

Transcript – Placecast episode one

Nicola Headlam:

Good afternoon and welcome to Placecast, a local policy innovation partnership hub production based at the University of Birmingham. Place cast is essential listening for those keen to explore the ins and outs of knowledge mobilisation for influence in central and local governments. Based on the view that it's only through animating the power of place based leadership that the wicked problems of 2025 can become more manageable. Whether you're a researcher, citizen scientist, an activist, a professional Workman in the public sector, a civil servant, politician, analyst or entrepreneur, we think that it's through our networks that most solutions can be assembled, tested and the learning shared before we go again. And the universities can act as repositories and observatories of these efforts. We're based at City-REDI and rooted in the L PIP programme, funded by the ESRC and Innovate UK. This podcast aims to highlight knowledge and evidence base ways of working and the strategies needed to make a real impact on the decisions that shape our society. Our guests are changemakers from across the UK with stories about the ways in which influence can be achieved. We focus in particular on some of the connective tissue within and between sectors, for clues as how to animate, place based leadership. As innovating is a team sport best done out in the open. Please contact us with feedback on the episode, or if you'd like to be a guest or have strong views on the processes of advocacy, lobbying, public campaigning, and more. Unpacking how research and evidence connect with neighbourhood local, city, regional. And national missions. I'm doctor Nicola Headlam, a fellow of the L PIP programme with a long career at these intersections, and I'm offering a route through the projects and initiatives emerging from. The government, in particular, I'm most concerned about the ways in which the growth missions link with the devolution impetus and further the innovations emerging from cabin office in their test and learn programme and the role of universities in this new world. My guests today are **Professor Rebecca Riley**. And **Doctor Abigail Taylor**. Two really important parts of the LPIP hub, Rebecca is the principal investigator, and Abigail leads on place leadership for the LPIP. Having looked at their very impressive CVS, they've both spent a lot of time in this space. Rebecca has worked for 20 years at the intersection between economic development and public service improvement, probably most notably in her work at the Northwest Regional Development Agency. Which is probably about the time when we first came across each other, professor. So based on this famousness, you're probably most closely associated with sort of national attempts to have regional observatories that function. Can you tell me how you became engaged in that work?

Rebecca Riley:

I started my career wanting to actually follow an arts background, I wanted to be a sculptor. And realised that actually I was more interested in making a change and sort of moulding the future rather than moulding a lump of rock. I think that's when I took a career that was based on a sort of sociology and the study of people within place and also developing my skills across a broad range of methodologies in terms of how do you answer the challenging questions. That became the basis of my career, after I worked at a regional development agency where my job was around developing regional evidence bases for action. Understanding how you might develop new interventions and evaluating their impact and then following the closure of the RDs I went into the private sector where I was specifically looking at data and policy makers having access to academic research through a role where I manage contracts and subscriptions to services,

that was at Idocs which was fascinating in the sense of there is accessibility of research which is a real barrier and a real problem. I'm glad to see the differences that are happening around Open Access in that area. I was brought to University with the idea of bringing those two parts of my previous role together both in terms of delivering and identifying policy, impactful research with access to academic knowledge and expertise to be able to make new policy intervention at the West Midlands. The university had foresight to invest in the development of City-REDI back in 2015 and I've been here since. The model that we adopted was very much about being responsive to government, UKRI funding calls were placed based on maximising the income that we could bring into the region to address regional challenges and also fundamentally within that building a hybrid team of academics and policy researchers so they could learn from one another and develop a real sort of team structure in terms of how we deal with our local partners and how we help them manage change and make a difference for Birmingham and the West Midlands.

Nicola Headlam:

We do have a member of that team in our other speaker of the day, which is Doctor Abigail Taylor. I was very surprised when I was reading your CV to see that you're only eight years postdoc and you've spent quite a lot of that time in the LPIP and City-REDI universe.

Abigail Taylor:

Yes, thank you. Lovely to be here today. I joined City-REDI in 2018, originally, I was a policy and data analyst and then I became a research fellow a couple of years later and I've really enjoyed my time as part of the team. When I first joined one of the first things that I worked on was a piece in conjunction with the Smart Specialisation Hub, I think it was where we first came across each other, the piece was looking at funding for local enterprise partnerships and governance structures, funding and governance are both themes that have really played out through the different projects I've worked on over the last few years at City-REDI, after I finished that piece of work, I ended up actually being seconded into the Industrial Strategy Council which at the time was part of the Department for Business, Energy and industrial strategy. I did worked picking up on that governance theme around the process that local areas went through developing their local industrial strategies. I should say I originally did a French degree. One of the things though out all my work is sort of understanding the role of placing social and economic inequalities and we did some work there looking at what we can learn from International city regions. In terms of levelling up, I've been back at City-REDI full time for a couple of years now and continued that focus on funding and institutions in leading projects with in connection with CIPFA, the Charter Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. I'm really excited to be part of the hub and building on the collaborative nature of the project I worked on over the last years.

