

Seven Ideas for the East Midlands



Foreword

This is a pivotal moment for the East Midlands. A Devolution Deal and a first directly elected Mayor present once-in-a-generation opportunities for transformational change.

Challenges such as widening inequality; poverty, climate change, economic instability, the drive towards net zero, and the rapid pace of technological change continue to shift our expectations and notions about the way we will live, work, travel and plan in the future.

The Devolution Deal offers opportunity for major positive change, to level up and create growth and innovation, building towards a more resilient, low carbon future for the region. New local powers will help tackle challenges and harness the East Midlands true economic potential

The East Midlands offers unique social, economic and natural diversity - something which this devolution opportunity enables the region to embrace and celebrate. It is home to a young and diverse population and has cultivated a dynamic base of innovators, entrepreneurs and businesses, alongside strong universities and colleges. The region's network of interconnected cities, towns, villages and stunning countryside are key to its uniqueness. This combination of superbly built heritage and driven people are powerful assets.

However, not everyone is fulfilling their potential and not all places are benefiting from this success. This can and must change, as new opportunities emerge.

We have lacked a convening voice and clear vision to champion the great people, businesses and partnerships across the region, and have experienced persistent Government under-investment. The East Midlands Mayor will be able to oversee radical change with strength of leadership, clarity of vision, and pragmatic delivery. The region must refocus its compelling offer and lean into existing strengths and capabilities regarding the future of energy, mobility, nature-based regeneration, and life sciences. We must do this by creating better conditions for collaboration and strengthening partnerships, both internally and externally, to achieve best results.

Arup was founded over 75 years ago, a time when the nation needed rebuilding and reshaping for the future. Throughout the built environment, we have helped realise the transformative effects of investment in culture, infrastructure and new technologies. Now a global business, with internationally recognised expertise, we remain rooted in our local communities and committed to working collaboratively for their betterment.

Our locally based teams have been at the heart of some of the most transformative projects in the region, bringing cutting edge global thinking. These include Nottingham Contemporary, the Becketwell Performance Venue under construction in Derby, and the National Rehabilitation Centre in Nottinghamshire.

Recently we have been at the heart of defining a vision for the future of Ratcliffe-on-Soar Power Station.

We have leveraged this experience and worked in partnership with key stakeholders to develop seven actionable policy ideas aimed at shaping an inclusive, prosperous, resilient, and environmentally sustainable future for the East Midlands. By working together, we are optimistic about the future we can jointly create and the role we can all play in helping this region prosper.



Vicky Evans
Group Leader

Cities Planning & Design Midlands
Advisory Services Midlands

Seven Ideas for the East Midlands

The following policy ideas are intended to be thought-provoking and inspire meaningful discussion. They incorporate wider thinking from our work in planning, design and governance. These ideas address a spectrum of topics, from industrial growth and home energy efficiency to public transportation and beyond. They are designed to be enacted within the first mayoral term starting in May 2024.

Seven Ideas for the East Midlands

In August 2022, the East Midlands Devolution Deal was announced covering Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham, and Nottinghamshire (D2N2). This will create a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) from April 2024 with powers over transport, skills, housing, and regeneration. The Deal includes a 30-year investment fund of £1.14 billion for the D2N2 area.

