Placecast Podcast: Episode Nine – Transcript

Nicola Headlam:

Welcome to Placecast, a Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub production based at the University of Birmingham. Placecast is essential listening for those keen to explore the ins and outs of knowledge mobilisation for influence in central and local government, based on the view that it is only through animating the power of place-based leadership that the wicked problems of 2025 can become more manageable.

I'm very excited to be talking this afternoon with Doctor Sarah Longlands nee Jack. If you know Sarah Jack, that's a long time ago. So Sarah is the chief executive officer of the centre for Local Economic Strategies, which is think and do tank that was set up in the 80s. And has been closely associated with subnational economic development of all kind of progressive types.

So it's fair to say then, that CLES sort of best known for is the community wealth building work and work around procurement. Can you tell us, please, Sarah, how you became engaged in that work and the work of CLES?

Sarah Longlands:

Great to be here, Nicola, and fabulous, as always, to be speaking to you. As you say, we we're set up back in the 1980s and our mission then and is now really was all about how do you create economies that really work for people and for place.

And of course, increasingly planet as well. The mission was really how do we intervene effectively in the economy so that it delivers good outcomes for place? It's good to be here today talking about place and thinking about its intersection with the economy and what we can do to try and support economies to really deliver against the priorities of place.

And as you say, we're really well known for the work of community wealth building. But community wealth is really another word for a strategic approach to an inclusive economy, and one that really recognises that there's lots of things you can do. There are lots of things in your power as an organisation, whether it's about using procurement effectively, whether it's about using your land and assets, whether it's about your workforce or about how you use finance cleverly and effectively, creatively to really deliver the jobs and the support that the people need in your area.

And so it's really about all of those things. And CLES as a think tank, as a think do tank is all about how we deliver on the ground.

Nicola Headlam:

And just in case anyone's unfamiliar with your work and frankly, where have you been? You're not London-based. You never have been. You've got presence across the nations and regions now, haven't you?

Sarah Longlands:

Yeah. When we were in established, one of the big principles of was let's set something up outside of Westminster. And so we were set up in Manchester with the support of some of the big northern local authorities at that time.

And we continued to be based outside Westminster. But as you say, we work across the UK and our team is now dispersed as well. People in Scotland, people in Wales, we're increasingly doing work in Ireland, north and south and we also work further afield as well. So we've worked in Australia, New Zealand and in parts of Europe as well.

Nicola Headlam:

And it did strike me a little bit. We're going to go on to talk about CLES' engagement with the LPIP project, but that sort of structure, that's a sort of way of working I guess would for some people would have them reaching for the sort of headache pills, because it is very hard to have both and sometimes it does, but the sort of way that you sort of slice and dice the country say you work at neighbourhood, city, regional, you know, all those different scales and all those different places.

And that, I guess, is also how the LPIP seeks to work, because we have the national projects and also the strategic hubs. That just struck me that there was quite a strong correlation there with how you work.

Nicola Headlam:

I think that's hopefully something that we're really pleased to be part of the Hub as one of the partners, and I think hopefully something we can bring to the discussion, because obviously the LPIPs have representation in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland as well as in England.

And I think the fact that we're well used to working in those areas as well as mainland UK, is something that we've kind of really enjoyed about the LPIP getting to hear what people are doing and seeing the similarities and differences and and you're right, sometimes I wake up the morning and I'm like, what company I'm in today? What legislative framework do I need to be reaching for? But the other thing that I suppose for us is that we find that whilst governments might differ, a lot of the challenges are the same, people's challenges are the same, and the context is what matters.

And that's why place is so important, because we and there are probably of the belief that how place operates, the context of that place, can actively have an influence on people's lives and can also, I think, influence the way in which you develop and create policy and how you can also then replicate it in other places too.

So I think it's so important that we are taking place properly into account rather than what we often see at Westminster, which is like kind of, you know, one-size-fits-all, push up button and get the same result in Barnsley as you do in Belfast, you know. So I think that's one of the big principles behind CLES, is that a lot of think tanks are trying to whisper in the ears of national politicians.