Nicola Headlam:

Could I just ask supplementary about culture, Beck alluded at the beginning about the pre investment in a way of the University of Birmingham in City-REDI and then the Research England funding then came and the LPIP funding. Having been in and out of government and universities myself, what is it about building that kind of open culture within City-REDI that you've particularly enjoyed as a as an earlier career member of staff?

Abigail Taylor:

I think what I've really enjoyed is the opportunity to meet with a range of different policy makers from national, regional, local level and understand the challenges and the opportunities that they have. Another early project that I worked on was when City-REDI led the Midlands Engine Economic observatory. I went round meetings of all of the different local enterprise partnerships in the Midlands and it was fascinating to be able to be part of those discussions so. What I Value is that we're responding to very timely questions, but we're doing it as part of a big team, so you can benefit from the mixed methods City-REDI and the LPIP Hub broadly benefit from people with a whole range of expertise across methods and disciplines.

Nicola Headlam:

Brilliant. And Bec in terms of building the culture of City-REDI, is that openness between policy open policy questions, but also Policy Research? I suppose your sort of strap line would be quality evidence based for policy wouldn't.

Rebecca Riley:

The discussions before City-REDI set up was between the mayor and the VC and the chair of the GBSLEP, the idea was about how you could create a knowledge base in the region that would provide confidence in the knowledge and the decision making so that government understood that the local partners were using good evidence provided at academic quality levels, this is really important.

Nicola Headlam:

So this moved me beautifully. Well done. It's almost like you knew what I was trying to move you into. This section is called the power of place. My question is, what is the potential for your work to reach maturity and become fully embedded? You were just talking about using it for investment cases, to build cases to government around investment in the region but more what could change as a result, and what is the size of that prize as we see it.

Rebecca Riley:

I think the interesting thing for me is, like one big experiment, isn't it? In terms of place based working and, not that it hasn't already been done, that's the thing, and one of the features of the LPIP event that we had last November actually with this idea that a lot of the activity that was being encouraged now was done sort of as an add on, somebody used the phrase of being in the shadows, I think, we are now coming out of that phase and actually with the various activities and changes including the UKRI place agenda. The letter from Bridget Phillips and about the role of universities in growth, all of these things start to shape the way universities are seen and how they are expected to play their role, which means that people doing place based work are even more important than they have been in the past and there's more opportunity to grow and develop that. Along the way is all this innovation and all this activity to capture that and share it and build that network and work with other structures like the university policy engagement network and the National Civic Impact Accelerator and UUK etcetera to think about. How can we help people trying to do this and corporately, how are organisations doing this? And I think that will be the greatest impact that we could possibly have to is to create these communities of practise and knowledge based.

Nicola Headlam:

Quote from your colleague, Professor Goddard, where he says some universities have always been full of people that want to change the world, but they're going to have to do it in less accidental way in the future. I think that really sums up how we're moving networks of people who've always been able to animate an evidence based in order to effect change, but then you're absolutely right, It's partly about that research being viewed as obvious in a timely way and in the right format. I wonder, Abby, if it's not mean of me to ask you, imagine what it might be like as an academic with this work being fully mature, kind of what will you imagine what the University of the future, would it be, would it be very different to how it is now or is it more of an incremental change? Describing the kind of initiatives that Beck's described.

Abigail Taylor:

I think we're trying to do both. In the short term, we are trying to respond to some of the most pressing questions so one of the roles that I have in the hub is coordinating across the theme leads and across the new fellows like yourself who've just joined, within the hub we have about 15 workstream seven of these were given to us by ESRC UKRI, they relate to really important issues like schools, innovation, inclusive and sustainable local economic development, living and working sustainably, communities in their places and cultural recovery, and then in addition, we've also put in place work streams around other strands of work which we think are often cross cutting to achieving progress in relation to those themes, Professional standards place leadership data in place, funding and devolution just to name a few of them. Each of the theme leads has put together a programme of work for both of the short term, the next couple of months, the medium term to the end of this year and longer term to the end of next year and they involve a variety of activities from evidence reviews we've already as a hub published for evidence reviews on innovation skills. Local economy and cultural recovery, and there's more evidence reviews due out imminently but there we're also looking to produce policy briefings responding to some of the areas of research interests that government has highlighted. I don't know if Bec want to say more about this in a second, but respond to some of the questions that government has raised as key challenges right at the moment in the conversation you and other members of the leadership team have been having, but also we want to create resources and signposts to existing resources that will last longer term as well and support more collaborative ways of working beyond the next couple of months into the future.

