Placecast Episode 28 - Transcript

00:00:07 Nicola Headlam

Welcome to Placecast, a Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub production based at the University of Birmingham.

00:00:13 Nicola Headlam

Placecast is essential listening for those keen to explore the ins and outs of knowledge mobilisation for influence in central and local government.

00:00:20 Nicola Headlam

Based on the view that it's only through animating the power of place-based leadership that the wicked problems of 2026 can become more manageable.

00:00:28 Nicola Headlam

Whether you are a researcher, citizen scientist, an activist, a professional working 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 that universities can act as the repositories and observatories of these efforts.

00:00:49 Nicola Headlam

We're based in City-REDI and rooted in the LPIP programme funded by the ESRC, AHRC and Innovate UK.

00:00:55 Nicola Headlam

This podcast aims to highlight knowledge and evidence-based ways of working and the strategies needed to make a real impact on the decisions that shape our society.

00:01:04 Nicola Headlam

Our guests are change makers from across the UK with stories about the ways in which influence can be achieved.

00:01:10 Nicola Headlam

We focus in particular on some of the connective tissue within and between sectors for clues as to how to animate place-based leadership as innovating is a team sport best done in the open.

00:01:20 Nicola Headlam

Please contact us with feedback on the episodes or if you'd like to be a guest or have strong views on the processes of advocacy, lobbying, public campaigning and more.

00:01:29 Nicola Headlam

Unpacking how research and evidence connects with neighborhood, local, city, regional and national missions.

00:01:34 Nicola Headlam

I'm Dr. Nicola Headlam, a fellow of the LPIP programme with a long career at the intersection of research and place-based policy.

00:01:42 Nicola Headlam

My guest today is Will Rossiter, Professor of Regional Policy and Development and Director of the Centre for Economy, Policy and Place at Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University.

00:01:52 Nicola Headlam

His research is focused on local and regional economic development, the policy process and the economic and institutional path dependencies, looking at why some places get locked into decline while others find new paths to growth.

00:02:05 Nicola Headlam

Before academia, Will was an economic development practitioner working on regional economic strategies in the East Midlands.

00:02:12 Nicola Headlam

Good afternoon and welcome, Will.

00:02:14 Will Rossiter

Hi, Nicola.

00:02:15 Nicola Headlam

Hello.

00:02:16 Nicola Headlam

You're most associated with economic development in the East Midlands.

00:02:19 Nicola Headlam

How did you first become engaged in that work?

00:02:23 Will Rossiter

Oh, feels like a long time ago.

00:02:25 Will Rossiter

I think I've worked all bar three years of my adult working life in the East Midlands.

00:02:31 Will Rossiter

Initially a little bit of academic research at Leicester University before going down to Cardiff, came back into a policy research role and it really all flowed from there.

00:02:41 Will Rossiter

I was working, initially, down in Northamptonshire for a Chamber of Commerce training and enterprise.

00:02:46 Will Rossiter

So one of the techs, which interestingly got abolished in 2001, which took me really to end at East Midlands Development Agency, where I ended up as head of strategy and research.

00:02:58 Will Rossiter

Very formative period under New Labour and working on regional policy in that period, certainly for me.

00:03:04 Will Rossiter

When I got abolished for the second time in 2010, you know, that was the trigger for the move across - or back - into academic research and related policy work.

00:03:15 Will Rossiter

But I have described myself as a professional East Midlander, and I think that's what I am more than anything else, having worked here all that time.

00:03:22 Will Rossiter

I find the region a fascinating place.

00:03:24 Will Rossiter

I think it has a lot to teach other places about the things that do and don't work in supporting development.

00:03:31 Will Rossiter

Also, it's been nothing like as prominent as it should have been in the discourse of regional policymaking in the UK.

00:03:39 Will Rossiter

Perhaps not coincidence that the historian WG Helsings back in 1949 described it as the most unknown and neglected part of England.