We're trying to demonstrate how things actually work, how things actually change at a local and regional level. And then we're trying to actually get national government to adopt the lessons of that. And I think that's a slightly different way of looking at the challenges we've got the movement. And hopefully more immediate, more, focussed on delivery and actual stuff done.

Nicola Headlam:

You and I have worked for 19 years together with agendas. And if I may, I think that CLES is sort of having a moment really, because certainly colleagues at Birmingham and with around the LPIP at all anyone is talking about is place leadership and things that we've worked on sort of interscalar or multi-tiered or... I saw you recently and the appointment of Darren Jones, his job title as Minister for Intergovernmental relationships.

And there is an acknowledgment actually that, as you say, it isn't so much that you pull a lever in Barnsley or where did you have Barnsley or Belfast? Belfast doesn't even reach Barnet. It doesn't. You know, my news is that there is a sense that national government, some of the levers aren't really connecting. And actually, rather than being beaten down by austerity as local government has been, it's been a rotten long decade for local government.

Through austerity, the centre's got an awful lot to learn from sophisticated place leadership, and rather than have any kind of cringe about only studying local government matters, how novel of us kind of thing, to me, it really feels like the world has turned now, and the subnational really. It's never been more important for certainly national politicians to get a grip on how they address the subnational challenges.

Sarah Longlands:

There's a lot, and not really. First and foremost, I think place is a great power to unify people and we often see this quite a lot in our work where no matter if you're coming from, what part of the public sector or private sector, community sector at a local level, people will care about place and look about the future of places.

So places can be a way of bringing round people around the table, getting collective agreement and then using that as an inspiration to go forward. And I think that could be the power of place, because whether people agree or not on politics, they can agree on on place and what needs to happen. So I think that's first off, and I think you're right, I think there's a realisation of Westminster.

That's the old ways of doing things at a national level are no longer operational. And they can't just pull levers. And that happens everywhere. I think devolution is starting to flex muscles a little bit on that regard. And I think you're absolutely right. You know, national government, we're always criticising them because of the how set the central model doesn't work, you know, and if you compare what happens at a local level, you know, in a city or in a town, people get round the table, they figure out a plan and they crack on with it.

National government doesn't have some kind of unifying model. It's only got division between departments who are vying with each other to get money from the Treasury. That's their common frame. Treasury is there is a unifying force, if you like, whereas place is a much more

powerful driver. I think it's a much more powerful driver, not only to get people to work together, but also to actually deliver better results at the other end.

So I think it's interesting at national government the minute, are they moving in that direction towards a more unified approach, which would, you know, not only see more effective collaboration between departments, but also, I think, give permission, and flexibility to the local and regional level to let people crack on and get stuff done. We don't know yet. But yeah, I think it's a really interesting point that you make about that intergovernmental minister and what kind of teeth or authority he will have to drive that.

Nicola Headlam:

Absolutely. And we should say we shall see. But I think reasons for cautious optimism and certainly that sort of you're absolutely right in some ways, if those of us that remember things like the local strategic partnership model, it felt like certainly subnational review, etc. at the end of the Blair and Brown period, which sort of got to a place where they were looking at all the assets and resources that go into an area rather than down different tubes and pipes and again, sliced and diced and messed about with, but starting to have that much more holistic place budget.

I mean, that's where devolution, as you say, which is starting to show some teeth. It was quite irritating that when I was doing work on the northern scale, they were always talking about being net contributors or net to the public finances, but having a real handle on all the resources that go into an area. I remember really clearly all the sort of perverse effects of LSPs.

In some ways it was consolidating partnership working into kind of a real thing, but then without maybe some of the national levers being clearer, because everybody's spending in patches and in different geographies, it does feel like it's not so much lever pulling. It's almost like the perverse effects of policy kind of worsen the less attuned you are to the dynamics of being able to run places in the kind of way that we talk about.