Nicola Headlam:

It does strike me, then, that you are sort of describing the kind of warp and weft of some of the questions being much more policy maker driven, some being funded driven, some being researched driven and I guess that's the part that I find really exciting is that if we ever get to a point where we're genuinely able to kind of co produce even, you know, I believe as a social scientist, we don't have anything unless we're acting in a co produced fashion, the development of a research question should never be done in isolation, it should always be in an amongst the kind of ferment of what is the art of the possible, what other kind of what's, what's kind of in the easter about a topic as well as you know, refining your research questions kind of on your own? Thank you. That was very clear. My next section is spotlight on solutions and I'd like you to think of something specific please from anything that you've worked on LPIP related or other projects that has worked well in exactly this space either the development of institutions or the underpinning of funding for this kind of evidence based mobilisation that we're discussing. I'm going to go to Beck first, whose eyes are going up and right, which means that she's choosing something brilliant from her repository of career successes, spotlight on solution, please, professor.

Rebecca Riley:

I suppose that one of the things I was involved in a much like Abby in her state of her career was actually at the Visual Department Agency and that was a combination of new exciting organisation trying to tackle big challenges and there was also security of funding over the longer term, there were clear guidance and outcome objectives set by government, there was local decision making around what that money was spent on, although at the time the partners didn't necessarily think like that. There were great projects that I was involved in either because I helped develop the research for them or helped with the business case, or I went back and looked at the evaluation of them. We still exist now and I think that was where my network helped me when the LPIP was formed and unfortunately, a lot of those people were would sort of dissipated with the various changes, I think going out into the private sector, it was a very different structure of a different feel and then coming back in back into this space I think what's what struck me is all those good things and all that capacity and all that capability that was built up has been lost quite a bit and we're now in a space where we're having to rebuild that, and that's the job of the LPIP to try and help that happen. The capacity not just in local authorities etcetera, but more generally in the whole environment is diminished. I think one of the interesting effects of that though is the movement of people from structures in the 2000s into universities which has also helped universities be better prepared for the civic, so you see people like me through structures that bring that policy knowledge in depth research knowledge and they can be real engines of change within and you're seeing that in the LPIP network as well.

Nicola Headlam:

Without wishing to be overly obsequious, there aren't that many people just like you Beck. There is people like Kersten England out there that have had a similar senior. I mean the point is, is that the end of the regional tier and you know we spent a lot of time scattered but I agree with you most of my networks are 1520 years old, it is the same people and they're all in business schools now. It all eventually ended up back in business schools. That's kind of how so essentially the solution that you would like to bring forward is a well funded original infrastructure.

Rebecca Riley:

It doesn't necessarily need to be regional, it needs to be at the right scale. I do think the government's approach is heading towards this but I think you can't expect places to mobilise and make change and innovate if you're not investing in, you're not giving them long term security of funding and sort of in one hand it's good because we've been involved in a lot of projects and on the other hand in terms of regional outcomes and national outcomes, it's not good is the competitive nature of funding that's been a feature of a lot of work that Abby and I have been involved in distracts resources away from delivery into constant churn and constant bidding when in reality, what you want at a place based level is investment in long term partnership and long term activity and this is the good thing about the LPIP and the pilots. I still think it's experimental so we're seeing if it works but at least it's a decent chunk of money and a decent chunk of time to grow these partnerships.

Nicola Headlam:

There is another word about scale then, because I guess, you know place covers a multitude of sins, we're not going to get a regional infrastructure that's sort of all single, all dancing, I don't think that's certainly not my reading of the room, but we do need something. the sub national is

particularly denuded, going back to Abi's research interests, really, and the sort of governance of the sub national. I always think of it as it's about marshalling scope at the scale that you can have impact and not being overly doctrinaire about its got to be neighbourhood or local authority or environment, agency boundary or health boundary or ever. You just need to sort of be much more adaptive than I think we used to be, which was a downside of the regional years. It felt like there was a stronger line, ether side, of which there were, there was a lot more policy differentiation, but it's a good point. Long term I get it and I couldn't agree more in terms of the funding piece. Abi spotlight on a solution.