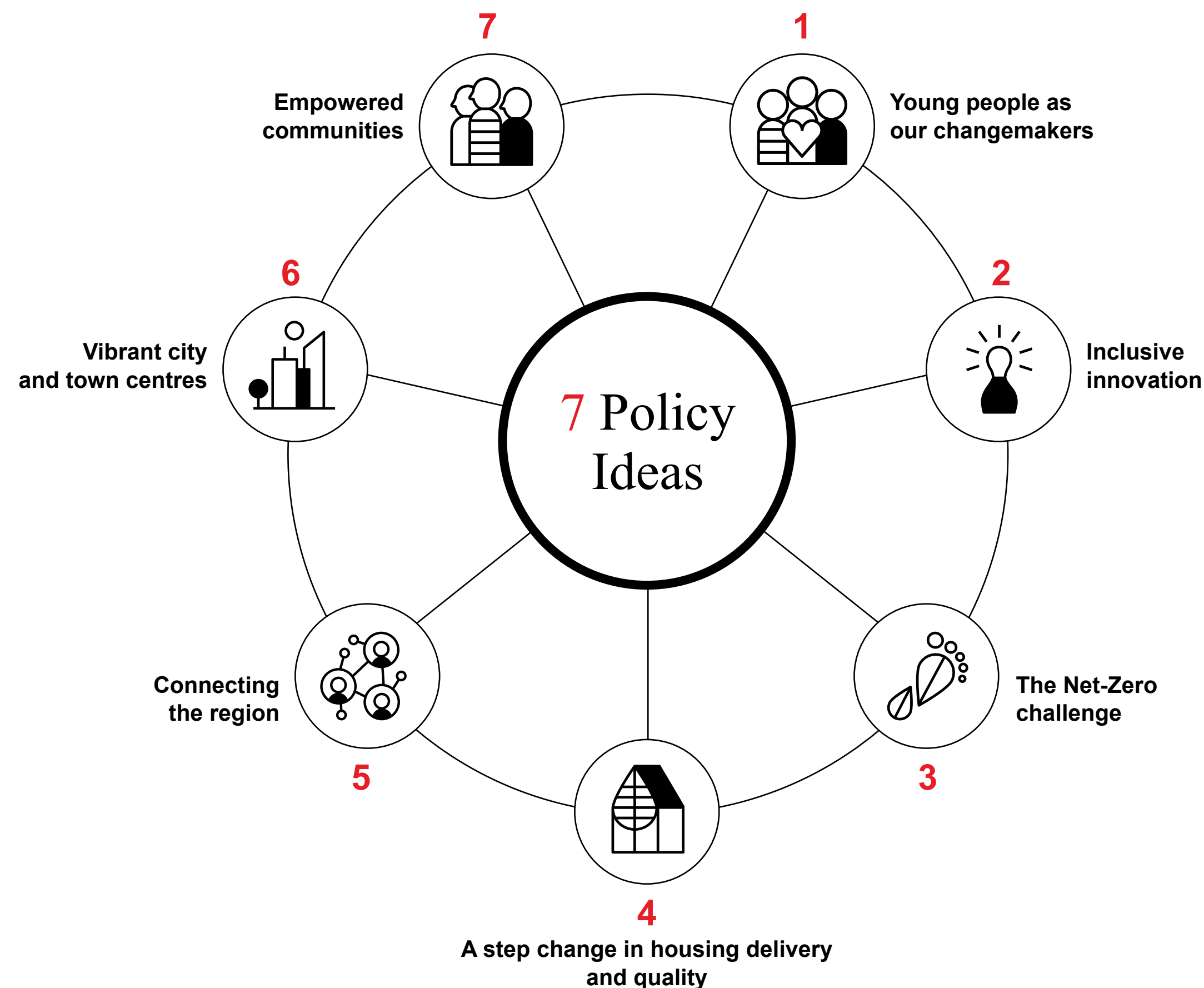
What could the Mayor do to make the East Midlands better?

The new Mayor will be uniquely placed to bring together people, local authorities and providers of other public services, business, and the community sector to address some of the major challenges and opportunities for the East Midlands.

The challenges include:

- **Productivity** – the East Midlands is 14.6% less productive than the UK average.
- **Public spending** – the East Midlands has the lowest public spending per person when compared to all other English regions at £11,225 (11% below the UK average).
- **Deprivation** – 219,600 people in our area are living in the most deprived 10% of areas across England.
- **Housing** – An estimated 9,200 homes a year are required to meet local need to avoid a shortfall of homes over the next 10 years.
- **Transport** – A car dominated region and under-investment is resulting in a highway network that is at capacity with congestion issues constraining growth.

We have identified seven ideas for the East Midlands, which we believe the new Mayor could adopt to ensure the region's future prosperity. These respond to the challenges identified, reflect our deep understanding of the East Midlands, and draw on our experience of priorities which have worked elsewhere.



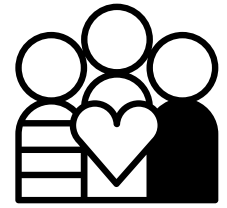


Young people as our changemakers

Create an environment for families and young people to thrive, where children and young adults have the chance to shape their future.



Growing Up In The City Event © Paul Carstairs, Arup



Young people as our changemakers

Background

The East Midlands has a diverse population with an above average proportion of young people within the major cities of Derby and Nottingham.

Today's young people are a creative, digitally native and socially conscious generation; however, they are among those who suffer the most from a legacy of the pandemic. School closures, declining mental health and rising youth unemployment are compounded by widening gaps in educational and economic opportunity.

The East Midlands has economic strengths in sectors such as advanced manufacturing, bioscience and renewable energy. These sectors require specific training, retraining and connecting of talent to sustain a resilient future economy. A better understanding of our current talent ecosystem and skills pipeline for future jobs, and an educational system which is skills-focused is necessary to adapt to the changing context around skills demand, such as the increasing need for green and digital skill.

By addressing each aspect of youth engagement and development, we believe that the East Midlands could become a beacon for youth-led innovation and social advancement.

A young people & children's mayor and youth combined authority

Provide a tangible route for young people to improve their lives and increase participation in public life.

There are no fewer than 135 secondary schools in the East Midlands (D2N2) from which to draw an assembly of great young minds. A new youth Combined Authority could bring together diversity and depth of experience to find solutions to issues faced by young people. The mayoral body could produce an annual "Manifesto for Young People", outlining key concerns and policy proposals.

The first 'Children's City or Town' in the UK

Pioneer the concept of a 'Children's City', for example in Derby or Nottingham, or a 'Children's Town', for example in Mansfield or Chesterfield.

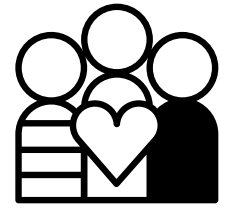
Arup's report *Cities Alive: Designing for Urban Childhoods* argues that children should be central to good urban planning and design. The amount of time children spend playing outdoors, their ability to get around independently, and their level of contact with nature are strong indicators of how places are performing for all generations. This should not only make cities, towns and even villages more liveable for families, but also serve as a model for other cities and towns in the UK.

