



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

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Research
Paper**

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Plan The World We Need

The contribution of planning
to a sustainable, resilient
and inclusive recovery

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Using our expertise and research we bring evidence and thought leadership to shape planning policies and thinking, putting the profession at the heart of society's big debates. We set the standards of planning education and professional behaviour that give our members, wherever they work in the world, a unique ability to meet complex economic, social and environmental challenges. We are the only body in the United Kingdom that confers Chartered status to planners, the highest professional qualification sought after by employers in both private and public sectors.

About this paper

This paper examines how planning can contribute to calls for a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the current health and economic crisis. It complements our ongoing work to understand how planners are responding to the immediate challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic.

We would like to thank members of the RTPI forums in England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and Northern Ireland, who contributed ideas to this paper along with our wider membership and partners across the built environment professions.

Front and back cover image

Photo credit: [Alexey Fedorenko](#)

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Executive summary

To recover from Covid-19, we need to make plans. These must be holistic in nature, integrated in structure, and resourced for delivery. They need to accelerate progress to a zero carbon economy, increase resilience to risk, and create fair, healthy and prosperous communities. At this critical moment in time, our paper reflects on the current situation, and what needs to change.

Chapter 1 summarises growing calls for a green recovery, and why planning is essential for delivering change on the ground. It explains how planning originated as a public health intervention, helped the UK rebuild after World War II, and has since evolved into a unique approach for place-based systems thinking. As the recovery gains pace, planning will be critical for directing investment to solutions which balance economic, social and environmental objectives.

However, the UK and Ireland's capacity for proactive planning is unevenly distributed. Chapter 1 describes how, over multiple decades, a reliance on market-based solutions reduced planning to a more reactive and regulatory tool for managing growth. Prosperous areas have reinvested some of these proceeds into better planning, attracting the investment needed to enable sustainable development, tackle inequality, boost resilience and cut emissions. But struggling areas, including those affected by de-industrialisation, have lost valuable tools to shape their future.

A lack of joined-up planning and investment at the national level, coupled with the fallout from the 2008 financial crisis, has seen the gap widen between successful and struggling places. The Covid-19 pandemic has layered new challenges onto these existing vulnerabilities, exposing weaknesses across the built environment that undermine resilience to risk. **Chapters 2 to 5 examine the impacts of Covid-19 on the built environment, across four themes:**

Health and wellbeing	The disproportionate impacts of Covid-19 on vulnerable groups, especially BAME communities and older people living in deprived neighbourhoods
Economic sectors	Changes to the economic landscape, including the loss of employment in at-risk sectors, growth in others, and the shift towards remote working
Travel and transport	The challenges of reallocating road space to enable walking, cycling and social distancing, especially in areas designed around the car
Net zero carbon	Risks to the investments needed to decarbonise buildings, energy and transport, delaying progress towards carbon reduction targets

In a fragile economy, with pressing social and environmental challenges ahead, recovery packages must be carefully designed and deployed. To assist this process, governments should:

1. Complement capital investment and support for individuals and businesses with the necessary resources and tools to plan effectively for the recovery, at a range of scales
2. View local and strategic plans as key mechanisms for directing stimulus measures towards place-based solutions which have local support and deliver multiple benefits, following the priorities set out below

Chapters 2 to 5 contain our priorities for a place-based recovery, across four themes

Tackling place-based inequality	Delivering affordable and high quality housing in the right locations, regenerating deprived areas for the benefit of existing communities, and improving access to key services, amenities and infrastructure
Enabling a green industrial revolution	Actively planning for the growth of sectors which deliver emission reductions, environmental gains and jobs, while helping places adapt to shifting economic and labour markets
Prioritising healthy and sustainable modes of transport	Integrating temporary active travel measures into strategies which lock-in behaviour change and support regeneration, and plan for growth that helps public and shared transport to recover
Accelerating the deployment of zero-carbon infrastructure	Local and strategic planning for energy efficiency, renewable energy, smart grids and nature-based solutions to flooding and overheating, guided by ambitious policies and standards

Achieving these will require a re-imagining of planning, which goes beyond purely statutory and regulatory functions, or a narrow zonal system. Chapter 6 starts by describing planning tools and approaches that can support a holistic recovery: allowing for direct engagement with diverse local communities, supporting local leadership and visioning, collaborating across geographical and sectoral boundaries, and providing flexibility and adaptability.

However, to ensure a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery, actions are also needed by the UK Government, the devolved administrations and the Irish Government.

Chapter 6 sets out key areas for change at the national level

Governance and resourcing	Create powerful and effective structures for cross-boundary strategic planning across the UK and Ireland, and invest in the planning services needed to engage with communities, businesses and infrastructure providers
Joined-up national strategies	To support the above, develop strategies which deliver investment in genuinely affordable homes, retrofit existing buildings, cut emissions from heat and transport, and plan networks of multi-functional green infrastructure
Common objectives and metrics	Breaking with past trends by testing plans, infrastructure decisions and bailout packages against common objectives for the future, with clear metrics and targets for decarbonisation, resilience, health and social justice
Data and technology	Establishing regional data observatories to provide common data and analysis for plan-making, and investing in open source digital planning tools for scenario modelling, public engagement and coordination with infrastructure providers

The long-term impacts of Covid-19 on the economy and society remain uncertain, with new information emerging every day. Some of the information and analysis contained in this paper represents a snapshot in time, and the RTPI will continue to monitor these trends, update our assumptions and provide more detailed recommendations as the situation develops.

1. Introduction

1.1. A health and economic crisis

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a huge amount of suffering around world, from both the impact of the virus and the necessary measures to control its spread. Analysis suggests that the UK has suffered one of the highest death rates among countries for which high-quality data exists¹.

The UK Government has introduced a wide range of fiscal and monetary stimulus packages, designed to 'rescue' individuals and businesses through what was assumed to be a period of temporary disruption, almost regardless of eligibility. These have been adjusted and expanded as the pandemic continued.

These rescue packages are estimated to have offset around a quarter of the economic damage suffered by households and businesses². Forecasts are now grappling with a huge amount of uncertainty about the economy. Key variables include the speed at which lockdown measures are lifted, the availability of contact tracing and testing measures, potential second waves of infection, and the psychological impacts on behaviour.

Even if economic activity recovers throughout 2020, the wider impacts will be severe. Initial scenario modelling from the Office for Budget Responsibility suggested that a three-month lockdown would result in a 13% fall in GDP³. The Bank of England have forecast that the pandemic will push the UK into its deepest recession in 300 years, decreasing output by 30% in the first half of 2020, more than doubling unemployment, and creating a £337bn deficit over the financial year⁴.

1.2. The climate and ecological crisis

The government is now looking beyond the immediate challenges of the pandemic, and towards economic 'recovery' packages. There is a clear rationale for continued intervention, but current levels of support cannot be maintained indefinitely. While details are still uncertain, recovery packages are likely to target specific sectors, with a greater focus on value for money⁵. Measures are also being considered to tackle the deficit, including tax rises and spending cuts⁶.

The UK also has only 30 years left to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero, with an even closer target of 2045 in Scotland. This rapid transition will require structural changes to the economy, and new ways of living and working. The following decades are also likely to see further risks from extreme weather and the breakdown of ecological systems, which disproportionately affect the most vulnerable in society.

¹ Financial Times. [UK suffers second highest death rate from COVID](#). 28 May 2020

² Financial Times. [State support will offset just quarter of UK economic hit, says think-tank](#). 29 April 2020.

³ Office for Budget Responsibility(2020) [Coronavirus Analysis](#)

⁴ Bank of England (2020) [Monetary Policy Report and Interim Financial Stability Report](#)

⁵ Institute for Government (2020) [Bailout for business after coronavirus](#)

⁶ Financial Times. [Treasury paper sets out stark UK options to cut estimated £337bn deficit](#). 12 May 2020.

In the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, recovery measures saw massive injections of liquidity to prop up the economy, followed by a decade of austerity. During this period, high levels of borrowing saw house prices inflate beyond average incomes, while wages stagnated and vital public services were cut⁷. This created economic and social fragility, which has undermined resilience to the current pandemic.

This recovery must be different: with no alternative but to rebuild in a way that creates a more sustainable, resilient and inclusive society. A failure to act now will simply defer costs to future generations and the most vulnerable, with the risks of climate and ecological breakdown to a weak economy becoming rapidly unmanageable in scale and complexity⁸.

1.3. A sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery

A growing movement is calling on governments around the world to plan for a recovery from Covid-19 in a way that meets long-term economic, social and environmental objectives. The sentiment is reflected in numerous articles, letters, declarations and resolutions, many using the catchphrase 'Build Back Better'⁹.

These voices include international organisations, business leaders, economists, charities, civil society, religious groups and many others. They recognise that the challenges facing society require government intervention alongside market-driven solutions, and share a sense of urgency, as the window for positive action narrows. Many contain a plea to listen to the evidence of scientists and other professionals, and to take worst-case scenarios more seriously.

When looking across recommendations for the recovery, common themes emerge which have implications for planning and the built environment:

- **Sustainability:** Accelerating progress towards zero carbon by retrofitting existing buildings and advancing standards for new development; decarbonising heat through the deployment of district heat networks and heat pumps; decarbonising transport through a shift to active, public and shared transport modes and rollout of electric vehicle charging infrastructure; investing in smart energy grids and low-cost solar energy; and supporting skills, training and job growth in the above while avoiding investments and bailouts which are incompatible with a net-zero carbon economy, or which increase exposure to risks.
- **Resilience:** Future-proofing buildings and infrastructure to the risks of flooding, overheating, drought and fire; increasing tree planting, permeable surfacing and multi-functional urban green spaces; providing a choice of affordable and safe transport options; and moving towards a circular economy that operates within ecological limits and places greater value on health, wellbeing and resilience.
- **Inclusivity:** Creating healthy and equitable places by targeting support to the most vulnerable in society; addressing regional inequalities; and improving capacities and

⁷ United Nations Human Rights Office of The High Commissioner (2018) [Statement on Visit to the United Kingdom, by Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights](#)

⁸ Stern, N. (2007) [The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review](#). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

⁹ For an example, see the United Nations Department of Communications (2020) [Climate Change and COVID-19 UN urges nations to 'recover better'](#)

processes for democratic community participation in decisions about the future.