00:03:47 Will Rossiter

And I think you could still make a similar comment.

00:03:48 Nicola Headlam

And it's interesting, isn't it?

00:03:50 Nicola Headlam

I mean, we've spoken about this.

00:03:51 Nicola Headlam

When you actually sketch out the kind of assets of the region, you've really got a bit of everything.

00:03:56 Nicola Headlam

You had certainly at the regional footprint.

00:03:59 Nicola Headlam

You have ports, you have coast, you have heavy industry, you have rurality,

00:04:04 Nicola Headlam

You have rural-urban interface, peri-urban, urban extensions, cities.

00:04:10 Nicola Headlam

It is an economic geographer's dream, really.

00:04:12 Will Rossiter

It is diverse and it is complex.

00:04:15 Will Rossiter

And I think some of the challenges for developing a region like this are a function of that complexity and certainly the essential kind of polycentricity that characterises this region.

00:04:25 Will Rossiter

But if we take it back to a place-based policy making and devolution UK-wide, I think that complexity.

00:04:32 Will Rossiter

The fact that it is not a region dominated by a single major conurbation in the way that arguably Birmingham dominates the West Midlands, Manchester dominates the North West, arguably.

00:04:44 Will Rossiter

Hostage to fortune obviously there.

00:04:46 Will Rossiter

But in a sense, we in East Midlands are completely unlike those regions in terms of the pattern of our spatial development, which is much more polycentric.

00:04:56 Will Rossiter

I would argue that none of the region's cities in the East Midlands, broadly defined, has become completely dominant.

00:05:03 Will Rossiter

Essentially what we've had is the historic county towns, if you like, persisting

00:05:09 Will Rossiter

as key nodes, if you like, in the region spatial development.

00:05:13 Will Rossiter

And that presents particular challenges, but also opportunities.

00:05:17 Will Rossiter

It's important to be thinking about that spatial context when we tackle economic development in a variety of ways.

00:05:24 Will Rossiter

It's also why some of the recent decisions around the cancelling of major road schemes in the region have caused such ire really within the region, because I think in a region that has that has that

00:05:36 Will Rossiter

polycentric spatial character, intra-regional connectivity is absolutely fundamental to our development.

00:05:42 Will Rossiter

So to see long cherished developed schemes like that being knocked on the head when Heathrow is pursuing a third runway, for instance, really defies belief, frankly.

00:05:59 Nicola Headlam

I think I first feel you make this argument in the late 90s.

00:06:02 Nicola Headlam

I think in many ways actually the East Midlands is more like England certainly than the Manchesterism.

00:06:09 Nicola Headlam

You have to be much more subtle where you've got the Ten borough solution with the political spatial fix

00:06:16 Nicola Headlam

that was possible, things like SELNEC (South East Lancashire North East Cheshire) and things like you could very easily divide my region in the northwest across a straight line that runs from the middle of Manchester to the middle of Liverpool and then melts down about 15 miles below, as indeed Peel Holdings did have tried to.

00:06:34 Nicola Headlam

And there's a completely different geography there, a geography that's much more like the home counties.

00:06:38 Nicola Headlam

That's invisible when you focus on the politically expedient ten borough solution that was sort of been concretised over the years.

00:06:46 Nicola Headlam

And I think that's always the way though, the minute that you try to pin down any kind of space, it sort of defies you a bit.

00:06:52 Nicola Headlam

But I think the East Midlands itself feels to me much more like what you can expect in England.

00:06:57 Will Rossiter

I think that's right.

00:06:58 Will Rossiter

And because of that, I think it's far more representative of some of the challenges that have to be overcome in extending devolution to parts of England not currently covered.

00:07:07 Will Rossiter

We, in a sense, are far more like those other places than the examples of Manchester or Birmingham.

00:07:12 Will Rossiter

Now, I think we have a lot to learn actually from the likes of Manchester, and I'm keen that we should do that, but it won't be a direct read across.