Sarah Longlands:

Yeah. I mean, just to riff a wee bit on that, fundamentally, what this comes down to is relationships. You know, about people actually getting out of their silos, reaching across and actually talking to people who have got a shared interests in the same things as them and being willing to kind of collapse some of those institutional boundaries, and move beyond that into a kind of more of a growth approach.

And I think stepping out of your comfort zone takes resources. It takes capacity. And that's probably why we're not seeing as much of that now, because people just don't have that given necessarily. And the way which has eaten away at people's goodwill and their capacity to build those relationships. I also think probably COVID too, which puts people back into their institutional boundaries again. Particularly after COVID people kind of bounced back.

Nicola Headlam:

I find it so weird the way that the technology sort of I mean, you know, you and I both know that a lot of our careers were very much involved with, oh, can I just cut you between these two meetings or. Yeah. Whoa. What's serendipity to be in this event, you know. Network.

Sarah Longlands:

Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

Nicola Headlman:

Whereas if you were in a zoom call, the people are on the list, you're in it. And the people that aren't on the list are out of it, and it doesn't matter how you can talk about inclusion and whatever else. But, you know, it's much more closed the technologies than they have been.

Sarah Longlands:

And it's more difficult, I think, to build those relationships. And, you know, we've all been in those meetings where you say to someone, oh, if I met you in person before or you don't even recognise someone because you've only ever seen them on a screen, you know,

Nicola Headlam:

it's weird when people are much smaller then you think they're going to be.

Sarah Longlands:

Or in my case, much shorter, you know, others.

Nicola Headlam:

Yes. That's true. [Musical interlude]

I guess a lot of the stuff with place leadership and good civic leadership and all that, it is about your know who as well as your know how. And I think certainly for younger colleagues, again, I think the technology, the perverse effect of the technology, which in some ways obviously kept us going when we were locked in our houses, but actually there has been a bit of a hangover to that.

I think, again, when you think when we were young, if you if you went to party conference, for example, be in and out of fringes, you see faces and be able to build up a sense of kind of who was who, I think in a much richer way then I think it's a real thing for the sector about networking.

Sarah Longlands:

Technology is brilliant in terms of flexibility it provides and everything. But one of the things we noticed with our work is during COVID because we couldn't because we do a lot of work on a local level, talking about the economy, talking about the partnerships, and during COVID we couldn't go to the place, you know, we had to do all remote based on secondary data analysis or, you know, talking to people on zoom, whatever.

Now that we've got back into it, we realised just how rich it is to be able to go to the place, you know, stand on the high street, talk to the people in their houses, you know go to the office, soak up the atmosphere of a local authority office or whatever, that in terms of getting under the skin of a place and understanding what's going on and picking up the nuance that we realised in hindsight that is absolutely invaluable [Inaudible fragment].

And I think the same goes with national government. You know, national governments very often get places wrong in a map on where they are. And them getting out, you know, and actually speaking to place status where there are and understanding what it's like to run a local authority. The challenges that this is dealing with, this is really important in this day and age.

Nicola Headlam:

And all sorts of centrality and peripherality so. In fact I do remember we had this conversation last in the community centre in Wigan. And it's I was home to Wigan from Stockport is really to get from London. The intercity part is kind of in some ways easier, but then remoteness and kind of what depends on where you sit. So you were involved with the LPIP from the beginning, your founding kind of partner. Through networks that you have. Can you say something about how you've engaged with this kind of scholarship? Because obviously you yourself have a long background in scholarship yourself. What's kind of good about the LPIP in terms of how it works?

Sarah Longlands:

We got involved because I guess, like many of the people around the LPIP table we're interested in place, and we think that place really matters and we want to be part of the LPIP to continue to inform national policy in a way which reflects the huge diversity of place that we have across the country.

And as a bit like people always say, oh, it's too complicated in England, in the UK you've got too many layers, too many structures. And I'm like, great. I think that's really strong. It's brilliant. Let's not try and tidy it up. Messy is good. Complexity is good because it reflects the places and it reflects the type of challenges that that we're dealing with in society.