Abigail Taylor:

I think as I mentioned, I've worked on a few different projects over the last few years where we've been trying to identify examples of effective collaborative partnership working across scales and partners. What particularly comes to mind is that last year we did a report in conjunction with CIPFA, which was looking at how different city regions and combined authority areas in the UK had invested in regional equality and as when I did the case study for that report out of South Yorkshire, one example I found particularly interesting there was how South Yorkshire mayoral combined has already had collaborated with various partners in the region effectively to successfully bid for an advanced manufacturing investment zone and what I found particularly interesting about the example was how the partners coalesced around shared goals despite previous tensions they built on existing sectors, strengths in manufacturing and they also sought to spread the benefits of that intervention across the region. The original idea was that it would be around the sort of core university assets located in Sheffield and Rotherham but it was extended to Barnsley and Doncaster, and that helped address land development challenges capitalising on how Barnsley and Doncaster have quite a lot of land available for development but also enabled broader university assets to be brought in so health innovation campus on the Sheffield Olympic Legacy Park, Sheffield Hallam's advanced well-being research centre, for example and to me it really demonstrated the benefits of collaborative leadership and focusing on shared goals sort of across local authority combined authority and university partners, rather than each Institution taking a sort of narrow institutionally driven perspective.

Nicola Headlam:

Excellent. I think Oliver Coppard is doing an awful lot with the resource that he has to think in those kind of ways, which leads me with great heaviness too. If you'll excuse me. one about international lessons that we can import or steal, and I was prompting Abigail to consider the community of our model in France. The main thing about those schemes is that they've had the same laws 40 years in the case of the Community urban, which is like our mind authority model.

Abigail Taylor:

OK. I completely agree with you and it reminds me what I did in my master's dissertation comparing economic regeneration in Sheffield and Lille between 1970. And when was it 2010? time quickly has passed. But one of the things that will always stick with me is that in that dissertation I did a table of key regeneration policies over the period in France and in the UK and in the UK my table was about four times longer because of the policy and one of our colleagues as part of her evidence review on local economic performance has just in a timeline of Economic development policies to support and promote economic development and inclusive and sustainable local economic performance in England and exactly the same thing comes out.

You can really see that and what Bec was talking about over the last few years, so if you haven't seen that, I really recommend reading Alice's evidence review, which is on her website.

Nicola Headlam:

Is it mortifying dealing with cross European partnership working, I remember I did a project with the regional agencies in Paris and at the time when ours was being dismantled, completely despondent about having any capacity at the regional level at all. We were sitting in an amazing building that looked like the Pompidou Centre with floors and floors of people all arguing about what exactly Econometric model was going to bring to bear and we've felt thoroughly depressed as that was a product and I think that's been again the case. The best case I know is niece in the South of France and the continuity of that community of our model. It's most like the DMCA model in in Manchester, there's a brand new tram that they've dreamt up and delivered in shorter than the time that we've changed the name of the pot funding more than 10 times. I think that the French comparison is brilliant. I didn't mean to tease you and make you answer in French, but in terms of your perspective, can you think of a good international lesson to import I suppose in a sense, the French example is back to robust institutions and the longer range and less policy churn, but have you come across anything? The service has got quite a parochial mindset when it comes to it and is not brilliant at doing the international piece. That's not in the Sheffield example, Dan Turner's work with Ed Balls was brilliant in terms of putting an international focus on to levelling up, but, It's not always that the international lessons are well absorbed, particularly not in the era where it's seen as a kind of jolly culture if councillors, or regional leaders or mayors go on the sort of international circuit, it can be quite controversial in terms of what they're doing. This has been a very live issue in Manchester. Thinking about those internationally, there's so much policy mobilisation. Did you have an international lesson?

Rebecca Riley:

This is one that I came across because of the LPIP actually. Myself and Des. Who's the chair of the Albert board, were introduced by one of our delivery partners, centre for local economic strategies and Sarah Longlands, we were introduced to the universities at Shady Grove We had some sessions with them, what was fascinating there is you've got an area of Maryland which is actually quite affluent to a great extent, and you're in the middle, but actually this particular area had no university, it had very little opportunities and there was a lot of very deprived communities and the universities, the surrounding, this all have come together to set up a university campus, which is a shared campus offering different programmes sort of foundational to create pathways into sort of universities and innovation and broadening horizons really. The model was brilliant, if you think of some of the issues that we have in this country and how you have places that have no university, what they might be able to do to create that and I think what struck me with that as well is they've done it in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and the local areas. It was a university initiative to address a real problem and I, Des and Sarah, in our team are doing a lot of work on international examples yet to be published, but part of that as well is about the different system in America where you know your funding is linked to actually having a local based outputs and that might be about the land that you occupy and how it's been gifted. It might be the various endorsements that people have, but there's a lot more sense of philanthropy and doing which this country doesn't particularly have in its funding structure. I think they're sort of enabled to be much more innovative in the way that they work with their partners in that sense, I think the American, particularly in the last few years, the funding that's gone into place, universities have been much more active and engaged in how that funding is spent and where it goes which is one of the

things that's sort of in the policy discussion now, in the UK is how do we fund innovation, how do we fund students and graduates and how do we fund the commercialisation of research, all hot topics and I think we can look at other countries to see what works.