Young people are creative, digitally native and socially conscious. If the East Midlands can provide better opportunities to harness and retain these skills, the impacts for the region will be huge.



Play in cities

City Park, Bradford. © Giles Rocholl Photography.



Young people as our changemakers

Rebuild young people's resilience and well-being post pandemic

Integrate health and well-being benefits into all aspects of the built and digital environment, as part of developing local strategies for young people's resilience, health and well-being.

Through our recent work assisting the development of the D2N2 Local Skills Improvement Plan, we saw that bespoke programmes are required in the region to equip young people with life skills, crucial for personal and professional growth. Low self-esteem and high levels of anxiety currently prevent some learners and employees from completing courses or attending work. Courses focusing on financial literacy, emotional intelligence, and resilience should be integrated from early years through to post-16 education to tackle these barriers.

Focus on retaining young talent

Set up entrepreneurial zones, innovation hubs, and digital infrastructure in close proximity to places of learning to provide the tools for young people to grow and prosper locally.

The East Midlands should concentrate on retaining its young population by creating a dynamic ecosystem that allows them to define their own futures. This underlines the important role businesses play in providing opportunities which attract, retain and nurture young candidates. Focus should be across areas historically less attractive to trained persons, especially graduates, such as Newark and Sherwood, Chesterfield and Mansfield.



Active journey to school

Connswater Community Greenway Project, Belfast. © Connswater Community Greenway Trust



Insight into the day-to-day life of engineers, designers and consultants

Arup's 'Engineering Awareness Week'. © Arup

Connect young people with employers, universities and education providers

Establish strategic relationships and partnerships between employers, educational institutions, and training providers to deliver more aligned curricula and opportunities through increased collaboration among stakeholders in training and skills development.

The region should focus on developing learning programmes that are aligned with the current and future needs of local industries, such as nuclear energy. This could involve apprenticeships, internship programmes, and even remote working hubs that enable students, graduates and non-graduates, to contribute to local businesses whilst benefiting from real-world experience. Arup's Engineering Awareness Week (EAW) is an example of a creative, engaging and inspiring work experience programme, in association with the 'STEM Partnership', which offers students insight into the day-to-day life of engineers, designers and consultants.

A 'Futures Commission'

Recruit a 'Futures Commission' to consist of leaders in technology, education, business, and governance to continually assess the future readiness of our strategies aimed at youth.

The goal is to ensure that the East Midlands remains responsive and adaptive to the rapidly changing landscape of opportunities and challenges for young people and builds a skills system that is agile to changing business context. The approach needs to be tailored to skills bespoke to the growing expertise of the region. This could highlight the East Midland's industrial legacy and advancements being made in the green energy revolution.



Inclusive innovation

Position the East Midlands at the forefront of problem solving some of society's greatest challenges through places and networks built on the region's strengths.



Inclusive innovation

Background

The East Midlands is host to an evolving innovation economy. There are strong partnerships between universities, government and industry, and the region's anchor institutions make an important contribution to the local and national economy.

There is strong potential for further innovation led growth in the advanced manufacturing, energy, transport, and environmental sectors. However, the region's productivity is behind the national average. There are areas of deprivation, and many new opportunities are low skill, low pay roles.

Solving the challenge of inclusive innovation would establish a more productive and stronger regional economy. This will require the development of policies and designing of investment in a way that ensures new opportunities and benefits are realised across communities.

Skills for a just transition to net zero

Establish a low carbon skills programme to train young people and those with more experience wishing to pursue a career in the low carbon sector.

For example, a programme to retrofit homes could be delivered by a newly upskilled and diverse workforce that is motivated to deliver the transition to net zero. Alternatively, as new nature-based solutions are developed and refined, businesses could work alongside schools, universities and communities to develop and share new skills.

A strong brand of innovation

Make innovation tailored, visible and prominent to help attract new investors and innovators, strengthen collaboration, engage local communities, and build a brand for investors and occupiers.

The East Midlands has world-class research institutes, businesses and skills. This presents an opportunity for more organisations to adopt the latest technologies to improve products, processes and services. Advanced manufacturing and life sciences are already strong industries for the region, which present opportunities to develop new digital skills in collaboration with education establishments and through industry led apprenticeships. Installing inclusive public realm and activated ground floor uses creates a clear physical connection between the innovation industries and the local community; providing a sense of ownership and understanding of roles in these sectors.

Universities as innovation anchors

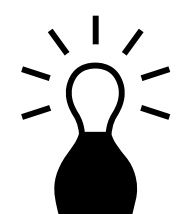
Drawing on the Universities for Nottingham Civic Agreement, develop conditions for better collaboration and innovation across the region.

Universities play a pivotal role in innovation and placemaking, especially when they engage in community outreach. Through our work advising on the Universities for Nottingham initiative, we saw that, civic universities can offer their research capabilities and student talent to work outwardly and help solve pressing local issues. This directly contributes to the community while also advancing academic goals and driving local innovation and economic growth.