It's all the same. It doesn't freakin in work. So that's kind of the origins of wanting to be part of something which recognises that. And then I think the other really fascinating thing that I find was the LPIP to date has been the fact that you've got a very strong emphasis on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and then you've got some in England as well, but they've got real equal share of the conversation and the debate.

And I think that's really refreshing. And I find it fascinating just listening to what's happening in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the differences and similarities and just how they have reflected their LPIP with the challenges and policy context that they're grappling with. I think

that's been really interesting, really, and kind of exciting too, because lots of different ideas coming out from all the three areas.

So in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and then of course, really interesting what's happening in Yorkshire and how they're navigating that kind of policy that we've seen from your government in the last. Well, I don't if you call them new still but it's there. But for now this is bright and shiny anymore. But you know, that's been interesting to me.

And just to contrast the LPIP was kind of straddled change of government too. So I think just the variety and diversity has been really good and the other bit I think is quite a much stronger focus. I think rurality then perhaps we talk about a national government level in particular what's happening in Wales and in Scotland, you know, the real sense of rurality being increasingly important.

I feel that gets really lost in this continual cliche of the agglomerative effect in the UK, which you and I both know is much more complicated than the policy makers would let us believe. I think that's been really refreshing.

Nicola Headlam:

What's certainly been fascinating, the Welsh LPIP, I did some work with over the summer, and certainly where Wales has got to in terms of the maturity of their institutions, it was a great lark to be at the Royal Welsh Show looking at some serious agriculture.

But anybody that was going to be asking the Welsh people for a vote in next year's Senedd elections were very, very active. There was marquees, Senedd marquee parties with I mean everybody from God forbid, Reform, etc. all because in the context of rural Wales, what's the point in booking a room in Cardiff and saying, come here? And certainly the institutions of Scotland in some ways have been better formed and are better resourced, partly because I think of it was always England and Wales.

I hadn't got the sense that the Welsh policy was just kind of as perfectly formed as it is now. But then also, let's not forget that the nations of the UK have been on a 25 year journey now, isn't it? In terms of their accomplishments? And of course, I used to say when I was a civil servant, I didn't do Brexit or Yorkshire, but the Yorkshire scale is a challenge.

But then everything in England is a challenge. I'm really thrilled by your complexity is good, but I think that England, it's such a mess in terms of reform agendas that have left across different geographies and a real sense actually that England, the subnational areas of England, are a long way behind actually the national experiments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, I think, and it's been quite intriguing from the LPIP perspective that just at the point when devolution to that scale kind of has hit maturity in a way, the LPIP has then be able to then graft onto quite mature institutions rather than, you know, I think it's fascinating to see how much in terms of engaged scholarship, certainly the Welsh LPIP, it really is in exactly the right place at exactly the right time, when exactly the right people. It's been very interesting.

Sarah Longlands:

And I think the legislative framework in Wales is really interesting, but the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and there's been real challenges in how you deliver that. But having that legislative framework gives you, I think, much more freedom and flexibility to be able to think big about how we could do things differently.

And similarly, in Scotland, we've got a community wealth building bill going through Parliament and again, like opening the door to more creative conversations about how we could kind of work creatively. Yorkshire I find fascinating because you'll remember, like me, the Yorkshire First days didn't get that because the government were terrified that they were going to get a strong leader in there. So I think it's fascinating that the LPIPs been able to take that geography.

Nicola Headlam:

Yorkshire, an idea whose time has come.

Sarah Longlands:

What would it mean to develop a more kind of unified Yorkshire approach?

Nicola Headlam:

But it was interesting actually. I went to the thing at Birmingham and we were talking about some old work from an EMDA development plan where you were able to look at ports and airports and inputs into the East Midlands and it was just heaven to be able to dream at that scale, which was sensible rather than, let's say, I mean all power to the mayors.

But the idea that between here and Newcastle you'd pass through four different kingdoms. It doesn't feel expansive enough to me as an English solution, because if and then anyway, we could talk about structure all day and all night. I think the that until waiting to kind of untangle some of the sort of mess of England I think is an idea that is coming.