In the UK, these recommendations come from the Committee on Climate Change¹⁰, IPPR Environmental Justice Commission¹¹, National Infrastructure Commission¹², Confederation of British Industry¹³ and many others. These are referenced throughout this report.

The desire for change is also reflected in public opinion. Polls suggest that only 9% of Britons want life to return to 'normal' after the pandemic is over, with more than half of respondents hoping to make changes in their own lives and for the country as a whole to learn from the crisis. 60% would like the government to pursue health and wellbeing over economic growth after the pandemic has subsided¹⁴.

1.4. Plan The World We Need

Modern urban planning was conceived during Victorian times as a public health intervention, responding to the spread of disease through overcrowded slums. The UK's current systems were designed to help the country rebuild after the devastation of World War II. In the decades that followed, planning evolved to reflect wider objectives: improving access to public parks and open spaces, setting standards for high quality and affordable housing, protecting cultural and historical assets, and shaping neighbourhoods to provide a mixture of local services and offer a choice of sustainable, healthy modes of transport. The RTPI's Awards for Planning Excellence champion these achievements¹⁵.

Planning must now respond to new challenges and opportunities: supporting the economic recovery while tackling inequality, accelerating progress towards net zero carbon, building resilience and reversing habitat and biodiversity loss.

This means that new affordable housing must be located and designed in ways that achieve carbon neutrality, supported by the upfront provision of transport, utilities and green infrastructure. This will require integrated masterplans, created by well-resourced and multi-skilled teams, with diverse delivery from major developers, housing associations, councils, SMEs and self/custom builders.

But while plans must deliver new housing, the health, economic and climate crisis demands a greater emphasis on the renewal, repurposing and retrofit of existing buildings. Planning can integrate this with interventions to regenerate deprived areas, creating new green spaces, improving access to jobs, services and amenities, attracting businesses, and supporting a

¹⁰ Committee on Climate Change (2020) [Reducing UK emissions: 2020 Progress Report to Parliament](#)

¹¹ The Institute for Public Policy Research (2020) [Faster, further, fairer: Putting people at the heart of tackling the climate and nature emergency](#)

¹² National Infrastructure Commission. [Armitt: Decisions now can help on long road of healing economy](#). 17 May 2020

¹³ Confederation of British Industry. [CBI latest to call for green recovery to help UK 'build back better'](#). 11 June 2020

¹⁴ Positive Money. [New polling: only 12% want the UK to prioritise economic growth over well-being](#). 11 May 2020

¹⁵ [RTPI Planning Awards](#)

resurgence of social and cultural activity.

And as markets respond to the climate crisis by providing new green jobs, planning can boost the UK and Ireland's competitive advantage by creating places which meet the needs of those businesses and industries driving the shift to a zero-carbon and circular economy.

These plans must operate effectively at a range of scales, depending on the issues at hand. Some are best addressed at the neighbourhood scale, while others require cooperation across city-regions, counties, natural landscapes and regions. Collectively, these plans should combine to deliver national objectives for a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery.

1.5. Re-imaging planning

While planning has a critical role to play in the recovery, it has become increasingly difficult to consistently achieve its objectives¹⁶. Part of this is due to the complexity of planning in a globalised world, characterised by 'wicked problems' such as technological disruption, demographic change, rapid urbanisation and the climate and ecological breakdown. Solutions in one area often create unpredictable challenges in another, as demonstrated by the current situation where public health interventions have precipitated a collapse in the economy.

But another problem is a loss of faith in the *concept of planning*. Over recent decades, successive governments have increasingly favoured market-led solutions to key challenges: whether that be to stimulate innovation and economic productivity, tackle the housing crisis, or cut carbon emissions. Government expenditure was thought to displace private sector activity, with the role of the Treasury limited to balancing the books.

Proponents of this view tend to perceive planning as a tool for managing the negative impacts of land use change and market-led development: a reactive and regulatory function, rather than a positive way to direct change. With this narrow perception, it became possible to see planning as a barrier to growth, which can be temporarily scaled back during times of crisis. As the scope was narrowed, it became easier to assert that planning is unable to tackle modern challenges: a self-fulfilling prophecy¹⁷.

Faith in market-driven approaches was fundamentally shaken by the global financial crisis. To prevent the collapse of the banking sector, the UK Government was forced to provide almost £1 trillion provided to maintain financial stability¹⁸. However, the following decade saw the capacity for proactive and visionary planning further diminished by austerity and deregulation. Planning departments saw disproportionate cuts, and services became dependent on the goodwill and professional integrity of officers¹⁹. Planning became more reactive, formulaic and litigious, with a narrower focus on short-term housing targets, less public engagement and strategic coordination, and fewer powers to ensure delivery²⁰.

¹⁶ RTPI (2016) [Delivering the Value of Planning](#)

¹⁷ Mike Harris (2019) [A Future for Planning](#). The RTPI Library Series

¹⁸ National Audit Office (2010) [Maintaining the financial stability of UK banks: Update on the support schemes](#)

¹⁹ RTPI (2015) [Investing in Delivery: How we can respond to the pressures on local planning](#)

²⁰ See RTPI (2016) [Delivering the Value of Planning](#), RTPI (2018) [Investing in Delivery](#) and RTPI (2019) [Serving the](#)

As the current crisis creates new complexities, all levels of government must work effectively to shift from crisis management towards enabling positive change, in a democratic and equitable way. However, the impacts of Covid-19 have already placed a huge financial burden on local authorities, with rising costs from the provision of adult social care, support for vulnerable residents and accommodating the homeless, coupled with a loss of income from sources such as parking charges and leisure centres, along from council tax revenue as people shift onto universal credit. The government has provided a £3.2bn funding package, but some local authorities are still at risk of declaring bankruptcy²¹.

This comes at a time when local authorities have already made disproportionate cuts to planning and development management, with the poorest areas most affected²². This is especially concerning as Covid-19 is creating new challenges for planning, while exacerbating existing problems. A further weakening of planning and local government at this critical time will make it impossible to deliver common objectives for the country.

Instead we must strengthen and invest in planning for the recovery, building the capacity for critical place-based systems thinking. This will enable local and strategic plans to set ambitious visions which direct stimulus measures towards solutions which address the challenges and opportunities outlined in this paper, and improve sustainability, resilience and inclusivity across the UK and Ireland.

Public Interest? The Reorganisation of UK Planning Services In An Age of Reluctant Outsourcing

²¹ The Times. [Councils threaten bankruptcy as coronavirus tears £10bn hole in finances](#). 17 May 2020

²² RTPI (2019) [Resourcing Public Planning](#) shows that total net expenditure on planning in England fell 42% between 2009-10 and 2017-18, with two-thirds of total reductions falling on planning policy. Spending on planning policy in England averaged out at less than £5 per resident per year. Research also shows similar cuts in [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#).

2. Health and wellbeing

2.1. Observations

Demographic and geographical variations in vulnerability to Covid-19

Vulnerability to Covid-19 has varied across society. 91% of those who have died from Covid-19 had an underlying health condition, with heart disease being the most common²³. Related to this is age, with the majority of deaths among people aged over 65²⁴.

Vulnerability is also related to place-based poverty and inequality, which affects health and wellbeing. Those living in more deprived areas were more than twice as likely to die from Covid-19 as those in less deprived areas, which has exacerbated health inequalities²⁵. People from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds have also been disproportionately affected. Black people are almost twice as likely to die from Covid-19 as their white counterparts, while Bangladesh and Pakistani people are around 1.7 times more likely to die²⁶.

While the causes are complex, the impact of Covid-19 on different places and people suggest that the built environment plays a key role, with housing and neighbourhood level inequality increasing vulnerability.

Inequalities in housing quality and affordability

Living in low-quality housing with poor insulation increases the risk of developing health conditions such as high blood pressure, heart attacks and pneumonia, which increase vulnerability to Covid-19. The same is true for houses with high levels of indoor air pollution, which can lead to respiratory problems. Lockdown has also increased levels of anxiety and stress, and exacerbated pre-existing mental health conditions²⁷, which are again related to insecure, low-quality and overcrowded housing.

Living in overcrowded housing also increases the risk of contracting Covid-19, due to the challenges of self-isolation and maintaining social distancing. This is especially true when attempting to shield vulnerable people within multi-generational households²⁸. Nearly half (48%) of

²³ The Guardian. [‘Every day I hear about a Covid-19 death’: life in the UK’s worst-affected area](#) 1 May 2020

²⁴ Office for National Statistics (2020) [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) roundup](#)

²⁵ Office for National Statistics (2020) [Deaths involving COVID-19 by local area and socioeconomic deprivation: deaths occurring between 17 March and 17 April](#)

²⁶ Office for National Statistics (2020) [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 30 April 2020](#)

²⁷ Young Minds. [Coronavirus having major impact on young people with mental health needs-new survey](#). 30 March 2020

Holmes, E.A et al. (2020) [Multidisciplinary research priorities for the COVID-19 pandemic: a call for action for mental health science](#). The Lancet.

²⁸ New Policy Institute (2020) [Accounting for the Variation in the Confirmed Covid-19 Caseload across England: An analysis of the role of multi-generation households, London and time](#)

legally overcrowded households²⁹ are headed by an individual from an ethnic minority³⁰.

The crisis in affordable housing has already driven people into poor quality homes. In England, 25% of homes in the private rented sector fail to meet statutory minimum standards, which include being in a reasonable state of repair, with modern facilities and services and a reasonable degree of thermal warmth³¹. In Scotland, 48% of houses in the private rented sector failed to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard, while in Wales, 24% pose a serious or immediate risk to health and wellbeing³². In Northern Ireland, 11% of private rented dwellings failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard³³.

Rates of social rented and private rented housing are higher among Black African, Black Caribbean, Pakistani and Chinese households, and BAME households are more likely than white households to live in private rented accommodation³⁴. Over two million people aged over-55 are also thought to live in a home that endangers their health or well-being, while households which include someone over 75 are disproportionately likely to be living in a non-decent home³⁵.