Newton & Arkwright Buildings

Regenerated Grade II* listed buildings at the heart of Nottingham Trent University's City Campus, Newton and Arkwright Buildings, Nottingham. © Nottingham Trent University



Inclusive innovation



Trent Building

School of Cultures, Languages and Area Studies, University of Nottingham

© Unsplash, Vitou Ream

Health, well-being and social value

Create an East Midlands Social Value Plan to set out the region's ambitions and encourage positive economic, social and environmental impact, monitored specifically through health and well-being indicators.

Innate natural assets and a strong health sector, including innovative health companies and world leading research capabilities, could become drivers of innovation, job creation, quality of life and growth for the region. A regional social value plan could include working with partners, businesses, and anchor institutions to harness innovative new ways to build community wealth. For example, the East Midlands could explore a model for an electric car charging company, ensuring that profits are reinvested in the local area. The Mayor could also create testbeds across the region to demonstrate and pilot new approaches to put health and well-being at the heart of transport schemes, regeneration sites and smart city plans.

'Mission East Midlands'

Start a Challenge Fund focused on socially impactful issues in the East Midlands to invite innovators, public service providers, businesses, and communities to contribute to a mission-oriented approach to growth.

These missions, explicitly linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, would aim to tackle substantial societal needs. They could focus on areas where there is a significant global market, thereby offering potential for positive disruption and attracting high levels of investment and talent to the region.

Innovation districts

Create a platform for innovation to happen by bringing together businesses, universities and other knowledge producing organisations, such as hospitals, to share and commercialise innovation.

Successful innovation places bring together a 'quadruple helix' of partners, from research, industry, government and community, so that invention, commercialisation and community benefit can work together. Arup's UK Cities Intelligence issue Innovation Places outlines the success factors to achieving this: knowledge-intensive firms, anchor institutions; and new work spaces, public spaces and vibrancy.

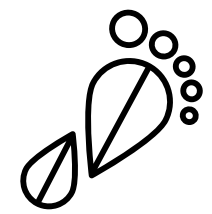
The health cluster at BioCity, the emerging green energy hub at Ratcliffe-on-Soar Power Station, and nuclear/ hydrogen growth cluster around Derby Investment Zone, provide the region with a foundation for building a stronger narrative around its strengths and establishing further districts in other parts of the region.

The East Midlands benefits from a strong network of universities, businesses and collaborators. To boost the region's productivity, it is vital for this innovation to be inclusive.



The Net-Zero challenge

Inspire and deliver systemic change across the East Midlands to lead a just transition to net zero by 2040.



The Net-Zero challenge

Background

The climate crisis is urgent. Immediate systemic change is required in many, if not all, areas of our lives. Putting net zero commitments at the heart of decision making would be a significant step towards addressing the climate crisis and delivering sustainable improvements in transport, energy, business and skills.

Transforming the built environment to mitigate and adapt to climate change requires collaborative action. The incoming Mayor and the combined authority can drive partnerships and bring together expertise to enable the East Midlands to play a leading role in the UK's response to the climate emergency. By inspiring everyone in the region to take action, the region can create momentum and mobilise change.

An offset fund for the East Midlands

Inspired by broader climate initiatives, create an offset fund to channel private investments into public sector projects aimed at reducing emissions.

Whether it is renewable energy installations or community green spaces, such an initiative would mean that everyone has a stake in the East Midlands's greener future.

Strategic approach to blue and green infrastructure

Take a holistic approach to establishing green and blue corridors, connecting urban centres to parks, rivers, and public spaces, and having positive environmental benefit.

Creating green and blue corridors and extending the region's impressive natural assets, such as the region's National Forests, not only beautifies urban areas and provides tourist attractions, but also critical local amenity. Initiatives could: restore native habitats; support urban farming projects; provide natural space for recreation and environmental education; help to manage flood risk; and reduce carbon to significantly contribute to ecology, environmental and community welfare. If combined, a project could serve more than one of these purposes at once. For example, nature-based Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems as 'sensory gardens', which are not only effective at mitigating flood risk, but also provide promote emotional and psychological wellbeing by offering users a space to rest and engage their senses.



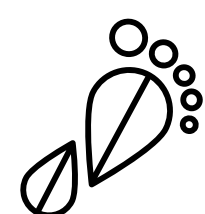
The Net Tram network

Looking towards Lace Market area of the city, Nottingham. © Chris Hepburn



Transforming the public realm and cycling and pedestrian infrastructure through a SuDs project

Greener Grangetown Project, Cardiff. © Arup



The Net-Zero challenge

An East Midlands energy board

Establish an East Midlands Energy Board to develop and deliver an integrated energy infrastructure plan, bringing together the major utilities companies and supporting collaborative, proactive and coordinated investment.

Whilst the region is in the early phases of Local Area Energy Planning, the broader strategic governance structures are not yet in place to support implementation. The Board could identify the infrastructure required to support a low carbon energy transition, including suitable locations for heat networks, hydrogen, or heat pumps, and consider the scale of grid reinforcement needed to electrify heat and transport systems. It would serve as a forum for stakeholders to come together, share insights, and implement policies at the scale needed for significant change.

A green economic powerhouse

Build an East Midlands ‘Green Economic Powerhouse’ to advance local green innovation and renewable technologies, as well as create high-skilled jobs, helping the region to prosper economically while meeting its climate goals.