You were a massive advocate for place. Can you maybe give us some sense of kind of what that means in numbers, in terms of the potential for work on placed reaching maturity in the mess of England and becoming fully embedded? Can you just tell me from your perspective what you think might change as a result if place was animated properly? And do you have a sense of the size of the prize of what the power of place can mean in central local discourse? Or in terms of managing the economy, take it any way you want.

Sarah Longlands:

Good question in that. But important one, I think you can look at different ways, I think places a sort of set as a language, as a set of terms to understand the challenges that we're dealing with at the minute.

You look at the weekend that we've had, look at some of the real bitterness and challenge and turmoil on the streets. That's not happening at Westminster. We're only seeing it in London because it's happening in place across the UK. So I think there's a really important thing here

about understanding the perspectives of communities at the minute in the country and understanding the levels of dissatisfaction, of disconnection that people are experiencing and the way in which that's been harnessed by people with agendas who are not interested, really, I don't believe in the wellbeing of communities, but interested in sort of sowing division. I grew up in the Troubles, so I can see this coming a mile off, but it needs to be dealt with also at place level. We need people to be engaging in dialogue. We need people to be understanding where people are coming from.

We need empathy. But we also, I think, need a really strong sense of purpose at the moment. And what politics and policy can do to actually reconnect with people and reconnect with the challenges that people are facing. But that all happens at a place level, and that's the only way you can solve it as well. You can't solve a big policy from government.

Its got to be solved at a local level, and it's got to be solved through proper funding for people, proper funding for services. And also, I think, you know, a really clear steer from the centre about the kind of framework that we're all the world working in as well, moral as well as everything else. So I think places where the challenges happen and that's where also solutions need to be posted.

And just to give you a sense of numbers, you know, we did some analysis earlier this year which was looking at what if we'd kept expenditure on local services. So local government, but also police, and education. What if we'd kept the level of investment from central government at the same level as it have been in 2009, 2010?

What would that have contributed to GVA growth? And the answer is 43 billion pounds per annum. And that is the opportunity cost that we've seen in this country since the onset of austerity in 2010, 2011. And that's I think, explains some way the challenges that we're seeing now at a place-based level. So you take money from place and you end up seeing the backlash for that in place in the future.

And I think that there's a really important lesson that for policymakers everywhere. And we know as well from the analysis that's been done, that as we've seen those local jobs disappear, we've seen more jobs proliferate at a central level. And that can't be right. That is not a way to that imbalance, not a way to improve things. So I think the challenges is there, but the answers are there to. And place is a common denominator.

Nicola Headlam:

Gosh, Sarah, I mean, again, you just don't talk like girl politicians talk because the idea of a sort of values led or a moral kind of imperative to activate place in a positive and constructive way. Just what Sarah was alluding to for the listener is that there was a march, a far-right mobilisation at the weekend.

The 110,000 people were the numbers that were given the Tommy Robinson speaking and Elon Musk and really very alarming rhetoric about, as you say, it gives us sort of politics of grievance is both toxic but also really expensive. So I like your your 43 billion point is no winners where you hollowed out the local state to the point where it feels like as hollow as it can be.

And I completely agree that funding public services properly in localities there the kind of public services people feel. But then equally, there is a 43 billion size of the prize annually.

Sarah Longlands:

Yeah. And the politics of the right is expensive. The politics of division is expensive, and you only have to spend a bit of time on Northern Ireland And look at how a divided society costs the Exchequer billions, billions more of money.

So I would just make that point too, that people can talk about of all the challenges, we've got this country. And sort of use that kind of rhetoric of here, but it cost is morally repugnant. But it's also very expensive to hate your neighbour. I know that from growing up in Northern Ireland.

Nicola Headlam:

Rather than get ourselves involved in a council of despair, I'd like to ask you to spotlight some solutions that you can think of recently. And I guess the issue here is that the problem is sufficient. It's macro, it's meta, it's huge. I know that you're been very closely associated in your career with sort of some micro interventions, locality based interventions.