00:07:20 Will Rossiter

You alluded to essentially a pragmatic kind of political fix as underpinning the institutional architecture of Manchester, if you like.

00:07:29 Will Rossiter

I think that's key, but also key is the fact that that has persisted over the best part of 30 plus years.

00:07:37 Will Rossiter

I think that is itself pretty fundamental because it points to the sense that really, if we want to develop places, we have to build institutions and institution building takes time.

00:07:49 Will Rossiter

It's never a quick fix.

00:07:51 Will Rossiter

It's something that institutions kind of become layered over time.

00:07:55 Will Rossiter

They build their capabilities, strategic and otherwise.

00:07:59 Will Rossiter

They're never quick fixes.

00:08:01 Will Rossiter

And one of the challenges, as many people have said, for regional policy in the UK is the fact that we have never really settled on a stable set of geographies to use as the basis of devolution, regional policy, whatever we want to call it.

00:08:17 Will Rossiter

It's been a problem for us.

00:08:19 Will Rossiter

Manchester stands out for me because it has had a degree of institutional stability that is actually quite uncommon.

00:08:27 Will Rossiter

In the UK context or certainly in English context.

00:08:29 Nicola Headlam

Brilliant.

00:08:30 Nicola Headlam

And I guess it sounds very like my next question was how did that lead you to engage with LPIP?

00:08:35 Nicola Headlam

I assume that you were doing the same job as Bec Riley in the Northwest at the same time.

00:08:39 Nicola Headlam

So again, that relationship would predate both of you coming back to academia.

00:08:44 Will Rossiter

Very much so.

00:08:45 Will Rossiter

I've worked with Bec over that period.

00:08:47 Will Rossiter

She was head of research at the Northwest Development Agency when I was doing the same role in EMDA (East Midlands Development Agency).

00:08:52 Will Rossiter

So we worked very closely on regional research, economic analysis, evaluation.

00:08:57 Will Rossiter

But also Professor Anne Green, who I first worked with, I think, in 2003, when I commissioned her to do some work on framework for regional employment and skills action.

00:09:09 Nicola Headlam

Oh, I'm sure she'll tell us a great detail.

00:09:11 Will Rossiter

You know, which dates us both, I'm sorry to say.

00:09:14 Nicola Headlam

One question before we move off that sort of regional period, and I know that sort of the legend

00:09:19 Nicola Headlam

as we often tell it, is that certainly the North West had, multiple hundreds of thousands a year to commission research studies.

00:09:27 Nicola Headlam

I mean, that's exactly how I got engaged.

00:09:29 Nicola Headlam

I was commissioned, as you describe.

00:09:30 Nicola Headlam

Having that kind of heft to commission at that scale has never returned, has it, since regional agencies.

00:09:37 Will Rossiter

No, it hasn't.

00:09:38 Will Rossiter

And I think that problem - actually of a lack of strategic capability at the regional and the sub-national scale has been compounded by what has happened in local government.

00:09:48 Will Rossiter

I mean, if I think about the stature, standing and capabilities of local authorities in my region, circa 2010, there were upper tier authorities you could point to in this region who had research, analytical, economic development functions, 20 or 30 people.

00:10:06 Will Rossiter

You look back now, what have they got? Two or three.

00:10:10 Will Rossiter

That is the extent to which they have been through successive rounds of austerity, first under the coalition government and then various Tory administrations, they have been denuded, actually, of significant strategic capability, which actually is more than anything else.

00:10:28 Will Rossiter

It's not often derided as unnecessary bureaucracy.

00:10:32 Will Rossiter

Actually, it's the essential raw material for good decision making and for good program design.

00:10:37 Will Rossiter

And that's what has been lost and not just as a function of the regional development agencies going.

00:10:43 Will Rossiter

And also the regional observatories look very active in supporting that kind of work, funded largely by RDAs.

00:10:50 Will Rossiter

It's the fact that has been lost at a time when quite purposively government of the day was stripping this kind of capacity out of local government.