Neighbourhood-level inequality

Neighbourhood-level characteristics also impact vulnerability and resilience to Covid-19, in terms of access to green and open space, local services and amenities, and critical infrastructure. Inner London, and other deprived urban areas of the UK which lack these characteristics, have suffered far higher death rates from Covid-19 than more prosperous and rural locations³⁶.

Social forces, institutions, ideologies and policies have interacted over many decades to generate and reinforce inequities among specific ethnic groups, resulting in concentrations of BAME communities in more deprived areas. In addition to the increased likelihood of living in overcrowded housing with poor basic infrastructure, deprived areas often have higher levels of air, noise and light pollution, lower levels of green space, and greater exposure to the urban heat island effect. These factors undermine physical and mental health, and resilience to disease³⁷. For example, the London Borough of Newham, where 78% of residents are BAME, has high levels of multiple deprivation and overcrowding, and has been disproportionately impacted by Covid-19³⁸.

²⁹ Defined as a household where two people of the opposite sex, who are not in a couple and over the age of ten, have to share a room to sleep

³⁰ Women's Budget Group (2017) [Intersecting Inequalities](#)

³¹ Place Alliance (2019) [A Housing Design Audit for England](#)

³² Nicol S et al. (2019) [The full cost of poor housing in Wales](#), Building Research Establishment Ltd, Public Health Wales, Welsh Government

³³ Housing Executive (2018) [House Condition Survey](#)

³⁴ Women's Budget Groups (2017) [Intersecting Inequalities](#)

Wales Government (2020) [First Minister's BAME Covid-19 Advisory Group](#)

³⁵ All Party Parliamentary Group (2019) [Rental Housing for an aging population](#)

³⁶ Financial Times. [Deprived areas hit hardest in UK by pandemic](#). 1 May 2020.

³⁷ The Centric Lab [COVID-19 and Biological Inequality; a London Data Study](#)

³⁸ Office for National Statistics (2020) [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) related deaths by ethnic group, England and Wales](#)

With recreational trips to the countryside discouraged, and many indoor places closed, accessible green and open spaces have provided a critical function in terms of supporting physical and mental health and wellbeing during the lockdown³⁹. This includes parks, doorstep green spaces within developments, pocket parks, community gardens and allotments. However, the pandemic has highlighted inequalities in terms of access. During lockdown, 12% of households in Great Britain had no access to a private or shared garden, rising to 21% in London. Across England, black people were nearly four times less likely than white people to have outdoor space at home⁴⁰. According to the Green Space Index, London falls well below the minimum standards of provision for parks and green spaces, with the Yorkshire & Humber, North West, North East and East Midlands also below the minimum⁴¹. Within these regions, ethnic minorities in more deprived areas have lower access to safe and high quality green spaces⁴².

Access to healthy and affordable food also varies between neighbourhoods. During the lockdown, food insecurity worsened for the economically vulnerable, especially those experiencing a loss of income or in self-isolation⁴³. In the first week of lockdown, the UK's largest foodbank issued 50,000 food parcels, almost double its usual volume⁴⁴. 20% of adults were already thought to experience food insecurity, due in part to a lack of accessible and affordable food shops. An estimated 1.2 million people are thought to live in 'food deserts': low-income areas where households struggle to buy affordable fresh fruit and vegetables, and are likely to pay a higher cost from shopping in more expensive small convenience stores with a limited stock⁴⁵.

Restrictions on public transport capacity have made it even harder to access shops, amenities and essential jobs, especially for low-income households without a car. This is particularly difficult in low-density and homogenous housing estates. The 2019 Housing Design Audit examined 142 new housing developments, and rated the majority as 'mediocre' or 'poor' in terms of walkability, car-dependence, street connectivity and access to amenities⁴⁶. Research by Transport for New Homes similarly examined more than 20 major new developments, and found that many lacked good accessibility to local services by walking and cycling⁴⁷. With BAME communities over-represented as key workers, and more likely to rely on public transport⁴⁸, any lack of accessibility by walking and cycling may increase vulnerability to Covid-19.

With both professional and social life shifting online during lockdown, access to high-speed broadband has also become more important. However, approximately 7% of homes in England

³⁹ Public Health England (2014) [Local action on health inequalities: Improving access to greenspaces](#)

⁴⁰ Office for National Statistics (2020) [One in eight British households has no garden](#)

⁴¹ Fields in Trust (2020) [The Green Space Index](#)

⁴² Public Health England (2014) [Local action on health inequalities: Improving access to greenspaces](#)

CABE (2015) [Community green: using local spaces to tackle inequality and improve health](#)

⁴³ The Food Foundation (2019) [Vulnerability to food insecurity since the COVID-19 lockdown](#)

⁴⁴ The Guardian. [UK food banks face record demand in coronavirus crisis](#). 1 May 2020

⁴⁵ The University of Sheffield. [1.2 million people in UK food deserts, study shows](#). 16 October 2018

⁴⁶ The Place Alliance (2019) [A Housing Design Audit for England](#)

⁴⁷ Transport for New Homes (2019) [Project Summary and Recommendations](#)

⁴⁸ Public Health England (2020) [Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups](#)

and Wales do not have a decent fixed connection, while 5 million people across the UK do not use the internet at all. Many still access the internet from public spaces, such as libraries, cafes and restaurants, in order to participate in education, search for employment or housing opportunities, or claim benefits⁴⁹. These people will have been disproportionately affected during the lockdown.

2.2. Implications for the recovery

Rising inequality within and between places

The pandemic has already exacerbated existing patterns of inequality and disadvantage both within and between places, and these could worsen during the economic downturn.

Across the UK, years of austerity have already led to cuts to local government spending and dismantling of neighbourhood services, which disproportionately affect women, ethnic minorities and the disabled⁵⁰. Between 2010 and 2016, spending on neighbourhood services fell by around 13% in England and Scotland, and 20% in Wales. The most deprived local authorities were most affected, with poor urban areas, especially those in the North of England, experiencing far higher cuts than wealthier rural authorities⁵¹. These have led to reductions in public transport, cuts to road safety and school crossings, a loss of community centres and halls, and fewer measures to reduce crime.⁵² An investigation in 2019 found that over 12,000 public and green spaces had been sold by councils since 2014/15, as they struggled with the rising costs of statutory services and redundancy payments⁵³. A major review of health equality in England, published in 2020, found that cuts to funding across social, economic and cultural domains have led to increased poverty, poorer health and greater socioeconomic inequalities⁵⁴.

Currently under 1% of businesses have reported permanently ceasing trading or laying people off during the pandemic⁵⁵. However this may change as government support is gradually withdrawn, and furloughs are converted into job losses. Approximately 22% of the working-age population (around 9 million people) has been furloughed⁵⁶. McKinsey have estimated that around 7.6 million jobs are at risk from permanent layoffs, temporary furloughs and reductions in hours and pay. This is again skewed towards people and places with the lowest incomes, and with higher percentages of at-risk jobs. The Lichfield Economic Risk Index, which covers England, Wales and Scotland, notes high concentrations of businesses in higher risk sectors across the North East of England, East of England, South East Coast and the South Yorkshire to Wirral corridor, and across the

⁴⁹ The University of Oxford. [Covid-19 is increasing digital inequality: We need human connectivity to close the digital divide](#). 14 April 2020

⁵⁰ The Guardian. [Austerity has hit women, ethnic minorities and the disabled most](#). 31 July 2014

⁵¹ The Guardian. [Deprived northern regions worst hit by UK austerity study finds](#). 28 January 2019

⁵² Association for Public Service Excellence (2017) [Redefining neighbourhoods, a future beyond austerity?](#)

⁵³ The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. [Revealed: The thousands of public spaces lost to the council funding crisis](#). 4 March 2019

⁵⁴ The Health Foundation (2020) [The Marmot Review 10 Years On](#)

⁵⁵ McKinsey and Company. [COVID-19 in the United Kingdom: Assessing jobs at risk and the impact on people and places](#). 11 May 2020

⁵⁶ Ibid

Central Belt of Scotland and South Wales⁵⁷.

Vulnerable demographic groups are also more likely to be employed in higher-risk sectors. Data from the Centre for Cities suggests that in England, self-employed workers are disproportionately located in London, while self-employed workers in northern cities are more likely to be in precarious conditions⁵⁸. More vulnerable demographic groups within these places, such as women, young people, BAME, part-time workers and lone parents, are also more likely to be in jobs which are at-risk⁵⁹. Meanwhile, employees in the South East are more likely to be employed in sectors like finance and consultancy, which can be carried out remotely⁶⁰.

Loss of income could push more people into insecure housing, and the most vulnerable into homelessness. While house prices are expected to fall slightly as a result of Covid-19 (see Chapter 3), the last decade saw housing become increasingly unaffordable, especially in England⁶¹. Since 2001 there has been a 70% increase in 'concealed families', where multiple generations live under one roof⁶². This could compound the vulnerabilities outlined earlier.

Loss of income could also drive households to relocate to more affordable locations, which tend to be in car-dependent locations with poor accessibility to jobs, services and amenities. There is also some evidence that more affluent households may relocate to rural locations, seeking larger houses with private gardens⁶³. While these trends are uncertain, the dispersal of households from denser locations could undermine efforts sustainable transport and urban regeneration, while increasing the costs of providing social and utility infrastructure.

Disadvantaged communities are also disproportionately affected by the environmental risks caused by climate change, such as flooding and overheating⁶⁴. These risks will continue to increase during the recovery period, interacting with and exacerbating the vulnerabilities outlined in this chapter.

2.3. How planning can support the recovery

Tackling place-based inequality

A wide variety of organisations and coalitions, including The United Nations, The Committee on Climate Change, The Environmental Justice Commission and The Wellbeing Economy Alliance have called for a strong focus on social justice during the recovery. This will involve prioritising long-term human wellbeing and equality through capacity building within communities and policies

⁵⁷ Lichfields (2020) [Exploring the local economic implications of Covid-19](#)

⁵⁸ Centre for Cities (2019) [Self-employment in cities](#)

⁵⁹ McKinsey and Company. [COVID-19 in the United Kingdom: Assessing jobs at risk and the impact on people and places](#). 11 May 2020

⁶⁰ Centre for Cities. [How will Coronavirus affect jobs in different parts of the country?](#) 17 March 2020

⁶¹ Office for National Statistics (2018) [Housing affordability in England and Wales: 2018](#)

⁶² Women's Budget Groups (2017) [Intersecting Inequalities](#)

⁶³ The Guardian. [Covid-19 sparks exodus of middle-class Londoners in search of the good life](#). 24 June 2020

⁶⁴ RTPI (2020) [Five Reasons for Climate Justice in Spatial Planning](#)

which reduce vulnerability to climate and other risks, taking into account socio-economic status.