Building on the recent Investment Zone announcement and using strengths of regional institutions like the DevCo / Freeport, West Burton’s STEP Fusion initiatives, Rolls Royce’s nuclear expertise, and Derbyshire’s burgeoning hydrogen economy, the East Midlands can become a leader in green innovation.

Electric for all

Explore bottom-up, community-led approaches to decarbonisation and pilot various green technologies and infrastructure, to break down the barriers to the clean vehicle transition.

The East Midlands has high car ownership, so achieving net zero depends upon a swift and comprehensive transition to electric and hybrid vehicles (EV).

Significant barriers remain for many, such as those on lower incomes or living in homes without off street parking, and we are still in the ‘low hanging fruit’ phase of transition. However, local experts, such as vehicle manufacturers, energy suppliers, digital innovators and engineering-focused universities, position the region to become a trailblazer for universal EV uptake.

For example, East Midlands could develop a ‘test street’ in every city and district dedicated to achieving net zero, which would act as living labs for green innovation and knowledge gained shared across communities, catalysing broader change.

The East Midlands is well-placed to build on its existing assets and economic strengths to become a Green Economic Powerhouse.

A NZC policy and regional strategy

Creating a robust Net Zero Carbon policy would underpin all the above initiatives.

This would involve laying out clear milestones, targets, and key investment areas to guide the East Midlands towards a sustainable future. Given the urgency of the climate crisis, immediate action is needed, and a robust NZC policy would be a vital tool for mobilising collective action.

Accelerate the hydrogen economy

Convene and coordinate partners and agencies to develop hydrogen hubs in the East Midlands.

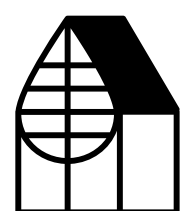
The East Midlands is already leading the way on hydrogen, for example with the East Midlands Hydrogen consortium, however a significant opportunity lies in accelerating the deployment of end-to-end hydrogen hubs (production, distribution, storage and demand) focused on industry, heavy duty transport and heating.

This would aim to position the East Midlands as a leader in the hydrogen economy and create new opportunities for investment and employment. Arup set out a unique opportunity in the region in its publication for Derby City Council, ‘Establishing a Regional Hydrogen Economy’.



A step change in housing delivery and quality

Accelerate delivery of quality housing to create affordable, good quality housing options with new models of delivery.



A step change in housing delivery and quality

Background

The East Midlands has a shortage of housing. The Mayor has the opportunity and powers to work with local authorities, landowners, developers, and housing providers to create affordable, good quality housing options for all people of all ages.

The Mayor could lead on the ambitious sustainable retrofit of existing homes, achieving this via a blended approach across private and public sector. This would recognise that both sides need to take risks for a huge payback; a collation of the willing will help to take this forward.

A housing delivery body

Create a housing delivery body for the East Midlands to provide a centralized approach to accelerating housing delivery and address housing challenges in the region.

The delivery body can use its powers to acquire land and unlock tricky development sites, in-line with City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement funding. The body could also incorporate a revolving infrastructure fund and provide forward funding. This would not only meet growing housing demand but also contribute to balanced community development.

The East Midlands also lacks a single spatial regional plan, coordinating the optimum distribution and delivery of new housing and other forms of development across the region. The Mayor could seek statutory powers to produce such a plan and improve housing delivery, or work with partners to produce and implement a non-statutory strategy.

De-risking innovation in housing technologies

Scale up to de-risk and bring down cost for retrofit and net zero carbon design.

Currently, there is no incentive to lead and often quality and innovation are bought about by SMEs. The Mayor can play a convening and coordinating role, working with forward thinking organisations (like Arup and others such as manufactures) to de-risk innovation and encourage the right mix of intervention to be deployed. This could be achieved via test-beds, Investment Zones or innovation missions with Universities in the region, for example.

Unlock sustainable housing delivery investment in transport infrastructure

Ensure that the places that offer the best opportunity for growth are well connected by high quality public transport services that people want to use and that take them where they need to go in order to unlock sustainable housing growth.

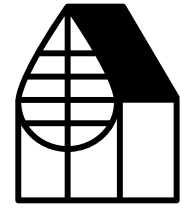
Growth in the East Midlands is being constrained by a dependency on the car and resulting traffic congestion, therefore we need to achieve population growth without a matching rise in car travel. Transport improves the viability of developments and creates new markets – for example, investment in mass transit and supporting highway infrastructure at Toton could unlock development at a grand scale. Growth tends to be greater in better connected places and properties in these locations can command a price premium.

The new Mayor has a one-in-a-generation opportunity to utilised new powers to address the shortage of housing in the East Midlands, deliver at scale and improve design quality.



'Retrofit at scale' UK Cities Intelligence

© SolStock



A step change in housing delivery and quality

A systems approach to retrofit at scale

Lead an integrated 'East Midlands Retrofit Mission' starting with social housing and the public sector estate.

The East Midlands could tackle the system-wide challenge of energy-efficient buildings by combining research and development, design expertise, digital innovation and manufacturing know how, to deliver a retrofit programme at scale and maximise benefits locally.