00:11:01 Will Rossiter

You know, those two forces have compounded.

00:11:03 Nicola Headlam

It's a disaster and I wrote a blog just the other day about exactly that, we need to return to

00:11:09 Nicola Headlam

I mean, the National Audit Office had it straight away that anything that was saved in the initial cull of the regional entities, we miss much more in terms of what it hasn't provided for us.

00:11:20 Will Rossiter

Well, universities, I mean, universities have played a significant role here in keeping hold of some of that capacity and expertise.

00:11:26 Will Rossiter

I'm an example of that.

00:11:28 Will Rossiter

NTU, I mean, my dean, Babat Yazdani, was very active in recruiting two or three of us to come across from the RDA (Regional Development Agency) to develop local and regional economic research.

00:11:38 Will Rossiter

Obviously,

00:11:39 Will Rossiter

University of Birmingham did that in the West Midlands with the establishment of City-REDI in a similar sense.

00:11:45 Will Rossiter

So I do think in both cases we can see our universities as repositories of regional knowledge.

00:11:54 Will Rossiter

And that has been important because in the context of the shifting sands of many other kinds of organisations, the universities have stood out as being, until recently, pretty stable anchor institutions that can act as repositories for this kind of evidence place, really.

00:12:13 Nicola Headlam

That's the sad part there.

00:12:14 Nicola Headlam

I've been saying for a couple of years that universities are where local government was in 2011-12 in terms of cuts and in terms of changing business models.

00:12:22 Nicola Headlam

And you're right, like the anchor institution sort of function of universities, it is sort of written through their prospectuses, but when their actual core business is challenged in terms of the bottom line, even that repository is challenged in a way.

00:12:37 Nicola Headlam

And I think that a lot of this is about having enough slack between the organisations as well.

00:12:42 Will Rossiter

There's something really important.

00:12:44 Will Rossiter

I mean, economic geographers have this term institutional thickness, which is not a new term.

00:12:49 Will Rossiter

It's, I think, really important as an ingredient or a prerequisite of what economic geographers also talk about, which is adaptive capability, by which we kind of mean the ability of places to weather shocks from without or within, and to have the capability, if you like, to take advantage of new and emerging opportunities, development opportunities when they arrive.

00:13:11 Will Rossiter

A critical enabler of that is institutional thickness, which is partly about the sort of capacities we've been talking about in particular institutions, but it's also crucially about

the relationships between - and the relationships between individuals in - those institutions.

00:13:30 Will Rossiter

It's important when we're thinking about institutions that we don't just think of formal organisation.

00:13:35 Will Rossiter

It's actually a relational thing.

00:13:38 Will Rossiter

It's a relational thing and those relationships and interactions far easier to disrupt, if you like, than they are to create.

00:13:47 Will Rossiter

And I think that's, for me, one of the key lessons of the last 10 or 15 years.

00:13:52 Will Rossiter

We have disrupted a lot of those relationships in ways that have proved very counterproductive.

00:13:58 Will Rossiter

We are now recognising the need to put back some of those institutional capabilities.

00:14:04 Will Rossiter

The combined authorities.

00:14:06 Will Rossiter

Perhaps the clearest example of that and development in my region of EMCA (East Midlands Combined Authority) is hugely to be welcomed, a real plus, a real positive, of which I'm hugely supportive, but it's not quick game.

00:14:18 Will Rossiter

Institution building probably takes decades, if we're honest, and that's kind of the journey we're on.

00:14:24 Will Rossiter

I mean, it is exciting that we do have a government that is recognising the need to invest in those sort of capacity, but we need that to be sustained, not just by this government, the next government, but perhaps the next 5 or 10 governments.

00:14:37 Nicola Headlam

And do you feel positive about sort of the Rewiring Whitehall document that we've seen about the sort of devolutionary, I mean, essentially what rewiring does is puts England on a subsidiarity footing that we've never seen formalised before.