Nicola Headlam:

There is a norm for a lot of, I'm thinking about Robin Hamilton having bought the Carnegie Mellon model into the UK. That is very quite well tried. The Boston Urban Dynamics, absolutely fantastic, not slightly more tech oriented because of the MIT connection. There is almost like twinning, isn't it? There's quite a lot of university to university links of this nature but you're absolutely right about the idea about philanthropy. I was just thinking when you were talking about an ancient project about Durham doing outreach into the Tees Valley years ago. In Manchester, an insurgent institution which is the 92 university, and they are doing something completely different from breaking the mould, very sort of online and you know I watched the thing the other day where Gary Neville was giving two kids their tuition fees for free, in the house with their mum and it's very different to kind of university outreach as we would see it from a Russell Group in Oxbridge perspective, you know. It's interesting. There is the graft and grow potential for these kinds of things. They're really useful. Thank you. So just very simple question. What are you working on next? Presumably, I realise that you're both running this huge programme which is going to be taking up a lot of your time. But if you did have a kind of, you know, curiosity base if there was a trip you could do, or a piece that you could do, what would your research agenda be in this space? What you're working on next, I'll go to Aby first.

Abigail Taylor:

Thank you. I will talk about what I'm doing on the two work streams that I'm leading as part of the Hub. So first one is place leadership and it's really exciting that we have the 1st event coming up on the 10th of April, we are organising a policy leadership seminar or mini conference on the theme of capability and capacity building in place leadership, identity, inclusion and change. What we want to do is bring together people from the local partnerships from across universities and from across policy at various scales to share collective knowledge or an understanding about place based identities and high place leadership. Build capacity and develop capabilities to support opportunities for inclusive and sustainable growth locally and regionally, and particularly how partnership working can address some of these challenges that we've just talked about in the climate that we've got at the UK at the moment and so we've got some great speakers already confirmed, Kersten England will be reflecting on examples from across our various roles, and particularly her work as part of the Yorkshire LPIP in relation to Bradford's City of Culture. We have Lukas Kammerer, from the OECD sharing some of the lessons from transforming places. Bec has also been involved and Katie Trout, Director of the West Midlands Growth Company, is going to be reflecting on how the West Midlands Growth Company used the Commonwealth Games help develop capability and capacity in the region and then quickly on communities in their places. This stream is all about thinking about the role of communities in addressing place based challenges and some of the questions we're going to be thinking about as part of that in conjunction with the partners across the Hub like Evolve and the young foundation is active community engagement important? How is it best conducted? When is it appropriate? When is it less appropriate? And just yesterday we were discussing plans to organise a webinar to discuss some of these challenges and opportunities and bring together learning from examples of where it's worked well, where it's been more challenging.

Nicola Headlam:

Brilliant. And I mean, I suppose it's a silly question, but you're going to now get your regional role as well in the university so I don't think you exactly thinking what should I learn next? But what would be the bit the Magic project for you?

Rebecca Riley:

I'm alluding to that actually. My time is split 50/50 between the LPIP and the associated activities and projects and the other 50% of the time I'm DPVC for Regional Engagement at the University. And I think in terms of, what am I working on next I'm having to put the money where my mouth is sort of thing in the I'm now having to take all this research and work about how we think should be done and I'm trying to apply it within the university itself. I think it's, so far, I've been in the role since last September, but I think it's been an interesting sort of new type of role because for quite a long time I've been doing the same thing with different job titles and this is completely different in terms of actually implementing some of this. One of the challenges that we face that although you know all the stars are aligning, universities really are getting sort of turned on to doing civic really much in a much greater way than I've seen before. To allude to your reference to John Goddard quote, I think we are at that turning point now the universities know that this is something good to do and the next phase is how do we do it? What do we do? How does that work and that's the bit I'm sort of trying to do and that includes upskilling people in universities, understanding region, understanding civic understanding what places, understanding the place they're in and the impact that they can have settings in corporate goals around that and being more strategic about what we engage in, but that is all being done in the context that a lot of universities are sort of facing funding issues and constraints. Changes in sort of overseas students etcetera and the whole sector is under a significant amount of turmoil. Luckily Birmingham is not facing those issues. But it does mean that you have to bear it, you have to think about how are we going to do this? I think the thing is Aby and I did work on our project actually to win some funding but we've not secured any yet, it was to look at international examples of how this is being both from the point of view of similar things, the City-REDI, but also from the point of view of a more corporate approach and strategic approach to civic and place leadership and the role as an anchor institution. So that's the bit that I would like to build on and interestingly from the LPIPS, one of the things that they would like to see the hub doing is thinking about this international question and what can we learn from, how can we engage in that? I think one of the other things in terms of my learning from the LPIP, you sort of always realise in the back of your mind that we are the UK, we have nations and we have regions etcetera, I think you don't quite understand until you're getting really deep. Relationships with those places trying to do this type of activity, how that relationship between Whitehall employers isn't working right and that there isn't a good understanding between Whitehall and places. I'm really looking forward to any impact or change that we can make as a help it network to improve that understanding of place in central government so that they do understand what the devolved nations are, how they work, what that means, what that looks like as well as regions.

Nicola Headlam:

Possible to even go a bit further than that. Growth flag launched the other day and it became really clear that because of the economic development being a devolved competency. I think it's being done a bit better, certainly in Scotland and in Northern Ireland, we all know the Barnett formula that actually it's geared in the favour of the peripheral nations of the UK, but also I just think in terms of, there is a really specific English problem around the governance of economic development and growth and all those things when I was at the House of Commons Library I

wrote a paper on the initial round of devolution saying what are the learning mechanisms if the nations do things better than Whitehall? And met with a lot of division, why would we need it? Well, there aren't. You know, as you very well know. A policy process is sort of linear. You don't then have feedback on how did all that go and what can we do better next time. But in terms of the feedback loop of economic development in the sub national UK there is loads of good practise. I mean Mark Hart and his colleagues at the at the ERC were talking about, do we need a body called Business England because it's so just so fractured at the English scale, I'm not sure that's the answer. There is something about the different tiers of devolutions and the different powers. I think there is something and I know I've heard Des speak on it, that he thinks that the Scottish scale, it's easier to get things done and not just because of the circles that he's moved in. Then we'd we find in our in our big city regions.

Rebecca Riley:

That's one of the things I've noticed is. The you know the 3 LPIPS in the devolved nations have much causal relationships with their national government than Yorkshire has, and that we have in the West Midlands actually. And there's a lot. There's a clearer route. There's a greater understanding. And I don't know whether that's a proximity issue or whatever, I don't know, but not just about where you are, it's where you can get and I think that's right. I think propping quickly in governance is, is and in the in the devolved UK, we haven't. We'll just let everything go. But the idea that again so Scottish Enterprise and all the rest of it, those are better partnerships, deeper partnerships.

Nicola Headlam:

So you're working next on scaling it deep and making it real. Very good and you're working next as that RSA thing. I'm going to follow up with all the references, everyone that we've mentioned. I'll be tracking down to ask the same questions as this too, have no fear. We're coming to the end now, this is much more sort of specific questions, things that we've been discussing. Can you think of a specific person who's a really good knowledge broker, they can be an academic, they can be in industry? I'll come to you second Bec because I realise that you haven't seen this question, Aby however has had some time to think about it, so give me some brokers because I'm going to be knocking on their doors for their views, some people that you've worked with.

Abigail Taylor:

I think on a daily basis I'm incredibly lucky to get to work with Bec because she's such a good broker. If we're thinking externally, two people who I think are important brokers are Wayne Langford, he's the director of West Midlands combined universities, brings together Birmingham City University, Coventry University and the University of Wolverhampton. Helen Turner, who is the director of Midland Innovation which are Aston Birmingham, Cranfield to try and get this right, if I miss someone out Keel Leicester. Nottingham, Loughborough and Warwick, and I think that we've worked quite closely with both Wayne and Helen as part of WM. Eddie and various projects over the last few years and what I've really valued are how I guess, underpinned by very a very strong understanding of the region that they work in. They are both great at working across boundaries to facilitate new collaboration. They're creative thinkers and I think that they're particularly successful because they're both very approachable so you can have an idea, might not be that developed, but you won't feel worried about discussing it with them and they're both very reactive as well.

Nicola Headlam:

Just reminded me of some really bad feedback I had and some work when I was quite young. I'm so glad that you thought you could share this with me in this state. Really good that they're both really good shouts.