This chapter has identified how Covid-19 could exacerbate existing patterns of socio-economic inequality within the built environment. Tackling this goes beyond 'people-focused' solutions such as welfare spending. It also requires place-based solutions to poverty and inequality, supporting the delivering of homes, services, amenities and infrastructure that improve health and wellbeing for all, tackling the rise of chronic non-communicable diseases like diabetes, cancer and obesity; mental health issues including anxiety, loneliness and depression; and the health impacts of climate change⁶⁵.

The contribution of planning

- **Improving the quality of existing homes and neighbourhoods.** The focus of planning on new build supply must be complemented with efforts to improve existing housing stock. Much-needed investment in energy efficiency retrofit should be linked to masterplans which regenerate deprived areas, protecting the rights of existing residents, and improving access to jobs, services, amenities and infrastructure.
- **Deliver high quality and affordable housing in the right locations.** Significant growth should be mixed use and targeted on brownfield sites which support wider regeneration efforts. Housing should come from a more diverse range of providers, including SME's, housing associations, local authorities and the custom and self-build sector, with clear design standards for space, light and thermal efficiency.
- **Improving access to green spaces.** Parks, public gardens and other open spaces should be integrated into strategic plans for critical green and blue infrastructure. These should improve quality, scale and accessibility of green spaces, especially in areas of deprivation, while delivering multifunctional benefits such as flood mitigation, cooling, air quality, active travel, biodiversity gains, habitat creation and space for urban agriculture.
- **Embedding 'climate justice' in plan-making.** Strong climate mitigation and adaptation policies are required to achieve net zero carbon and increase resilience to environmental risks. These policies must be designed to support the most vulnerable in society, integrated with the measures outlined above.

Further reading

To view all our current and upcoming work on planning, health and inclusivity, [visit the RTPI website](#). Selected publications include:

- **RTPI, 2020: [Five Reasons for Climate Justice in Spatial Planning](#)**
- **RTPI, 2018: [Settlement Patterns, Urban Form and Sustainability](#)**
- **RTPI, 2016: [Poverty, Place and Inequality](#)**
- **RTPI, 2014: [Promoting Healthy Cities](#)**

⁶⁵ RTPI (2014) [Promoting Healthy Cities: why planning is critical to a healthy urban future](#)

3. Economic sectors and labour markets

3.1. Observations

Different impacts across sectors and places

The impacts of lockdown and social distancing impacted economic sectors in different ways. Essential services like healthcare remained open, and sectors like utilities, forestry and agriculture saw a limited impact. Service and knowledge-based sectors were insulated by the ability to shift rapidly to homeworking. In the UK during April, 39% of those in employment reported working only from home, while 6% both worked from home and travelled to work⁶⁶. This contrasts with 5% of the workforce who reported working mainly from home during 2019⁶⁷.

Some sectors have expanded during the crisis, including teleworking, logistics and home delivery, technology and digital entertainment. Many others experienced profound disruption. Those sectors at highest risk include accommodation and food services, entertainment and recreation, construction, and education. Those at medium risk include manufacturing, wholesale and retail, transport and storage, information and communication, finance and insurance, real estate and professional services⁶⁸.

Many employers shifted employees onto the government furlough programme, which has been extended to October. However, others have already announced major redundancies which affect local economies. For example, Virgin Atlantic and British Airways are planning to shut operations at Gatwick airport and cut over 3,000 jobs⁶⁹, while McLaren Group is cutting 1,200 jobs from its factory in Woking⁷⁰.

Several organisations have considered how the composition of local economies affected resilience to the pandemic. As described in Chapter 2, there are concentrations of businesses in higher risk sectors across the North East of England, East of England, South East Coast and the South Yorkshire to Wirral corridor, and across the Central Belt of Scotland and South Wales, with vulnerable demographic groups more likely to be employed in these sectors⁷¹. The shift to homeworking also has both regional and sectoral variation, with workers in London, the East and the South East of England reporting a greater ability to work from home, compared to those in places like Wales and the North East of England⁷².

⁶⁶ Office for National Statistics: [Coronavirus, the UK economy and society, faster indicators: 30 April 2020](#)

⁶⁷ Office for National Statistics: [Coronavirus and homeworking in the UK labour market: 2019](#)

⁶⁸ Lichfields (2020) [Exploring the local economic implications of Covid-19](#)

⁶⁹ The Guardian. [Virgin Atlantic to axe a third of jobs and shut Gatwick operations](#). 5 May 2020

⁷⁰ The Guardian. [Formula One carmaker McLaren cuts 1,200 jobs amid Covid-19 crisis](#). 26 May 2020

⁷¹ Lichfields (2020) [Exploring the local economic implications of Covid-19](#)

⁷² YouGov. [Who are the Britons Working from Home?](#) 7 April 2020

Disruption to construction and the housing market

Social distancing requirements led to the suspension of construction on many sites, along with reduced levels of housing transactions and rental activity. Planning activity was similarly disrupted, with development management activity moving online where possible⁷³. The incremental relaxation of lockdown measures has allowed some construction and transaction activity to resume.

The Government has encouraged lenders to help those struggling with mortgage repayments, in order to limit the number of households forced to sell. Support has been provided for renters and buy-to-let landlords with tenants in financial difficulty.

Shocks to high streets and town centres

The closure of non-essential businesses has had a significant impact on high streets and town centres. Several major retailers went into administration as income collapsed, including Debenhams, Laura Ashley, Oasis and Cath Kidston. Others are restructuring and renegotiating leases. However, industry figures show that local corner stores and independent grocery stores experienced a 63% boost in trade in the three months leading up to 17 May, along with a 75% increase in online grocery sales in the last month of this period⁷⁴.

3.2. Implications for the recovery

More flexible working patterns

Current levels of homeworking are likely to decrease as lockdown measures are lifted. Around 20% of those currently working from home report finding it difficult⁷⁵, and some will have practical reasons to return to an office, such as the need for faster broadband and the use of specialist equipment. The value of physical interaction to productivity, collaboration and innovation will remain important, along with the benefits of in-person conversations, socialising and mentoring. Some will lack comfortable space for homeworking, or have struggled to separate professional and domestic life. Property managers are anticipating the return of employees to offices, and making the necessary changes to enable social distancing.

However, the experience of lockdown is likely to lead to a permanent increase in flexible working arrangements in sectors where remote working is possible. Many employers have rapidly overcome practical challenges to homeworking, and changed their perception around the productivity of homeworking. In a survey of 6,000 office workers across the UK, Germany, France and the Netherlands, only 24% of UK respondents said they wanted to return to the office full-time⁷⁶. Major tech companies, such as Twitter, Google and Facebook, are among those offering

⁷³ RTPI (2020) [Pragmatic and prepared for the recovery: The planning profession's rapid response to Covid-19](#)

⁷⁴ The Guardian. [UK corner shops and independent grocers ring up 63% rise in sales](#). 27 May 2020

⁷⁵ McKinsey and Company. [COVID-19 in the United Kingdom: Assessing jobs at risk and the impact on people and places](#). 11 May 2020

⁷⁶ OKTA (2020) [The New Workplace. Re-imagining work after 2020](#)

greater long-term flexibility to their employees⁷⁷.

Demand for office space may be propped up in the short-term as social distancing reduces capacity. However, wider impacts could emerge as office leases come up for renewal, and companies seek to make operational savings during the recession. This could see the price of commercial real estate decrease, and secondary impacts for restaurants, bars, shops and services located around office clusters.

Changing commuting journeys could reduce peak travel demand, easing pressure on roads and public transport, and alleviating the need for expensive capacity upgrades. However, transport networks may come under strain as commuting journeys are replaced by more complex local journeys, especially in locations with limited accessibility and connectivity by public and active travel. Broadband and energy networks may also come under strain, as daytime usage shifts towards residential neighbourhoods.

Impacts on house prices and development viability

The impact on development viability is uncertain, and dependent on how quickly residential transactions recover. Savills calculated that total transactions for 2020 could be between 38% and 53% lower than were forecast for 2020 in November last year⁷⁸. In China, property transactions have only recovered to 50% of their four year average⁷⁹.

This could result in a build-up of latent demand, and households with stable and secure incomes may take advantage of low interest rates to move house. This could support price growth in the medium term, however house prices are broadly expected to decline, with Savills estimating a fall of 5-10% based on a very low level of transactions⁸⁰. House prices in prime property markets, such as central London, may be hit particularly hard as the global recession affects international investors.

As described above, housing needs and preferences may change as a result of the pandemic, for example by reducing demand for high density flats or purpose-built student housing. The loss of income, coupled with an end to the moratorium on evictions, could increase demand for affordable private rental, social and council housing.

These pressures could interact with wider factors to impact development viability over the medium term. These factors include disruption to global supply chains, increased competition for labour and building materials, difficulty accessing finance and the continued uncertainty of Brexit. Viability could be especially affected in weak housing markets with high levels of consumer debt, or locations where development was linked to infrastructure investment. For example in London, the conditions attached to TfL's £1.6bn financial support package include a review of all capital works, creating uncertainty about which transport improvements will proceed.

Falling house prices and weak markets could lead developers to renegotiate both the timing and

⁷⁷ BBC News. [Coronavirus: Twitter allows staff to work from home 'forever'](#). 13 May 2020

⁷⁸ Savills. [Coronavirus and the UK housing market](#). 27 March 2020

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ Ibid

quantum of contributions towards affordable housing and infrastructure, reduce spending on design and sustainability, or shift focus to lower-risk sites.

Changing economic geographies

As government support is gradually withdrawn, furloughs may be converted into job losses. The recession is expected to reduce economic activity across the country as a whole, but the most visible impacts are likely to be in places with a higher dependency on at-risk sectors, many of which were already struggling⁸¹. For example, coastal and rural communities are likely to be affected by disruption to the summer tourism season, while local economies which are dependent on manufacturing and aviation could suffer from continued job cuts. University towns will be affected by the drop in their student population if teaching continues online, or if prospective students defer and reconsider their applications.