00:14:51 Nicola Headlam

I mean, I'm very enthusiastic that finally we might get some constitutional help in terms of kind of the agenda that we're describing.

00:14:58 Will Rossiter

I think that's true.

00:14:59 Will Rossiter

Honestly, I think that's needed.

00:15:00 Will Rossiter

And if we look around at international examples of places where they would appear, certainly from the outside, to have done this better rather than worse, often it is because, in a sense, regional redistribution, investment is part of a constitutional settlement, very fundamental.

00:15:19 Will Rossiter

And I would highlight 2 examples.

00:15:20 Will Rossiter

I mean, Germany, also perhaps less prominent, but equally interesting, Japan.

00:15:25 Will Rossiter

As countries where you have had much more institutional stability, but also a redistribution of resources that is part of a constitutional settlement.

00:15:34 Will Rossiter

Obviously, in Germany, that was the post-unification context.

00:15:38 Will Rossiter

And they still have hypothecated taxation that is redistributed in that way.

00:15:42 Will Rossiter

And it explains how they have been able to sustain investments in the East over an extremely long period of time.

00:15:49 Will Rossiter

And that is the kind of scale of effort we need, I'm afraid, given the challenges we face.

00:15:54 Nicola Headlam

Absolutely.

00:15:55 Nicola Headlam

Talking about the East Midlands punching out weight and all those kinds of things, if you could just think maybe what would be the power of the East Midlands having institutions that had reached maturity and were fully embedded, what could change as a result and what might the size of that prize be?

00:16:11 Nicola Headlam

You can define that any way that you like.

00:16:15 Will Rossiter

I'm not sure that I could define the size of the prize.

00:16:17 Will Rossiter

I do think, though, that we have an opportunity to deal with some pretty fundamental challenges that this region has faced over the years.

00:16:26 Will Rossiter

And institution building is part of the solution.

00:16:29 Will Rossiter

And if we look at transport, we've already talked about transport as being a key enabler.

00:16:33 Will Rossiter

Inter and intra-regional connectivity, really fundamental.

00:16:37 Will Rossiter

Particularly in this kind of complex spatial landscape that is characteristic of the East Midlands.

00:16:43 Will Rossiter

And yet the East Midlands has never had an integrated passenger transport authority coordinating investment, provision of services at the regional scale.

00:16:52 Will Rossiter

Regions to the north, Sheffield has had that, Birmingham has had that for a long, long time.

00:16:57 Will Rossiter

That absence has been a real problem.

00:17:00 Will Rossiter

And when you look at quality of transport infrastructure in the region, it partly speaks to the lack of that strategic coordination, integrated planning, and service provision.

00:17:11 Will Rossiter

EMCA, with its transport hat on, actually is now in a position to do something about that in a way that has never been the case, certainly in my lifetime in the East Midlands.

00:17:22 Will Rossiter

And I think that is a really important opportunity to do better.

00:17:26 Will Rossiter

And I know the mayor is keen to do that.

00:17:28 Will Rossiter

We're seeing that already in some of her interesting initiatives around buses and access to training and education for young people in the more remote rural parts of the region.

00:17:37 Will Rossiter

I'm very hopeful that we'll see more of that going forward.

00:17:40 Nicola Headlam

Certainly my experience has been that building the institutions that can build infrastructure, build capacity to then build the place becomes a mutually reinforcing.

00:17:51 Will Rossiter

I think that's right.

00:17:52 Will Rossiter

But I think there are some other challenges that we need to be cognizant of.

00:17:56 Will Rossiter

I mean, some of my academic research in recent years has focused on the emergence of a really interesting biotech and life sciences cluster in and around Nottingham

00:18:06 Will Rossiter

focused on the BioCity complex in Nottingham, which is now, I think, the country's largest bioscience business incubation facility, bar none.

00:18:16 Will Rossiter

Bigger than Babram in Cambridge.