Rebecca Riley:

I'm going to go for a couple of people that have sort of I would say a similar drive to make a difference in their place and similar backgrounds, although they've sort of come from a different background and I'll explain that in a minute because of something that one of them said to me, The first one is my Co director at City-REDI, Anne Green. Anne talks about me and her in the sense that we both stood in the same room, but we've come through different doors. Anne has come from a traditional academic background, but always been engaged in impact and she's been at the research institutes in universities that are all very engaged and active and I think it's always a joy to work with her on projects and her knowledge and expertise sort of is amazing, really across a broad set of areas. As she says, she's an economic geographer, so she's interested in most things. The other is Will Rossiter at Nottingham Trent, so Will and I have known each other for a very long time in that we had similar roles. He was in the East Midlands, I was in the northwest, we had a great network of people doing the doing these roles and we've both ended up in a university doing the civic activities. He's great as a sounding board, to think through what the problems are and also we have a shared interest and we both came through the same door into that room with Anne. I think in terms of the brokers, it's the people that have a varied experience, background and knowledge, and that they understand how the place you are works and how your partners work and that's one of the reasons that I'm quite keen for anybody in the team to do. The convents and placements like Aby has done so she gets that knowledge and the others do, but that makes a really good knowledge.

Nicola Headlam:

Brilliant answer. Thank you. You could have both said me, but let's just leave it there. And I think in a similar vein then from slightly the other end of the telescope, can you describe a really good place leader? And I'll go to Aby again first, because this is a surprise to Bec.

Abigail Taylor:

The example when I saw this question that came to me first was Pierre Morra, who was mayor of Leo between 1973 and the start of the 2000, and he was also at the same time for about 5 years started the 1980's. The Prime Minister of France. And. When I did a report for the Industrial Strategy Council on the lessons that we can take for from International city regions for high places can level up because it's the time just after the levelling up White Paper had been published. I interviewed various people who all were academics, policy makers in business representatives as well in Lille, and they all stressed how Mora was a great place leader because of his ability to be visionary and to be collaborative. He helped raise Leo's profile enormously on there and that on the national stage and transform it into city today. For example, he was really key to ensuring that the Eurostar stopped in Lil, but also he was involved in at that time there was something called the committee, Cohen Liel, which was a large network that brought together representatives from financial institutions, local businesses, Chamber of Commerce, civil servants, artists, politicians, etcetera, that was really important in strengthening relationships across. He also said Bill consensus is across party lines, one of the things though that really interests me is whether and how the role of place leaders is changing given the

economic and the political challenges, opportunities we have at the moment so as part of the place leadership work stream of the hub that we've talked about, I'm going to be working with Jamie Union from Inner Circle Consulting, who is another member of the Hub leadership team, and we're going to be investigating the sort of daily life of senior leaders to contextualise how they make decisions around the themes that the hub is focusing on, understanding how their role is changing, and then what we want to do at the end is try and map the process from crisis to recovery, to thriving, and you're right, leadership learning for partnership, working at each of those points.

Nicola Headlam:

Brilliant answer. That's again a very specific French thing, that notion of the human Mondas. You work, you are elected at completely different scales and you make it work. I mean, we all instinctively know one of the things about being a good local leader is that you're able to operate at the United Nations scale down to the football field. You know it's the every level in between but in France, they really exemplify that because it's perfectly possible to have people at a different sort of scales. That's a really good example.

Rebecca Riley:

I'm going to think of three, but they sort of come as a threesome. When I first came to the West Midlands and obviously with my economic development focus, we are the first thing I had to do was sort of make friends and get to understand the local enterprise partnership. The three sort of chief execs of the LEPs were all women and they were also three of the most successful reps in the country are attracting funding into the region and spending it wisely and having the processes in place. The three women that led those organisations were Holly Diaz, Katie Trout and Sarah Middleton, and they were absolutely brilliant people to work with and still are. Although Sarah's retired now and busy baking and knitting, and I think one of the things with that as well is they were all excellent partnership workers they brought together people to help deliver activities and projects. As you said in a particular Katie, representing Birmingham and Solihull, to that international level, she was the chair, she was the leap chair at one point galvanising great teams, great people to develop that at sort of delivery and you know, for Polar and Katie, they're still in the structures within the West Midlands and still doing that it also demonstrates that good leaders can be in different organisations, they can be quite specific or they can be quite broad but really good leaders are made on the basis of who people will follow and who people will work with them and people will collaborate in the long term. The skill sets that they brought to the region and certainly you know welcomed me into that network and helped me enormously as Aby said, in terms of helping you to develop your own networks, develop your own knowledge of how things work and just really nice people to work with.