The impacts of a decline in spending by affected sectors, and the collapse of vulnerable businesses, will ripple across the wider economy. It takes considerable time to rebuild companies, balance sheets and supply chains, and the process of economic contraction and restructuring will have knock-on impacts for landlords, pension funds, listed companies, private investors and banks. This could spread economic impacts beyond the most at-risk places, and accelerate trends already present, such as business consolidation through mergers and acquisitions, and the shift in retail towards fewer and larger stores.

The combined impacts of social distancing and a weak economy will accelerate existing trends on the high street. Over 11,000 major retailers have already ceased trading since 2008⁸², in part due to competition from the convenience of large supermarkets, out-of-town stores and online shopping⁸³. The need to maintain social distancing could see this competition get even stronger. However, diverse high streets, in areas with strong local economies, may prove resilient as social distancing rules are gradually relaxed and shops and offices reopen. Some local high streets may benefit from the increase in flexible working, as employees spend more time in their local neighbourhoods. The reallocation of space for pedestrians and cyclists, described in Chapter 4, may also help to increase footfall.

The use of space will also evolve in response to the health and economic crisis. High streets may see increased demand for bicycle repair shops, local grocery and takeaway stores, local public health and community support services, skills and training, and indoor venues which are suitable for recreation and socialisation while maintaining social distancing.

3.3. How planning can support the recovery

Enabling a green industrial revolution

Numerous organisations and coalitions have called on governments to target recovery packages towards sectors that can accelerate progress towards net zero carbon. This includes jobs and

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Centre for Retail Research. [Who's Gone Bust in Retail? Who's Gone Bust in UK Retailing in 2019-2020?](#)

⁸³ DBIS and MHCLG (2011). [The Portas review: the future of our high streets](#)

training in building energy efficiency retrofit, low-carbon and renewable energy, electric vehicles, and carbon capture and storage. These include the United Nations, Committee on Climate Change, IPPR Environmental Justice Commission, Wellbeing Economy Alliance and Under2 Coalition. Many have also called for strict limitations and conditions on financial support for carbon-intensive sectors⁸⁴.

Many of these sectors are labour intensive, and could help to spread economic activity across the UK⁸⁵. For example, the North of England has expertise in renewable energy generation and storage technologies, while the West Midlands has specialisms in the manufacturing of vehicle components⁸⁶. The acceleration of growth in low-carbon sectors will have impacts on housing markets and create new demand for infrastructure and associated services. Continued growth in areas which have expanded during the pandemic, including pharmaceutical, packaged food, online retail, digital entertainment and remote-working sectors, will create similar impacts at the local and regional scale.

A green recovery will also require a reduction in unsustainable patterns of consumption, which contributes to climate and ecological breakdown and increases the risk of future pandemics⁸⁷. These pressures, coupled with continued supply chain disruption and the need to decarbonise, could also impact on land use. Urban areas could see increased demand for sectors which support a circular economy, such as decentralised manufacturing and upcycling, while rural areas could see changing patterns of demand for food, timber and minerals.

These changes will be coupled with the contraction of at-risk sectors, creating challenges for certain places. Proactive planning and place-leadership will be needed to maximise the opportunities of a green industrial revolution, while helping vulnerable places navigate through a difficult transition.

The contribution of planning

- **Meeting the land, housing and infrastructure needs of sectors which can deliver emission reductions, environmental gains and job growth.** This will require strategic planning over wide geographical areas, and close engagement with businesses groups, trade unions, skills agencies, infrastructure providers and investors.
- **Identifying and coordinating the upfront infrastructure funding needed to maintain viability in weak housing markets.** Public-sector masterplanning, with close involvement from infrastructure providers, can provide confidence for developers and local communities, and ensure that measures taken to stimulate construction are coupled with the investments needed to deliver sustainability and resilience.
- **Planning for mixed use communities with accessible local services, digital connectivity and networks of green and active transport infrastructure.** This investment will capture the benefits of more flexible and remote working patterns, reduce

⁸⁴ The Times. [Coronavirus: Rishi Sunak wants green new jobs for laid-off workers](#). 3 June 2020

⁸⁵ Committee on Climate Change (2019). [Net Zero The UK's contribution to stopping global warming](#)

⁸⁶ Local Government Association. [Local green jobs – accelerating a sustainable economic recovery](#)

⁸⁷ The Guardian. [Pandemics result from destruction of nature, say UN and WHO](#). 17 June 2020

pressure on both local and strategic transport networks, freeing up capacity which avoids the need for costly upgrades.

- **Regenerate, revitalise and diversify town centres and high streets.** Maintain a town-centre first approach by taking a holistic, plan-led approach to the integration of high-quality affordable homes, and the repurposing of vacant commercial space for uses which support community resilience and environmental sustainability.

Further reading

To view all our current and upcoming work on planning and the economy, [visit the RTPI website](#). Selected publications include:

- **RTPI, 2019: [A Smarter Approach to Infrastructure Planning](#)**
- **RTPI, 2019: [Ambitions for the North: A Spatial Framework for People and Places](#)**
- **RTPI, 2016: [Planning for the growth of the technology and advanced manufacturing sectors](#)**
- **RTPI, 2015: [Planning as ‘Market Maker’: How planning is used to stimulate development in Germany, France and the Netherlands](#)**
- **RTPI, RICS, ATCM and IED, 2015: [A brighter future for our towns and cities](#)**

4. Travel and transport

4.1. Observations

Significant changes to travel behaviour

The pandemic has caused dramatic changes to travel patterns across the world. In the UK, during March and April, visits to public transport hubs fell by 71%, and work trips by 68%⁸⁸. Changes in travel behaviour varied across modes. Between February and April 2020, UK traffic volumes decreased by 71%, bus by 88% and domestic rail by 95%. In London, tube travel fell by 94% and bus use by 80%⁸⁹.

As lockdown measures started to ease, travel behaviour slowly adjusted. By late May, trips to UK public transport hubs remained down by 62%, and work trips by 61%⁹⁰. Data from Transport Scotland showed that rail journeys remained down by 50% compared to early April, while concessionary bus journeys were up by 10%. Car journeys also increased by 35%, cycling by 50% and walking by 30%⁹¹.

Environmental benefits

Travel restrictions imposed during lockdown led to significant air quality improvements. Levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) decreased by approximately 48% in Leeds when compared with the five-year average, with similar impacts in places like Newcastle, Cardiff, Glasgow, Birmingham, Manchester, Bristol and Belfast⁹². Greater London saw an average decrease of 21%, with some parts of central London experiencing half of average levels⁹³.

These temporary improvements to air quality are likely to deliver health benefits. One study suggested that the sharp decline in road traffic, coupled with reduced industrial emissions, could result in 11,000 fewer deaths across Europe from air pollution, 1.3 million fewer days of work absence, 6,000 fewer children developing asthma, 1,900 avoided emergency room visits and 600 fewer preterm births. In the UK, one study suggests that between 1,069 and 3,425 deaths have been avoided due to improved air quality⁹⁴.

⁸⁸ Google (2020) [COVID-19 mobility reports](#)

⁸⁹ House of Commons Transport Committee, [Oral Evidence Coronavirus: Implications for Transport](#), April 2020

⁹⁰ Google (2020) [COVID-19 mobility reports](#)

⁹¹ Transport Scotland. [COVID-19 Transport Trend Data – 11](#). 17 May 2020

⁹² University of York. [Pollution levels in UK cities drop as coronavirus impacts on daily life, new data reveals](#). 25 March 2020

⁹³ Kings College London: A note from the Environmental Research Group (2020). [The effect of COVID 19 lockdown measures on air quality in London in 2020](#)

⁹⁴ Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. [11,000 air pollution-related deaths avoided in Europe as coal, oil consumption plummet](#). 30 April 2020

The prioritisation of walking and cycling

To account for reduced public transport capacity and frequency, local authorities have installed temporary active travel infrastructure such as wider pavements and pop-up bike lanes. Road closure regulations were relaxed to assist the reallocation of space to walking and cycling⁹⁵. Brighton and Hove were among the first to act by restricting the seafront for walking and cycling⁹⁶, and many others have since followed. To accommodate 33% of journeys being made by bike, Greater Manchester combined authority allocated £5 million in funding for new pop-up bike lanes and widened pavements⁹⁷, while Birmingham City Council launched an Emergency Transport Plan that accelerated measures outlined in their draft Transport Plan⁹⁸. The Mayor of Liverpool approved a £2 million package to introduce up to 100km of pop-up cycle lanes along key routes⁹⁹.

London has announced its intention to transform streets in preparation for a possible ten-fold increase in cycling and a five-fold increase in walking when lockdown is fully lifted. Transport for London (TfL) is working with boroughs to rapidly expand the strategic cycling network using temporary materials, including new routes aimed at reducing crowding on busy underground, train and bus routes. Local town centres are also being transformed to enable shorter journeys to be made by walking and cycling, with wider pavements on high streets¹⁰⁰. The City of London Corporation plans to ban cars on its busiest roads as commuters return to work¹⁰¹, while Hackney Council is filtering streets to reduce through traffic and promote walking and cycling¹⁰².

In Scotland, Edinburgh council approved a detailed plan to create safe spaces for walking and cycling¹⁰³, while a pop-up bike lane is now operational along with River Clyde in Glasgow¹⁰⁴. In Wales, £14.5m has been made available to create more space for walking and cycling in local towns¹⁰⁵.

Greater adoption of electric mobility solutions, such as e-scooters and e-bikes, is also underway. In Northern Ireland, legislation is currently being considered which would allow e-bikes on public roads without the need for licensing or registration¹⁰⁶. In England, the Department for Transport

⁹⁵ Forbes. [Roads Can Be For People Not Cars, States U.K. Government Lockdown Guidance](#). 17 April 2020

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ Forbes. [Greater Manchester To Spend £5 Million On Pop-Up Cycleways, Widened Sidewalks](#). 6 May 2020

⁹⁸ Air Quality News. [Birmingham to prioritise walking and cycling](#). 19 May 2020

⁹⁹ Cycling Weekly. [Liverpool to invest £2 million in up to 100km of pop-up cycle lanes to aid coronavirus recovery](#). 14 May 2020

¹⁰⁰ Mayor of London, Press Release. [Mayor's bold new Streetspace plan will overhaul London's streets](#). 6 May 2020

¹⁰¹ Financial Times. [City of London to ban cars on busiest roads as lockdown eases](#). 13 May 2020.