00:18:17 Will Rossiter

It's a really significant development and achievement for Nottingham and the wider East Midlands, for sure.

00:18:24 Will Rossiter

But if you analyse how that has come about, there are a lot of interesting lessons, I think, for local and national policymakers in understanding a story like that.

00:18:34 Will Rossiter

Because in a sense, I mean, I could trace that story back quite precisely to a date in 1916 when the Boots Company responded to the inability to get chemicals in from Germany where they'd previously bought them.

00:18:49 Will Rossiter

Chose to invest in local manufacturing of fine chemicals, you know, roll forward to the millennium, and they had created capabilities in the local area that actually had become potentially redundant, but could be redeployed to take advantage of new opportunities.

00:19:08 Will Rossiter

And that's what happened in terms of the reuse, the redevelopment of the Pennyfoot Street Laboratory that Boots had set up as a biotech themed business incubation facility opened in about 2003.

00:19:22 Will Rossiter

Really interesting story, interesting not just because of how it happened, but where it happened, because it happened outside

00:19:29 Will Rossiter

of the traditional heartlands of the biotech industry, that sort of triangle between - sometimes called the Golden Triangle - Oxford, Cambridge, London.

00:19:38 Will Rossiter

The fact that it happened in Nottingham, 100 miles or so north, is really interesting, not least because as recently as 1999, Lord Sainsbury's has done a big review of the biotech sector for the then Labour government and essentially concluded there was nothing of note in Nottingham and the East Midlands.

00:19:55 Nicola Headlam

Here be dragons!

00:19:57 Will Rossiter

Clearly he'd missed something.

00:19:58 Will Rossiter

Four years later, he was back opening BioCity it's become a real success story but it's also a success story with a bit of a sting in the tail because whilst it is great and it should be celebrated for sure if you think about who has benefited locally from that development you know sadly I don't think it's the residents of Sneinton just up the road. It is predominantly you know graduates people with higher degrees, you know

00:20:25 Will Rossiter

who've come into research intensive roles.

00:20:27 Will Rossiter

It's great for the city, we absolutely need it, but if we're honest, it hasn't fed through into good outcomes or sufficient good outcomes for local people.

00:20:37 Will Rossiter

And that is why I'm particularly interested in the Mayor's new focus on inclusive growth and what that might mean.

00:20:44 Will Rossiter

Inclusive growth, as I think of it, is very much about a model of development that is better able to deliver good social and economic outcomes to local residents.

00:20:54 Will Rossiter

So her efforts in that space are very much on point as far as I'm concerned.

00:21:00 Will Rossiter

And some of the reasons I say that are some of the things I've been doing recently in the city to perhaps change my view a little bit on how these things operate and what matters.

00:21:14 Nicola Headlam

Unfortunately, for growth to be inclusive, we have to have some growth.

00:21:19 Nicola Headlam

And I was watching the news last night and a very young economist was describing how we'd had really strong growth and I had to change the channel, as I often do watching Channel 4 News in the evening.

00:21:29 Nicola Headlam

She was talking about 0.6 was our great leap forward in terms of growth, 0.6 of a percentage point.

00:21:35 Nicola Headlam

We've got so used to such sluggish economic growth since the global financial crash and that is poorly understood at a national level.

00:21:44 Nicola Headlam

Let alone once we get into the more granular subnational, what can we do?

00:21:48 Nicola Headlam

Because again, 0.6% isn't enough to have good growth.

00:21:53 Nicola Headlam

Essentially, we've been managing a low growth trajectory for two decades now.

00:21:57 Nicola Headlam

I said to my husband, that economist thinks that 0.6 of a percentage point is strong because she's used to a sort of flat growth scenario.

00:22:05 Nicola Headlam

And that really isn't kind of good enough in terms of lifting places and challenging places to be able to then, as you say, share those outcomes more broadly.

00:22:15 Will Rossiter

Prior to 2008, we would have been pretty disappointed with that.