Nicola Headlam:

I think the good thing about having people like that on your side, it's not so much that they necessarily build it for you, but they can really help you to miss some of the obvious error. You know this is the background here, don't go, don't foreground this, focus on this, there's much more consensus here. Again, it's that weaving that place leadership is about and you're absolutely right, the notion of distributed place leadership across more than one organisation is for people that are used to hierarchies and silos. Around that it can be distributed in that sense. Thank you. So you've got to the end of my long list, except just the last question. I have a moment of foolishness for you. I'm going to let you have a go on this, which is my place based

innovation magic wand, to be very careful with it because it has powerful magic and it can grant you a wish. You will have absolute power to do one of these things, but you must use your powers to make a tangible change to a specific place, so your change will have to be specific, measurable, actionable, recordable and transferable backs just for use. Smart magic is very hard to get hold of at the moment and is subject to 20% reducing multi year budget settlements of course. So just to get you started, you can have a £10 million project fund, half an hour, the Cabinet and a slide deck, editorial control of the front page of a tabloid, a clause to insert into a bill, a very simple message that goes viral on Tiktok, anyone from any walk of life as an advocate for this? Or an answer to a question that has bothered you forever. So here you are. you've got to go on my magic wand, what do you think? So really, I've got a me brackets on my script, hopefully baffled laughter. What is the magic thing that can make this agenda really fly? I certainly remember the work that George Clark did on housing just for a moment really ignited around an affordable housing kind of moment, and he was a celebrity and did a documentary, and it just sort of filtered that dial. Do you think it's in the social media escape? Is it in media? Is it in legislation? Like what? What do you want to do with the Magic wand, Aby?

Abigail Taylor:

I think I'd pick up on this. Issue of capacity that we've talked about quite a lot and things that I think could be really important if it was possible, would be if you could create a sort of long term £10 million fund a year in each combined authority area for funding split across combined authorities and local authorities and universities to improve monitoring and evaluation, because I think with all the capacity constraints at the moment, monitoring and evaluation is often squeezed and if you could improve managing and evaluation, particularly the infrastructure to feedback learning into organisations, it would help. Create stronger policy longer term.

Nicola Headlam:

Brilliant. So essentially your ask is for original observatory structure but with £10 million guaranteed. I like it. Let's have ramps. Is he? Was he? What would you? What's the magic?

Rebecca Riley:

I'm doing some work with Birmingham City Council at the moment on their reshape in Birmingham and a theme that comes up in a lot of our research is perceptions of Birmingham. Including my own before I started working here, you know, and what people say is, it's quite nice here, I didn't know or things like that. It's much better than I thought, I'm not quite sure what people thought, time Birmingham was like and Aby is from Birmingham and I think if I could do anything, it would be picking up on one of the things that's emerging out of that reshaping Birmingham is this idea about what we can all do to improve Birmingham. What difference can we make? It's forming into the shape of a promise, what do I promise to do for Birmingham? to an extent, that's what I'm doing with the university is thinking about what do we promise to do as our contribution to make Birmingham better. I think if I could do anything, you would have a sort of a viral TikTok thing which or social media, if you could if you could have some sort of viral thing that says you know, this is my place, this is my city and I promise to make it better. By doing this I think the more you have that confidence in your where you live, a self belief that you can make a difference the better, and I think you know it's what, it's what people need because we're in very turbulent times and globally, there's obviously the issues that we're facing, the more that we can make people think about the place that they live have, shout about it, be bold.

Be more engaged about making sure that people know how great places are then that message gets back to central government, if it gets back to Cabinet Office, if people, the decision makers have more of a sense of these places are great places and we should be investing in them. Wouldn't that be a great world to be in?

Nicola Headlam:

I tell you, he's definitely done the most for that. I think is Stephen Knight with his regional form of studio. You know that at the same time as you can't get stuff built on the Greenbelt around London to extend Pinewood, the work that he's done in the canals of having a kind of one stop shop studio so that's exactly the kind of thing you're talking about, isn't it? Without regional patriotism. Amazing, right? Well, I should say at the end that just in case, you know, we are researchers of course, I don't believe in magic wands, but one thing I do believe in is magicians and you have both given lots of examples.

A magician based approach to doing this work together. I've thoroughly enjoyed this hour. So just to close, I would just like to thank anybody who's made it through this whole hour for joining us. We set out to mine insights from experts, real world case studies, practical tips and career advice, and to Spotlight solutions as well as waive the place based innovation magic. And we have. Thank you.