¹⁰² The Guardian. [London pedestrians and cyclists may get more space on roads](#). 14 April 2020

¹⁰³ The City of Edinburgh Council. [Creating Safe Spaces for Walking and Cycling](#). 14 May 2020

¹⁰⁴ Glasgow Evening Times. [New cycle lane 'pops up' by the Glasgow Clyde to ease traffic pressure](#). 14 May 2020

¹⁰⁵ Welsh Government. [£15 million for 'Covid-proof' travel](#). 20 June 2020

¹⁰⁶ Intelligent Transport. [Northern Ireland in talks to change legislation to encourage use of e-bikes](#). 14 May 2020

has accelerated trials for e-scooters to inform decisions about whether to fully legalise them¹⁰⁷.

Financial support for public transport operators

In response to plummeting revenues for public transport operators, the UK government provided a £400 million package to support bus companies to operate at 50% capacity¹⁰⁸ and a further £30 million for metro services in Manchester, Tyne and Wear, Nottingham, the Midlands and Sheffield¹⁰⁹. A further £1.6bn support package was agreed for TfL in May¹¹⁰.

In Edinburgh, Transport for Edinburgh and the Scottish Government are in talks to secure bailouts for the tram network, where ridership has fallen by 90%¹¹¹. In Ireland, the Minister for Transport has announced that the government is ready to support CIÉ, the nation's largest transport provider¹¹².

The shared mobility sector has been similarly affected, with estimates of a 70% decline in revenue during lockdown across different providers¹¹³. There has to date been no financial support provided by government.

Delays to the implementation of clean air zones

The safety benefits of private cars, especially for healthcare workers, has led some local authorities to postpone the implementation of Clean Air Zones (CAZs) with the support of central government. Recent announcements suggest that CAZs may be postponed in Birmingham, Leeds, Bath, Bristol, Sheffield, Newcastle, Greater Manchester and Portsmouth. Plans to introduce Low Emissions Zones have also been paused in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee¹¹⁴. Some were due to come in this year, others in 2021¹¹⁵. In London, the Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ), Low Emission Zone (LEZ) and Congestion Charge were suspended between March 23 and May 18, while several underground and bus routes were closed. Across the country, motorists are also being allowed to park for free with councils relaxing restrictions and enforcement¹¹⁶.

¹⁰⁷ Intelligent Transport. [DfT seeks views on proposed regulations for fast-tracked e-scooter trials](#). 19 May 2020

¹⁰⁸ The Guardian. [Bus firms get £400m bailout to maintain services](#). 2 April 2020

¹⁰⁹ BBC News. [Coronavirus: Government £30m bailout for light rail](#). 2 May 2020

¹¹⁰ Department for Transport. [Government grants Transport for London funding package](#). 15 May 2020.

¹¹¹ Edinburgh News. [Edinburgh Trams set for Scottish Government bailout amid plummeting passenger numbers and cash crisis](#). 1 May 2020.

¹¹² The Irish Times. [Government is ready to bail out CIÉ if necessary, Shane Ross says](#). 17 May 2020.

¹¹³ Rough estimates provided by CoMoUK

¹¹⁴ Transport Scotland. [Scotland's Low Emission Zones paused](#). 7 May 2020

¹¹⁵ Client Earth. [Air pollution and Covid-19 – Clean Air Zones postponed across the UK](#). 24 April 2020.

¹¹⁶ The Telegraph. [Motorists to enjoy free parking during Covid-19 pandemic as councils scale back restrictions](#). 29 March 2020.

4.2. Implications for the recovery

Long term strategies for active travel

The pandemic has created an urgent need to reallocate space to support greater levels of walking, cycling and outdoor activity, to ease pressure on public transport and help shops and restaurants to reopen. Progressive local authorities which were already working to provide better active travel have found themselves more resilient to the pandemic, able to accommodate the need for social distancing by accelerating existing plans which had already been consulted on. Others have been able to overcome barriers to the delivery of longstanding sustainable transport, traffic removal and place-making objectives, which often suffer from a lack of political support, prioritisation and funding.

The government is has announced the publication of an updated Walking and Cycling Investment Strategy during the summer¹¹⁷. This will include the creation of a national cycling and walking commissioner and inspectorate, and a long-term budget for active travel, such as already exists for roads. While these are positive steps, further efforts will be needed to encourage new cyclists and drive a wider cultural shift.

While urban areas have been quick to respond, changes have been limited in more rural areas where the pressure on road space is less acute. The Welsh Government has announced that active travel measures should not be limited to large urban areas, with the same principles applying to smaller towns and rural areas¹¹⁸. This will be necessary to overcome historically low levels of cycling in rural areas. For example in Northern Ireland, just 2% of the population cycle to work, with even lower levels in more rural areas such as Newry, Mourne and Down¹¹⁹.

In all places, active travel strategies will need to cover engagement and education, for example through online engagement tools where people can share their views on active travel infrastructure¹²⁰. Equality of access to infrastructure and support services will also be critical. Sport England's Active Lives Survey found that cycling rates are lower in Black and South Asian communities than for white British people, due to barriers in participation¹²¹.

In the shared micro mobility sector, concerns about Covid-19 have led to a significant drop in the use of shared bicycles and scooters. This has put pressure on business models which were already under strain in a competitive market, and with challenges from vandalism and theft, costly charging and redistribution needs, compliance with local policies, and bad weather¹²². The recovery period could see changes to the sector including consolidation. Uber and Lime have

¹¹⁷ Department for Transport. [£2 billion package to create new era for cycling and walking](#). 9 May 2020.

¹¹⁸ Welsh Government: [Written Statement: Funding for local sustainable transport measures in response to Covid 19](#). 7 May 2020

¹¹⁹ BBC. [Coronavirus: Could pandemic spark cycling revolution in NI?](#) 10 May 2020

¹²⁰ Such as by Sustrans: [First online tool to help residents share views on emergency walking and cycling infrastructure](#). 7 May 2020

¹²¹ See Sport England's [Active Lives Survey](#) and the British Cycling 2019 [Diversity in Cycling Report](#)

¹²² Deloitte Insights. [Small is beautiful: Making micromobility work for citizens, cities, and service providers](#). 16 April 2019

already announced a deal that would transfer Uber's bike and scooter business to Lime, with the option of buying Lime at a specific price between 2022 and 2024¹²³.

Continuing reductions in public transport capacity

Increased confidence in homeworking, coupled with the need for social distancing, are likely to see a continued reduction in public transport use, especially at peak times. Access to public transport will however remain crucial to those who cannot work from home, such as key workers, and those in jobs which place a premium on face-to-face interaction.

Many people in the UK have trouble accessing employment, healthcare, education and shops by healthy, affordable and low-carbon modes of transport. This applies especially to low income households, where 40% have no car access. This disproportionately affects female heads of households, children, young and older people, BAME and disabled people¹²⁴. Across the UK, 14% of the workforce commute to work using public transport, a rate which is higher in urban areas and especially London, where 49% of the workforce rely on public transport to get to work. While improvements in active travel can provide alternatives, those with long commutes to essential jobs, rely on an efficient, safe and affordable public transport service. As such, continued policies to discourage public transport could exacerbate the place-based inequalities described in Chapter 2.

Increased car use

Private vehicles are currently being promoted as a safe way to travel during the pandemic. The RAC estimated an 11% increase in road traffic by the 8th of May, compared with the second week of lockdown.¹²⁵ Car sales are also rising around the world as countries ease lockdown measures, with Volvo reporting that sales in China are 20% higher than in 2019. Subscriptions to car sharing services such as Zipcar have also increased¹²⁶.

During the recovery, local authorities may find it hard to implement CAZs and other traffic removal policies, or set ambitious policies for car-free developments, if people have become accustomed to car use. Under-resourced local authorities also rely on parking revenue, with councils collecting £930 million in 2018-19, an increase of 41% since 2013¹²⁷.

Increased car use has implications for road safety, especially with the growth in walking, cycling and last-mile delivery vehicles. This could impede the recovery of businesses, shops and services in town centres and high streets where outdoor space is being reallocated to support social distancing. It could reverse the improvements to clean air seen during lockdown, again disproportionately affecting disadvantaged places and people. It also creates barriers to the decarbonisation of transport, which is discussed in Chapter 5.

¹²³ The Verve. [Lime squeezes \\$170 million from Uber and Alphabet as scooter-sharing plummets under COVID-19](#). 7 May 2020.

¹²⁴ Government Office for Science & Foresight (2019) [Inequalities in Mobility and Access in the UK Transport System](#)

¹²⁵ BBC. [Coronavirus: 'Lockdown fatigue' blamed for increase in driving](#). 8 May 2020

¹²⁶ Financial Times. [Time to buy a car? Industry hopes for coronavirus silver lining](#). 20 May 2020

¹²⁷ RAC Foundation (2019) [Council parking revenue in England 2018-19](#)

4.3. How can planning can support the recovery

Prioritising healthy and sustainable modes of transport

National and global organisations have called for transport decarbonisation as a central component to the economic recovery, through investing in low and zero carbon infrastructure, incentivising uptake of electric vehicles, introducing policies to reduce car use, and encouraging uptake of public transport¹²⁸.

This chapter has identified how rising car use could reverse the benefits to air quality and congestion seen during lockdown, and threaten a recovery that depends on the prioritisation of space for walking and cycling. To lock-in more sustainable travel patterns, and accelerate progress towards net zero carbon, closer integration is required between transport and land use planning.