So thinking about some sort of Council of Hope rather than Council of Despair. Can you think of something that's worked well in this space specifically, and what the characteristics of kind of hopeful, place-based work can give us?

Sarah Longland:

Yeah. Great question. I can certainly point to a lot of the work that we've been involved with at CLES, that I've seen it first hand making a real difference.

So, you know, some of the innovations that we've seen in places like Wigan, but also in Birmingham, where you've got, particularly Wigan, where they've they've really taken the challenge of care and skills to heart and really kind of explore how could they work with their partners to really innovate in that space? And not only create good jobs for people in the care industry, but also, I think doing more to disrupt some of the more extractive practices, which, you know, drive down quality, drive down quality of jobs, and instead you know, creating a sector which is actively supporting local jobs, you know, giving people opportunities for progression and seeing that more of that money, that more invest, of that investment is coming back into the local economy. So I think and you've got and similarly projects in areas like Leeds where they've got the anchor partnership. And in Birmingham, where in both Leeds and Birmingham there have been innovating to look at how do we ensure that we're giving access to really good quality health and social care jobs?

We're taking those jobs to people in our community. So we're not just sitting back and putting advert in a paper, but we're going to communities. We're helping people to think about a career in health and social care, and then we're working with them to give them the support and the skills that they need to then take those jobs up. Good quality jobs, well-paid opportunities for progression, and really particularly important for women as well.

So I think those are a couple of examples. And then I think some of the other projects that we've seen, particularly where you've got local authorities, like we've done a lot with Matt Whitworth, Manchester, but also with Westminster, Islington, where they're taking a really proactive approach to thinking about the money that they spend. So they're not seeing it as procurement.

They're seeing it as an opportunity to tackle some of the challenges through having a much more intentional approach to how they commission and how they work with their suppliers. And at times, they're also thinking about actually is outsourcing a good solution here? Maybe we should also be thinking of bringing those services back in-house and running them as well.

And we've seen that in areas like like Salford where there's and a really strong approach to that as well. So I think that's the thing that really inspires me that we've had, you know, more than ten years of austerity times a really challenging central government, regardless of political party. Central government is just sometimes just doesn't get it.

But yet you've got local thought leaders waking up in the morning and doing stuff that really matters for their area, being willing to take a risk and to try something different and to be creative and imaginative and that, more than anything, is what we need imagination, creativity, to see things differently. And that's the stuff that gets me out of bed.

Nicola Headlam:

And you're absolutely right that connecting things together because good employment charters, for example, can seem a little bit dry. But then when you attach that to training, absolutely sectors, you know, it's really powerful. So I'm going to take a slight change of tack now because I happen to know that you've done some very interesting international work over the years.

You've been all over the place. I was reminded actually, by a message on social about your Norfolk trust thing that you went so you didn't you. So what gives you hope from sort of international lessons, as we both know, obsessed as we are by the sort of local context. It cannot be local and parochial because there's often there's elements that are sort of, it's about opening up a story that might help in a territory that has no existing link to one another, which I guess is part of the work, isn't it? Is how can we do that policy mobilisation, that knowledge mobilisation between contexts, where, as you said earlier, sometimes the challenge can be the same? So can you think of a good international lesson from your satchel of lessons that we might want to import or steal?

Sarah Longlands:

Yeah. Well, I've always been inspired by the Wellbeing Budget in New Zealand because it feels so different from, I guess, what our approach to the Treasury would take in the UK. So I think that's one that really stands out to me of just thinking differently about what matters and what we value in society, and instead of simply focusing on catch all term like growth, we're focusing in on wellbeing, on what improves people's lives. So I think for me, that's definitely one of the standout examples, from, from international.

Nicola Headlam:

And I guess that that also links to the example in Wales of the Wellbeing Act and the Wellbeing Tsar. All those that the wellbeing champion.