This would include a funding model that delivers and a partnership model between government, industry and universities to address financing, training, and supply chain development. This would build confidence in the supply chain and deliver decarbonisation, economic growth and social benefits.

Arup's UK Cities Intelligence issue three [Retrofit at Scale](#) sets out an approach which takes a systemic, whole neighbourhood, people-centred approach to deliver benefits across the board and moves beyond traditional technically-led approaches.

Supercharge design quality

Raise the bar in design quality with a cohesive, long term design vision for Place.

The East Midlands Design Review Panel already plays an important role in driving up design quality in the region. There is a potential for the organisation to be enhanced as part of the Combined Authority to supercharge design quality in the region. The Office for Place relocating to Stoke, provides an excellent enabler to focus efforts on design and attracting skills to the Midlands. This should also drive design engagement and representation from across the equalities spectrum to ensure design is inclusive.



Aerial view of a traditional housing estate

England. © Shutterstock / K303

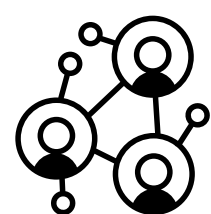


Connecting the region

Prioritise quick, easy and healthy transport connections to unlock wider benefits.



View of Mansfield Town, Nottinghamshire. © Getty Images / Matthew Troke



Connecting the region

Background

Better transport is key to providing access to jobs and homes, and delivering a better quality of life for residents. The scale of future transport investment and powers that the Mayor will have is transformational and is unprecedented within the region, providing huge opportunities for improved public transport, freight and logistics.

The East Midlands has experienced some of the lowest levels of transport investment per person in the UK, and as a result the potential of the region is currently being held back by congested roads and a lack of high quality local and national public transport options. A creative approach to transport investment could unlock new homes and jobs and improve quality of life for residents of the region, helping make the East Midlands the best place to live in the UK for families.

Transforming the railway as a catalyst for growth

There is the opportunity to unlock jobs growth by making transformational investments in the railway in the East Midlands – the new East Midlands Mayor could work in partnership with other regional Mayors to develop a new proposition for the railway that can be delivered faster and cheaper, engaging the private sector to innovate and drawing on new finance options.

Opportunities for agglomeration are limited by poor inter-city rail connections within the East Midlands, and between the East Midlands and the wider region – particularly between Nottingham, Derby and Birmingham, and northbound through Chesterfield to Sheffield and Leeds. A Mayoral alliance between the West Midlands, East Midlands, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire would act as a powerful lobbying force, achieving similar results as the growing alliance between the West Midlands and Greater Manchester mayoralities.

The Mayor could lobby for the continuation of Midlands Mainline Electrification; for the development of realistic and affordable proposals to reduce rail journey times, improve frequency and transform service quality between Nottingham and Derby to Birmingham and to cities in the north; and for the ongoing funding of ‘Re-Opening Your Railways’ plans across the region.

Flexible mass transit and turn-up-and-go bus services in our urban areas

High quality public transport that appeals to a wider range of people and provides a genuine alternative to the car can be the go-to option in urban areas.

The creation of the Combined Authority and the offer of £1.5bn of CRSTS funding, provide a unique opportunity to transform the public transport offer across the region. The Mayor could explore the benefits of enhanced partnerships or in the longer term, bus franchising, using the power of public and private partnership to facilitate a turn-up-and-go service in our urban areas, providing an affordable and appealing public transport option. Investment in bus priority, new cleaner and more accessible buses, and driver training could transform the journey experience. A flexible mass transit offer, building on the NET tram network and utilising innovative new opportunities such as trackless tram or autonomous buses, could act as the backbone of a new urban transport network.

‘Go East Midlands’

A regional body has the opportunity to create a one-network approach transforming the user experience with integrated branding, ticketing, information and customer services.

The current public transport network is confusing, with multiple ticketing systems, different approaches to pricing, and a lack of customer information. The ‘GEM Network’ could transform the public transport user experience – with a single region-wide brand similar to Greater Manchester’s Bee Network; integrated ticketing and coherent pricing using smart cards and contactless payments like London’s Oyster system; a one-stop shop for journey planning in advance and on-the-move, with real-time information helping users cope with disruption; and a shared customer services offer to take responsibility when things go wrong.

Connecting the region

An active travel offer that is fit for town and countryside, residents and visitors

Create ‘Corridors of Growth’ for infrastructure investment within and outside of our cities and towns.

Orbital and radial corridors would prioritise public transport and active travel modes like cycling or walking. These could serve as pilot areas for green urban planning, featuring pedestrian pathways, secure bike lanes, and priority bus lanes to ensure smoother commutes, ultimately improving social mobility by offering quicker access to education and employment centres. Rural residents are put off from cycling on narrow roads dominated by high-speed traffic. An active travel offer for the countryside could look to the approach taken in rural Germany or Holland – where a network of off-road bike lanes connects places together, enabling families to cycle safely to school, play and shop. Thinking differently about the way we target our active travel spend could provide a sustainable and healthy alternative to the car in places where public transport services will struggle to be viable.

The East Midlands is at the centre of the UK’s transport networks - if the Mayor can harness their powers and funding to improve local connectivity, the benefits for the region will be substantial.