The contribution of planning

- **Integrate temporary measures to enable walking and cycling into wider strategies for place, locking in long-term shifts in travel behaviour.** This will require multidisciplinary place-based teams which can integrate active travel measures with plans for high street regeneration, green infrastructure, new car-free residential and commercial developments, electric vehicle charging points and last-mile deliveries.
- **Engaging with communities and businesses to ensure that changes meet a range of mobility needs.** This should include groups which promote diversity and equality in walking and cycling, including in more rural areas.
- **Collaborate on temporary measures to support sustainable mobility in car-dependent locations.** Provide evidence on locations where ongoing subsidy will be required to maintain levels of public transport coverage and frequency, or initiatives to provide access to active and shared mobility options, such as like electric bikes.
- **Design and locate new development to maximise accessibility by public, active and shared modes of transport.** Patterns of housing and commercial development must support urban regeneration and renewal, and provide levels of patronage which support the recovery of public and shared transport providers, rather than diverting public funds towards the expansion of the road network to accommodate car use.

Further reading

To view all our current and upcoming work on planning and transport, [visit the RTPI website](#). Selected publications include:

- **CIHT, 2019: [Better Planning, Better Transport, Better Places](#)**
- **RTPI, 2019: [A Smarter Approach to Infrastructure Planning](#)**
- **RTPI, 2018: [Settlement Patterns, Urban Form and Sustainability](#)**

¹²⁸ Committee on Climate Change (2020) [Reducing UK emissions: 2020 Progress Report to Parliament](#)

5. Net zero carbon

5.1. Observations

Falling energy demand

The energy sector has been severely affected by the pandemic, with significant reductions in electricity demand as countries enacted lockdown measures. In the UK, electricity demand fell dramatically as the lockdown was imposed, and had reduced by over 20% after 25 days (after correcting for the weather)¹²⁹. This was broadly driven by reduced demand for commercial and business activity, offset by a slight increase in domestic demand as people spent more time at home. The traditional weekday morning peak in energy demand flattened out slightly, as people started their working day differently, while evening demand remained broadly similar¹³⁰.

Lower electricity demand, coupled with favourable weather conditions, reduced the use of coal-fired power plants, with demand met by gas, nuclear and renewables. On April 5th, this combination saw power prices go negative for four hours, enabling customers on dynamic tariffs to be paid for using power¹³¹. As a power surplus during early May raised concerns about grid overload, National Grid requested that EDF reduce output at the Sizewell B nuclear plant, and sought emergency powers to limit supply from solar and wind farms¹³². The cost of continuing to manage reduced electricity demand on the National Grid over the summer has been estimated at £500m¹³³.

These changes are set against the historic collapse of global oil prices, as industry, services and transport ground to a standstill. During April, oil demand was 29 million barrels per day lower than in 2019. Even if restrictions are partially lifted throughout the remainder of 2020, demand is forecast to continue falling by approximately 9.3 million barrels per day over the course of the year, compared to 2019¹³⁴. In the USA, oil prices went negative for the first time in history, with producers paying buyers to take on supply¹³⁵. Prices are forecast to recover throughout 2020, as economies start to reopen, however supply is expected to remain low due to the deal struck between oil producing and exporting countries (OPEC+) to protect prices¹³⁶.

¹²⁹ IEA. [Reductions of electricity demand after implementing lockdown measures in selected countries, weather corrected](#), 0 to 86 days. 4 June 2020

¹³⁰ Frontier Economics (2020) [How is COVID 19 impacting the UK electricity system?](#)

¹³¹ Ibid

¹³² The Times. [Blackout risk as low demand for power brings plea to switch off wind farms](#). 2 May 2020

Reuters. [EDF asked to lower Sizewell nuclear plant output to help balance UK grid](#). 6 May 2020

¹³³ The Times. [Slump in electricity use to cost £500m, says National Grid](#). 22 May 2020

¹³⁴ IEA (2020) [Oil Market Report – April 2020](#)

¹³⁵ Guardian. [Oil prices dip below zero as producers forced to pay to dispose of excess](#). 20 April 2020

¹³⁶ EA (2020) [Oil Market Report – April 2020](#)

A temporary reduction in emissions

Before Covid-19, global CO₂ emissions were rising at around 1% per year over the previous decade, with no growth during 2019¹³⁷. This was largely due to the expansion of renewable energy production, although this complemented rather than replaced fossil fuel energy. Emissions from surface transport were also rising. However, during the peak of lockdown measures in early April, daily global CO₂ emissions were down by 17% compared to 2019 – a far steeper reduction than seen after the financial crisis levels¹³⁸. 43% of this change was due to the decrease in surface transport. Annual emissions for 2020 are forecast to be between 4% and 8% lower than 2019 levels, depending on the continued duration and impact of lockdown measures.

5.2. Implications for the recovery

While these changes will briefly slow the accumulation of CO₂ emissions, they were driven by emergency measures and at huge cost. To keep global warming from surpassing 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels, annual global emissions need to be cut by 7.6% every year¹³⁹. In industrialised nations like the UK, an equitable contribution to climate mitigation could require emission reductions of over 10% per annum¹⁴⁰.

This requires both the deployment of low and zero-carbon energy infrastructure *and* an overall reduction in energy consumption through building retrofit, behaviour change and the restructuring of energy-intensive economic sectors¹⁴¹. However, energy consumption could quickly rebound to pre-crisis levels as lockdown measures are lifted, while the wider economic impacts could create both challenges and opportunities for the transition to net zero carbon.

Energy efficiency and renewable energy

Low oil prices could become a permanent feature if supply continues to exceed demand, which could accelerate the shift in investment towards renewable energy¹⁴². However, the renewables sector may be affected by the drop in overall energy investment, job losses, delays to construction and supply chain disruption¹⁴³. Social distancing may also create barriers for renewable energy projects related to land acquisition, environmental assessments, permitting and community engagement. A combination of low energy prices and the weak economy could reduce incentives for households and businesses to switch to clean energy products and services, invest in retrofit, or to relocate to more energy efficient buildings.

¹³⁷ Le Quéré, C. et al. (2020) [Temporary reduction in daily global CO₂ emissions during the COVID-19 forced confinement](#). Nature Climate Change.

¹³⁸ Ibid

¹³⁹ UNEP (2019) [Emissions Gap Report 2019](#)

¹⁴⁰ Anderson, K. et al. (2019) [A factor of two: how the mitigation plans of 'climate progressive' nations fall far short of Paris-compliant pathways](#). Climate Policy.

¹⁴¹ Committee on Climate Change (2020) [Reducing UK emissions: 2020 Progress Report to Parliament](#)

¹⁴² IEA. [Global energy demand to plunge this year as a result of the biggest shock since the Second World War](#). 30 April 2020

¹⁴³ IEA (2020) [World Energy Investment Outlook](#)

However, the falling price of renewable energy, coupled with government support for green jobs and investment, could prove transformative. In the UK and Ireland, the challenges of balancing energy supply and demand during the pandemic has highlighted the need for a 'smart' electricity grid, one which is capable of responding to fluctuations in renewable energy supply, changing patterns of demand, and the electrification of transport and heat. This requires connections with European energy networks, the installation of energy storage technologies, and greater demand-side flexibility through the deployment of smart meters, controls, systems and appliances¹⁴⁴.

Electric vehicles

The issues described above could also delay the uptake of electric vehicles (EVs), which form a central component of the UK's approach to transport decarbonisation. Covid-19 has already disrupted the supply chain for components, while the recession could affect both vehicle manufacturers and providers of charging infrastructure. Low oil and diesel prices, coupled with a weak economy, may reduce incentives for consumers and fleet managers to purchase EVs.

There are some encouraging signs. A recent survey suggested that almost half of UK drivers would consider switching to an EV after the pandemic, and that the public would like to see additional measures to accelerate EVs once the UK has recovered from the crisis¹⁴⁵. EV sales are expected to recover as battery prices fall, energy density improves, and more charging infrastructure is deployed¹⁴⁶. However, Chapter 4 described the risk of increased car use during the recovery phase, due to safety concerns around public transport and reductions in service frequency and capacity. If the transition to EVs takes place against the backdrop of rising car use, then it will increase overall energy demand, exacerbate problems of congestion, safety and local air pollution from brakes and tires, along with the lifecycle emissions of the vehicles themselves.

5.3. How planning can support the recovery

Accelerating the deployment of zero carbon infrastructure

The Committee on Climate Change, along with many others, are calling on the government to protect existing climate and environmental regulations and policies, and invest in the infrastructure needed to deliver the UK's international commitments while creating new jobs and economic growth. Recommended measures include the deployment of low carbon energy production and storage infrastructure, modernising the electricity grid to enable higher penetration from renewables and accommodate the electrification of heat and transport, higher standards for new homes, and financial support for households installing insulation and other energy efficient improvements¹⁴⁷. Many of these interventions will need to be integrated into local and strategic plans, which can help to minimise the costs of decarbonisation¹⁴⁸.

¹⁴⁴ RTPI (2019) [Planning for a Smart Energy Future](#)

¹⁴⁵ Energy Live News. [Almost half of UK drivers 'consider EV switch in the wake of Covid-19'](#). 15 April 2020.

¹⁴⁷ Committee on Climate Change (2020) [Reducing UK emissions: 2020 Progress Report to Parliament](#)

¹⁴⁸ Energy Systems Catapult. [Local Area Energy Planning key to minimising decarbonisation costs](#). 10 December 2018.

The contribution of planning

- **Minimising energy and transport demand in local plans.** As described in Chapter 2, plans should include strategies for retrofitting existing buildings, especially in areas where fuel poverty is a significant issue¹⁴⁹. Overall transport demand, including for electric vehicles, should be reduced through planning for mixed use neighbourhoods with accessible local services and high quality walking and cycling infrastructure.
- **Delivering smart energy infrastructure through local and strategic planning.** Site allocations should maximise opportunities for onsite renewable energy and connections to decentralised low-carbon energy networks. Close engagement with local Distribution Network Operators and the National Grid should identify areas for energy storage and decentralised energy, supported by policies and guidance. Electric vehicle charging infrastructure should form a key part of transport and energy strategies¹⁵⁰.
- **Providing certainty through ambitious and consistent local planning policy.** Local authorities currently have the freedom to set ambitious energy standards for homes which go above building regulations, incorporating energy efficiency measures, low carbon technologies and smart controls to minimise energy use throughout the building life-cycle.
- **Directing growth towards sustainable locations.** Planning can ensure that new development is delivered in locations and densities that maximise the potential for low and zero-carbon energy and transport infrastructure, and work with providers and regulators to deliver investment ahead of demand.