Sarah Longlands:

Commissioner.

Nicola Headlam:

Commissioner. I remember very clearly looking at the initial legislation for that when it was being scrutinised in the House, and I asked the question how do we feed good lessons back into Westminster from the political territories?

We wouldn't need a feedback mechanism. But actually, as you say, being able to take that New Zealand example via Wales, in some ways the story gathers extra moss, doesn't it? As it comes back.

Sarah Longlands:

I think that's one of the interesting something for us to think about at LPIP too, because you've got different ways of doing this in the different relations of the UK.

That's something I think to bring back to Westminster. So look, here's what you can learn in the round from how people are approaching this. And I mean, we had Derek Walker, the Commissioner for Wellbeing, at the summit this year in July. And he spoke. I think it's really interesting listening to him talk about his experience and, and how important is we can that we can actually really take those lessons.

And we've got that freedom at the national level, but that also I put in forward into delivery as well. So yeah, there's a lot to take from that. And obviously wellbeing has been a big focus in Scotland too.

Nicola Headlam:

So you always give us reason to be cheerful. What are you particularly excited and are working on next? Sarah.

Sarah Longlands:

Well we are, we're doing quite a lot on English devolution at CLES at the moment. We've got a big regional program that we've been involved with and partnership with New Economics Foundation, Centre for Thriving Places and Co-ops UK. That's in its third year now, and I think lots of insights from our work on how can you scale up, progressive economics, using devolved structures.

So I think that's exciting. And similarly, we're doing another piece which is looking at that same question, but through the lens of health and kind of really exploring how can we make progress on some of the really challenging health issues that parts of the UK have got. And that that's been really interesting with the Health Foundation. So that's exciting. I'm really excited though by a a piece of what we're doing in Scotland at the moment, which is looking at how do we

support and pilot new approaches to in-work progression, because the progression economy, if you want to call it, you know, how people progress is really is a very under-researched undervalued topic in the UK. And there's very little good data about it as well. We've been talking LPIP about this, about how you get data. So that's something it's funded through the Robertson Trust. It's going to be we're going to work on that for the next 2 or 3 years, just trying to really get under the skin and piloting new approaches. So I'm really excited about that. I think it's going to be really interesting.

Nicola Headlam:

I think you're absolutely onto something that I'm so totally obsessed, because all the work that I do recently at the launch of the food Strategy in Bradford and Darley Street Market, knowing that's the kind of coming together of a national piece of work that was years in the making, a physical environment that was 20 more will also. But blueprint for Bradford must being from the 90s, you know so we sort of speed of the place changing the speed of national government policy, but also talking to lots of people who had various kinds of Yorkshire roots and asking them, well, what would be the thing that would bring you back? And in general, there is still within policy makers and a lot of third sector organisations that, you know, sort of people to have what the food strategy was going to be.

It was very much like, oh, I feel like I had to get out for my first or maybe my second job. And I was laughing, saying, well, it's the two body problem of course, when there's two of you to find jobs for. But then the four body problem, if, God forbid, you end up with children as well, it's becomes virtually the same kind of complexity of the sets of decisions that have put you in a specific place so that you can have the public services that you need, the schools that you need, and then the jobs that you might need.

It's not that those are private decisions being made by individuals. The sociology and then the spatiality of them is so key in terms of what would it take you? I remember one of the first conversations we ever had actually was do remember that before the internet? God forbid! There was a newsletter that went round in London and it was amongst advertising people and it was called "What if We all went home" and it was the Mancs and the Scousers who found themselves crossing paths in every creative pitch.

They were in the bars and chatting and there to really make money, you know, make a name for themselves in creative sectors and they just started to wonder, what if we all went home? You know, I'm not sure who lives those and those associations, those things, those pull factors like your football team like, and the ways in which we don't have any compelling evidence really, about, well, what if they all go home? What if every copywriter you had ever met actually was still working from Lancashire? You mean more power to you? It sounds like it's a real area that we need a lot of evidence base.