00:22:18 Nicola Headlam

Exactly.

00:22:19 Nicola Headlam

The other thing, of course, is that you're talking, it sounds like a similar tale I once heard about a small welly boot maker in northern Finland, which became Nokia as they diversified away from their main rubber.

00:22:30 Nicola Headlam

So it's interesting that you're relying in that story on a kind of German Mittelstand, kind of a large company who wants to do research and have a regional profile rather than necessarily viewing the

00:22:44 Nicola Headlam

Golden Triangle or anywhere else is where they need to be.

00:22:45 Nicola Headlam

It's very rich, that tale.

00:22:47 Will Rossiter

You mentioned Finland.

00:22:48 Will Rossiter

Finland is interesting because, and many cities in Finland have experienced very similar kinds of de-industrialisation to that faced by many towns and cities in the North and Midland in the UK.

00:23:00 Will Rossiter

Albeit in the Finnish example, I mean, a lot of that was a function of the decoupling of the Finnish economy from the USSR following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

00:23:10 Will Rossiter

They lost a lot of market for manufacturers.

00:23:14 Will Rossiter

And in a sense, whilst the cause was quite particular and perhaps more geopolitical, maybe, than we faced in a similar era in the UK, their response has been equally interesting.

00:23:26 Will Rossiter

I mean, Tampere is a really interesting case study in this respect.

00:23:30 Will Rossiter

I have visited courtesy of Marku Sotorata at the university there, who's clearly a big name in regional policy and related research.

00:23:38 Will Rossiter

But a couple of things stand out to me.

00:23:40 Will Rossiter

One is the role of a regional development agency, albeit one that is accountable there to local government, funded by locally raised taxation.

00:23:48 Will Rossiter

So if you like, local government with greater levels of fiscal autonomy that can raise taxes to invest in a regional development entity.

00:23:57 Will Rossiter

Interesting.

00:23:57 Will Rossiter

Also interesting because the leaders of Tampere, I think back in the 70s, recognised that the lack of a university in the city was a major impediment to development.

00:24:08 Will Rossiter

So they went out and recruited one, which relocated to Tampere and the development of the university, very much hand in hand with the development of city.

00:24:16 Will Rossiter

You could also say not unrelated to their ability subsequently to themselves develop a significant biotech cluster too.

00:24:23 Will Rossiter

There are some really strong and interesting parallels when you think in those terms.

00:24:27 Will Rossiter

I mean, it's interesting when you were talking about the German example earlier on, there was a very compelling speech at the Convention of the North in 2003 from Carsten Schneider, who was in the cabinet at the time, talking about over the

00:24:40 Nicola Headlam

the same period as reunification, where Germany had committed 2 trillion to the equalisation of the East and the West.

00:24:48 Nicola Headlam

In that same period, we'd invested very little and apart from slight hope that we would be able to restructure.

00:24:56 Nicola Headlam

And essentially, we're looking at waves, aren't we?

00:24:59 Nicola Headlam

Again, Manchester is very interesting in terms of; not only was it original modern city, we have been managing

00:25:05 Nicola Headlam

deindustrialization for almost as long, so really from the 1830s onwards. Things have been becoming obsolete and then being repurposed, and part of it depends on how

00:25:17 Nicola Headlam

you have a good tale to tell around this very good business in the repurposing.

00:25:21 Nicola Headlam

It's almost like the initial shock is of less interest, or whether that's positive or negative.

00:25:27 Nicola Headlam

So in that case, that's steam, isn't it?

00:25:29 Nicola Headlam

So the changing technology, but being pliable to be like, right, well, we've done that.

00:25:35 Nicola Headlam

So we'll rework it into another set of industries.

00:25:39 Nicola Headlam

And then fast industrialisation comes coupled with de-industrialisation kind of at the edges.

00:25:44 Nicola Headlam

And repurposing and rethinking.