Living Stations as a gateway to the region

There is an opportunity to reimagine stations as vibrant community and mobility hubs that offer more than just transit.

Through public-private partnerships, stations could host retailing, workspaces, and community services. By integrating these services, our stations could become landmarks that enhance the surrounding areas economically and socially. Stations should act as Mobility Hubs – providing interchange between public transport modes, access to shared mobility services, active and micro-mobility, electric vehicle charging infrastructure and car parking as well as potential features such as bike storage, lockers and showers, lock boxes for delivery services, and travel information centres.

East Midlands at the heart of the UK logistics industry

The East Midlands is at the centre of freight in the UK and could be at the forefront of freight innovation, offering distributors the best place in the country to operate.

Our region will host the UK’s only inland freeport, alongside the busiest airport for freight operations and key road and rail freight hubs, with the M1 and A1 at the heart of Britain’s logistics operations. The East Midlands could help the freight industry tackle their recruitment crisis by offering the best place to be for drivers, with comfortable, safe and inclusive facilities for rest, cleaning and eating; creating a fit-for-purpose strategic road freight network and ensuring priority for logistics, whilst implementing last mile innovation in city centres; supporting the switch to rail freight; and bringing together big and small businesses, government and innovators to deliver the cleanest freight fleet in the UK.



Inclusive, safe and accessible active travel through a green space

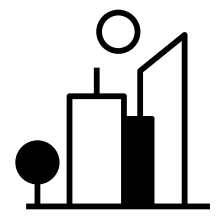
© Arup



Vibrant city and town centres

Regenerate urban centres and breathe
new life into communities.

Old Market Square, Nottingham. © Getty Images / SAKhanPhotography



Vibrant city and town centres

Background

In common with those in many parts of the UK, the region's city and town centres are transforming to reflect changes in the way people live, shop, work and spend their spare time. Promoting an inclusive and distinctive experience in our towns and cities has never been more important to their vibrancy and success.

To welcome a diverse range of people into urban centres, we must build on the region's strengths to establish vibrant business workplaces and knowledge and community hubs, alongside green civic spaces. For example, new plazas and boulevards, complemented by street art and pop-up activities, as sociable places for people to gather and dwell.

Flagship schemes are already reimagining Mansfield and Sutton-in-Ashfield.

There are more opportunities through regeneration to increase the number of people living in urban centres in the region, to support local economies, whilst alleviating development pressure on rural areas.

Small but transformative moves in our city and town centres

Create more vibrant and attractive cities and towns, making the most of small but transformative changes to reanimate our centres.

While large-scale regeneration projects have their merits, they often require substantial investment and long-term commitments, however, the absence of such funds doesn't mean stagnation. By curating experiences rather than merely offering spaces, towns and cities can become destinations where people want to be, not just places they have to visit. One approach is the use of 'meanwhile uses,' which are temporary solutions that bring vibrancy and utility to otherwise empty or underutilised spaces. Pop-up art galleries, temporary markets, or even community hubs can inject life into vacant shops or open areas. Activation strategies could involve events, installations, and interventions that create a buzz, drawing people into the centres. Public-private partnerships can be instrumental in this, pooling resources and skills to make such initiatives more feasible and effective.

Green your town

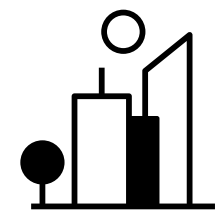
Invite everyone to participate in maintaining and creating green urban spaces at the heart of our towns and cities.

Pop-up parklets, urban farms, voluntary landscaping groups and social prescribing initiatives could improve the environment in town centres, promote wellbeing and increase social interaction. A mix of temporary and permanent spaces can create vibrancy and become important cultural and social areas for the local community and visitors to come together.



Derby City Centre

View of Derby Cathedral from Irongate on a busy summer's day. © Arup



Vibrant city and town centres



Castle Meadow Campus

Vision of the University of Nottingham (UoN) Castle Meadow Campus, Nottingham.
© Hopkins Architects / UoN



Museum of Making

Museum of Making & River Derwent, Derby. © Colin Park CC BY-SA 2.0

Night owls

Create a new ‘night-time taskforce’ to develop a safe, vibrant, inclusive night-time economy for our city and town centres.

Not everyone experiences city and town centres positively. Arup’s Night-time Vulnerability Assessment examines how to create safer and more inclusive urban environments after dusk. Inspired by Greater Manchester’s Night Time Economy Advisor, a similar post could be created to help to generate quality jobs and attract a diversity of families, young people and older generations into towns and cities in the evening.

Inclusive, age-friendly places

Develop urban centres into places for people of all ages, from childhood to retirement and older age, through a more inclusive approach to design.

Arup’s *Cities Alive* series takes a human-centred approach to rethinking how urban design can make places less intimidating and more accessible, for example, for children or for people living with dementia. Simple changes, like installing traffic calming measures, parklets or urban kitchen gardens, can transform public spaces into safe and communal havens. Providing more cultural and community focused facilities in tandem with a better mix of housing for families and the elderly as a coordinated package, would give investors and occupiers more confidence.

Workplace-making

Support the development of new office space, the recalibration of existing workspace, and city centres as spaces for learning, collaboration, and innovation.