Brilliant. Well, so you've met them all. In terms of knowledge mobilisation our model, I should say a sort of theory of change is this sort of academic side. And the policy side is about linking people together. But really that is a brokerage function right between and across academia, data, any of those things. So brokerage and again that pull factor just like yourself really. But then that person needs to dock with a really good place leader. And of course there's timing as well. So I wonder if you could think of specific people who are good on the brokerage side and then where they would dock in to.

So really good place leaders and people that you know that are active at the moment, kind of having careers at the moment, that would be amazing.

Sarah Longlands:

Well, speak to any, you know, local authority chief exec or people who run chair of local hospital trusts or people who are involved in the day-to-day challenge of running services, and trying to get places to work, as well as dealing with all the other stuff that's going on at the minute.

You know, I think those people, if you're an early career researcher or you're someone who's just trying to get their head round place, speaking to a local politician, speaking to a local chief exec or a local public servant, that will give you a really good sense of what's going on at a minute. How are people dealing with it? And what are some of the solutions and some of the some of the reasons for hope I think as well, you know. Because we've got to have that too. The other thing I would say is there's a lot of people out there in our communities that are taking a real leadership role. And you know, if you look in Scotland, some of the communities that are really trying to forge ahead on making sure that communities not only have the chance to benefit from some of the many kind of renewable schemes that are coming in, or some of the natural capital schemes are coming in, but they're also seeking to negotiate a long term investment for those areas. Which means the community having an ownership stake, which is not just about, oh, we'll throw you a few pennies because we're developing your area. We're actually giving you an ownership and a share of the profits in the longer term. So I think there's lots of people out there who would recommend speaking to, but seeking out those people who are doing something interesting to push beyond the comfort barrier and try to do things that are different in a climate which is not always very supportive of that idea.

Nicola Headlam:

Well, there we are. There is another element for place-based innovation, and it's the magic place-based innovation magic wand. So I'm going to give you a go with it. Right? I'm passing it over. Be very careful with it because it can grant your wish. You have absolute power to do one of these things, but you must use your powers to make a tangible change to a specific place.

Your change will be specific, measurable, actionable, recordable, and transferable. Magic is hard to get hold of at the moment and is subject to 20% reducing multi-year budget settlement. Right, Sarah? You can have a 10 million pounds project fund, half an hour with the cabinet and a slide deck, editorial control of the front page of a tabloid, a clause to insert into a bill, a simple message to go viral on TikTok, or anyone as an advocate for this work. What would you like the place-based magic wand? If you can wave it and have one of those things, what do you think you would need? Tell you what, I'm going to cheat. I would like you to have the cabinet and a slide deck.

Sarah Longlands:

Well, I was kind of thinking I was kind of quite tempted to take the cash.

Nicola Headlam:

Yeah, (laughing) you are allowed to take the cash, but I think actually you could probably do more good, because the way that you put things, as I say. So just describing in the same sort of stream of talking, you're talking about how important it is to get it right, and then you've just got a killer number at the end, I think half an hour with the whole cabinet and some straight talking might improve their performance when they come out of the room.

That's what I think. I would wish that they would have to have you for an hour. How's that? Your allowed to wish as well? Go on, go on. That's my wish.

Sarah Longlands:

Yeah. No, I mean, I think it would be interesting as a research project, perhaps for the LPIP and we could write it up and publish it. That would be good, wouldn't it? Turn it into some sort of docu-soap, some detective drama. But I don't know if you've got, like, an old quiz show. We could win a speedboat. We could, like, speed off into the distance to New Zealand or so.

Nicola Headlam:

Oh. Bless you. Well, okay. Yeah, I have the place-based magic wand back. I think you make the challenge so compelling. But also, you've given us some hope. And that's what we try and do in Placecast. We set out to mine insights from experts with real world case studies, practical tips and career advice, and to spotlight solutions as well as wave the place-based innovation magic wand. And we have thank you very much Sarah Longlands for being a guest on Placecast.

Sarah Longlands:

Thank you. You've been great to speak to.