Further reading

To view all our current and upcoming work on planning, climate change and energy, [visit the RTPI website](#). Selected publications include:

- RTPI, 2020: [Five Reasons for Climate Justice in Spatial Planning](#)
- RTPI and TCPA, 2018: [Rising to the climate crisis: a guide for local authorities on planning for climate change](#)
- RTPI, 2019: [Planning for a Smart Energy Future](#)
- RTPI, 2018: [Settlement Patterns, Urban Form and Sustainability](#)
- RTPI, 2018: [Renewable Energy Practice Advice Note](#)

¹⁴⁹ RTPI and TCPA (2019) [Rising to the Climate Crisis](#)

¹⁵⁰ RTPI (2019) [Planning for Smart Energy](#)

6. Supporting a place-based recovery

6.1. Planning tools and approaches

This paper describes a wide range of challenges and opportunities for the UK during the recovery. To deliver a holistic, place-based response, local and strategic plans will need to direct stimulus measures and other forms of investment towards solutions which have local support and deliver multiple benefits. This will require planning to draw on a wide range of tools and approaches which go beyond statutory and regulatory functions. These include:

Listening and engagement

Covid-19 has affected people in different ways: through bereavement, the loss of employment, uncertainty about the future, or a decline in mental and physical health. Genuinely participatory planning can help decision-makers to understand the concerns, needs and aspirations of individuals, communities and businesses. A strong focus on social and climate justice, with the needs of vulnerable people and disadvantaged communities at the heart, will be needed to deliver an inclusive recovery that works for those most affected by the health and economic crisis.

Place-based vision and leadership

An effective recovery requires a common purpose among a wide range of stakeholders, coordinating decisions about land use, infrastructure, resources and investments to create places that shape markets, stimulate innovation and encourage behaviour change over the medium and long-term. Planners are well placed to coordinate between these stakeholders, including those delivering smart zero-carbon energy systems, high-speed broadband, sustainable and healthy transport, multi-functional green spaces, programmes of building retrofit and regeneration, and the provision of services, education and healthcare facilities. To support local leaders, planners can help to integrate these priorities into a long-term vision for places, balancing community needs with strategic objectives.

Integrated and strategic planning

Different combinations of land use and infrastructure can be tested against the vision and objectives for place, looking for synergies which deliver the widest benefits to sustainability, resilience and inclusivity. Preferred options can be delivered through high-level strategic policies which guide places as they change and adapt, and supported by the development of integrated strategies which cover housing, employment, connectivity, regeneration, climate change and the environment. These strategies can help to direct economic stimulus measures, like infrastructure investment, towards solutions which deliver multiple benefits.

Flexibility and adaptability

With national projections thrown into doubt, a place-based vision and strategy should provide businesses, developers, investors and communities with confidence about the direction of travel, the presence of complementary investment, and the non-negotiable contributions required from individual developments. This should allow more time and resources to allow for greater flexibility

and innovation on the ground, for example by developing guidance for specific areas and supporting developers with detailed design.

6.2. Actions from governments

The RTPI is engaging with national governments on specific issues which affect England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In this section, we set out broad recommendations which can help the UK's planning systems guide the recovery towards outcomes which deliver long-term sustainability, resilience and inclusivity.

Governance and resourcing

- **Place leadership.** Effective leadership from elected mayors and councillors will be critical to the recovery, and should be informed by the expertise of Chief Planning Officers at the top table in each local authority¹⁵¹. In England especially, more powers and funding should be devolved to support ambitious regeneration programmes that require land assembly, direct delivery of affordable housing, and upfront infrastructure investment.
- **Robust strategic planning arrangements.** Many of the challenges identified in this paper require planning across wide geographical areas, aligning infrastructure investment and other stimulus measures with the needs of businesses, and the economic, social and environmental priorities of multiple local authorities. Despite some progress, many places still rely on weak and informal methods of cooperation, which increases the risk of uncoordinated and unsustainable patterns of development¹⁵². National and devolved governments should provide leadership and resources to ensure that all areas of the UK and Ireland are able to engage in plan-making at a strategic scale.
- **Investment in proactive planning.** Public sector planning has seen disproportionate cuts which makes it extremely challenging to deliver on the wider objectives of planning¹⁵³. Financial assistance for local government should include sufficient investment in plan-making for the recovery, and allowing for meaningful participation with local communities and close collaboration between council departments, developers, businesses and infrastructure providers.
- **Resources for community participation in planning.** Existing neighbourhood and community-level planning systems across the UK and Ireland should be strengthened to ensure that diverse voices are reflected in plan-making during the recovery, with a particular focus on BAME communities.

¹⁵¹ RTPI (2019) [Chief Planning Officers](#)

¹⁵² RTPI (2016) [Smart City Regions](#)

¹⁵³ RTPI (2019) [Resourcing Public Planning](#) shows that total net expenditure on planning in England fell 42% between 2009-10 and 2017-18, with two-thirds of total reductions falling on planning policy. Spending on planning policy in England averaged out at less than £5 per resident per year. Research also shows similar cuts in [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#).

Joined up national strategies

- **Infrastructure:** National infrastructure spending should be closely aligned with the delivery of long-term visions and objectives for place, with upfront investment to reduce travel demand and encourage public, active and shared modes of transport, enable sustainable land use, support urban regeneration, accelerate progress towards net zero carbon, increase resilience to risk, and improve health and wellbeing. The Project Ireland 2040 project demonstrates how planning and capital investment are being aligned at the national level¹⁵⁴, with similar announcements in Northern Ireland¹⁵⁵.
- **Affordable homes:** Scotland and Wales have ambitious grant-funding programmes for affordable housing which are lacking in England. To boost the economy, support lower income households, increase developer spending on design and place-making, and stimulate urban regeneration, the English government should provide major new grants to support new social housebuilding by local authorities and housing associations¹⁵⁶. Following Scotland and Wales, the UK Government should also remove the Right to Buy, or at least ensure that local authorities can set their own discounts and retain 100% of revenues to build new social housing¹⁵⁷.
- **Building retrofit and reuse:** 80% of the buildings that will exist by 2050 have already been built. National strategies should deliver the labour force and investment needed to maximise their energy and water efficiency, accelerating progress towards net zero carbon¹⁵⁸. Policy and taxation should also prioritise building reuse and refurbishment over demolition and rebuild, where lifecycle emissions would be lower as a result.
- **The climate and ecological crisis:** Cross-departmental strategies should provide clarity on the legislation, regulation, policy and investment needed to decarbonise heat and transport, and deliver national environmental priorities. These should remove barriers to planning for networks of active travel, district heat, smart energy and multifunctional blue/green infrastructure, ensuring that investment is directed to solutions which have local support and deliver multiple benefits.

Common objectives and metrics

- **Equality and justice:** The impacts of the pandemic, economic slowdown and climate crisis are likely to place the most vulnerable at greater risk. National strategies, policies and investment decisions must help plans to tackle place-based poverty, eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity across the built environment. Specific indicators should be developed to

¹⁵⁴ Government of Ireland: [Project Ireland 2040](#)

¹⁵⁵ Northern Ireland Executive: [Mallon announces budget to aid economy kick start and community transformation](#). 19 June 2020.

¹⁵⁶ [Research from the LGA](#) shows that investment in a new generation of social housing could return £320bn to the English economy over 50 years. Estimates of the grant required for social housebuilding in England include Savills (2017) [Investing to solve the housing crisis](#) (£7 billion a year) and Shelter Commission on Social Housing (2019) [A vision for social housing](#) (£10.7bn a year for 20 years)

¹⁵⁷ For more detailed recommendations, see the RTPI's [priorities for planning reform in England](#) (2020)

¹⁵⁸ For an example, see the recommendations of the [Decarbonisation of Homes Wales Advisory Group](#) (2019)

ensure that disadvantaged groups, including BAME communities, women and older people, can access secure, quality and affordable housing, along with services, jobs, infrastructure and amenities.

- **Climate-proof planning systems:** To accelerate progress towards net zero carbon, national planning legislation and policy should be strengthened to support high levels of energy efficiency in new development, maximise accessibility by sustainable modes of transport, and overcome barriers to the delivery of smart and renewable energy infrastructure.
- **Infrastructure appraisal:** The regulatory framework for utilities, and transport appraisal methodologies, should be improved to better align infrastructure investment priorities with the economic, social and environmental objectives of planning. The Well-being of Future Generations Act in Wales provides an example of how better legislation can shape infrastructure decisions¹⁵⁹.
- **Measuring planning outcomes:** Establish common metrics to measure and monitor the short, medium and long-term performance of planning¹⁶⁰. These should look beyond housing delivery to focus on decarbonisation, resilience, accessibility to services and infrastructure, design, health and wellbeing. Local and strategic plans should be examined on this basis, with Inspectors making recommendations where necessary to bring them into conformity with the Climate Change Act and other key legislation.

Data and technology¹⁶¹

- **Regional data observatories.** The evidence base for local and strategic plans will require updating to reflect wider changes to the economy. To make this process more efficient, the government should create regional bodies tasked with collecting and analysing demographic, economic, social and environmental data, providing local authorities and other stakeholders with consistent, trusted and timely evidence to inform strategic planning over wide areas.
- **Scenario modelling tools.** Local authorities should have access to open source scenario modelling tools which allow for different policies, land uses and infrastructure investments to be tested against key sustainability criteria.
- **Standardisation and open data.** Planning for the recovery requires close cooperation between local government departments, developers, infrastructure providers and others. This can be facilitated through the standardisation of common built environment language, processes, documents and data, and by ensuring that planning documents are published in a machine readable format.
- **Digital tools for inclusive and participatory planning.** These should complement traditional face-to-face methods, enabling discussions with diverse stakeholders to gather qualitative data on local priorities for place, and enabling planners to analyse large volumes of representations.

¹⁵⁹ Welsh Government: [Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015](#)

¹⁶⁰ The RTPi has commissioned new research on [measuring planning outcomes](#)

¹⁶¹ The RTPi is producing evidence for [digitising the Scottish planning system](#), and has worked with the Connected Places Catapult to set out [priorities for a digital planning system in England](#)



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