Our city and town centres need to offer more than just a desk space; creating high quality environments where people meet and collaborate will be crucial to attracting people into cities and towns.

Community and health hubs

Create new health, sports, leisure and community hubs that support healthy living.

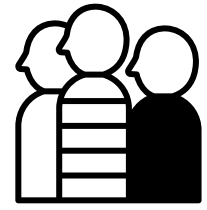
Improve and reimagine village greens, town halls, libraries, town squares and community centres as shared spaces to bring together public and community services with small businesses and social enterprises to support people and develop skills and networks.

The network of cities and towns in the East Midlands are a key part of the region’s identity. Small but transformative moves will ensure their ongoing distinctiveness and success.



Empowered communities

Place communities at the heart of investment programmes and support resilient people-centric place making with strong local engagement.



Empowered communities

Background

By supporting communities at all levels and meeting their needs, the region can create resilient places which drive positive change. Meaningful local engagement and co-design of the built environment are powerful ways to develop a sense of community pride.

A place-based approach to planning and development, involving local communities and with a strong programme of citizen, civic, local government, employer, education and social infrastructure provider stakeholder engagement, will allow the new Mayor and combined authority to identify priority places to target investment strategically, and coordinate devolved funds.

Deliberative democracy

Form a deliberative democracy model and initiate an East Midland's Citizens Panel.

Comprising a diverse group of residents from across the East Midlands, this panel would act as a sounding board for new policies and projects, providing valuable citizen perspectives that could guide decision-making at the highest levels. It's an innovative way to democratise governance and make sure that the voices of ordinary people are heard. Citizens' Assemblies engage a cross-section of society to learn, deliberate, discuss and draw conclusions as demonstrated by Lancaster City Council's People's Jury and Greater Cambridge Citizens' Assembly.

Community decarbonisation planning

Engage residents in creating community decarbonisation plans and explore new sources of funding by experimenting with alternative investment approaches to support more distributed wealth and sustained growth.

Appointing and supporting net zero community groups is one way to empower local decision making and provide resources to ensure the most disadvantaged communities can participate on equal footing. This could explore community heating schemes and other community action such as car share schemes, active travel improvements or local food production at allotments. The East Midlands could pilot local renewable energy investment and installation, coupled with community ownership models, to help keep the control and value of energy generation in the local economy.



King's Cross Central supported diverse activities for more cohesive communities
London. © John Sturrock



Arup Nottingham Office client event 2023
Cleaver & Wake, Nottingham. © Arup



Empowered communities



'Ageing In The City'

Community engagement workshop, London. © Arup

Place-based planning

Establish a hyper-local, place-based strategy to harness the unique qualities of the different East Midlands towns and districts.

Fostering a sense of community pride starts with involving citizens in the design and planning of their neighbourhoods. From hosting community workshops to leveraging digital platforms for public input, a multi-faceted approach to civic engagement ensures that the diverse needs and perspectives within the community are addressed. These collaborative initiatives can result in public spaces, housing projects, and amenities that truly reflect the wants and needs of local residents.

Adopting a place-based approach to deliver plans which integrate skills, business, transport and energy, will level up the East Midlands economy and reduce inequality. For example, Arup worked with multiple Towns in the region as part of the Towns Fund initiative to develop visions and masterplans that reflect stakeholder views and ambitions for towns, helping to secure significant government investment. Through such targeted efforts, devolved funds can be effectively coordinated, ensuring that every penny contributes to impactful, long-lasting improvements in quality of life.

As a new political entity and form of governance, we believe it will be crucial for the new Mayor and combined authority to establish a place-based approach to planning and development and securing local engagement.

Thank You for Reading

We hope you found these ideas interesting, insightful, and thought provoking. This is not intended to be a fully costed programme of work, but neither is it a wishlist. All these ideas are achievable, providing real opportunities to improve quality of life in our region.

Thank you to all the stakeholders and collaborators who contributed to this publication and helped develop the thinking behind these seven ideas.

Further Reading

<https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/establishing-a-hydrogen-economy-the-future-of-energy-2035>

<https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/cities-alive-designing-for-urban-childhoods>

<https://www.arup.com/news-and-events/arup-engineering-awareness-week>

<https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/innovation-districts-how-can-we-drive-growth-in-major-uk-cities>

<https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/making-place-the-recalibration-of-work-life-and-place>

<https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/cities-alive-designing-for-ageing-communities>

<https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/cities-alive-towards-a-walking-world>

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<https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/uk-cities-intelligence-issue-2>

<https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/uk-cities-intelligence-issue-3>

<https://www.arup.com/services/technical-consulting/lighting-design/night-time-vulnerability-assessment>

About Arup in the East Midlands

Dedicated to sustainable development, Arup is a collective of designers, consultants and experts working globally. We are committed to supporting the East Midlands, being a critical friend to local clients, communities and key city decision makers to foster growth and innovation within the region. Arup's business in the East Midlands has been making a positive contribution to the region for 38 years, since opening our Nottingham city centre office in 1986. Our team has grown to more than 110 engineers, planners and digital experts providing multidisciplinary services to projects both locally and around the globe.

If you would like to discuss these ideas or opportunities further, please get in touch with our team on:

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