00:25:47 Nicola Headlam

So in some ways, I think it matters less for the long future of Manchester that we were the “Cottonopolis”, but that we then modified the behaviour of the kind of elite to accommodate steam.

00:25:59 Nicola Headlam

It's kind of a long tail of reworking.

00:26:02 Will Rossiter

Well, it is, and that is economic history, isn't it?

00:26:04 Will Rossiter

It's of adaptation and change.

00:26:06 Will Rossiter

It's successive shocks, rebounds.

00:26:09 Will Rossiter

I mean, that's kind of the story.

00:26:10 Will Rossiter

And we could say something similar in a city like Nottingham, where we often associate it with lace, but lace was actually quite time-limited in a lot of ways.

00:26:19 Will Rossiter

What's interesting to me is how the sort of lace and textiles industry kind of gave birth to some other interesting industries locally in ways that perhaps are not as well understood as they might be.

00:26:31 Will Rossiter

So if you think about Nottingham as a manufacturing centre in the 20th century, where did that come from?

00:26:36 Will Rossiter

Well, in a sense, it came from the sort of light engineering

00:26:40 Will Rossiter

and manufacturing associated with companies like Raleigh emerged from the textiles industry.

00:26:46 Will Rossiter

There was engineering capability developed to support essentially the machinery and develop the machinery necessary for the textiles firms.

00:26:54 Will Rossiter

It was that kind of light engineering expertise that gets redeployed in the shape of a bike making firm that becomes the biggest bike maker in the world back in the 1950s, you know, knocking out over a million bikes, mainly for export, a year, in that period and employing close to 10,000 people in the city of Nottingham.

00:27:13 Will Rossiter

The relationship between these sectors, not always obvious, but that kind of branching process, how one sector or part of it can evolve and develop into something else is a really interesting and important thing.

00:27:25 Will Rossiter

It strikes me that policymakers need to be mindful of what they can do to facilitate that.

00:27:30 Nicola Headlam

And the movement between the bobbin to the bike is not obvious, but it is once you start to pull at the threads...

00:27:38 Nicola Headlam

Sorry to torture the lace metaphor.

00:27:40 Nicola Headlam

And I think also it's another bugbear of mine.

00:27:43 Nicola Headlam

I was talking about cluster policy recently to some pals.

00:27:47 Nicola Headlam

And again, it's another downside of localism that everybody invented their own clusters, called them something slightly different and moved away from sort of what we would understand as old school 50 or so SMEs within a kind of defined area that's a cluster and calling...

00:28:03 Nicola Headlam

Part of the problem has been that a complete anarchy in terms of what a cluster is.

00:28:09 Will Rossiter

Well, I think you have to distinguish between the aspirational cluster of many policy makers.

00:28:14 Will Rossiter

We all need a biotech, a nanotech, whatever tech it might be. And usually it is a tech.

00:28:19 Will Rossiter

And that's a problem in itself, in my view.

00:28:21 Will Rossiter

But nevertheless, there is that aspirational view.

00:28:24 Will Rossiter

Where it becomes particularly challenging though is where it doesn't connect to local capacity, to local expertise, to physical assets that are relevant to the cluster.

00:28:34 Will Rossiter

But I think we also have to be a little bit sympathetic to policymakers because the nature of clusters and clustering is such that

00:28:42 Will Rossiter

at the point when certainly public support makes most sense early in the gestation period, they really are very difficult to identify and to be sure you've got one.

00:28:51 Will Rossiter

And actually maybe that Lord Sainsbury kind of slightly apocryphal tale that I told and misrepresentation of a very solid bit of work, maybe that points to the challenge and the difficulty.

00:29:02 Will Rossiter

It wasn't that it was a bad bit of work, but the task is hard.

00:29:05 Will Rossiter

And being sure you've got something on which to build is not a trivial thing.

00:29:10 Will Rossiter

It's not a straightforward thing.

00:29:11 Will Rossiter

And I think it also points to the big challenge going forward, because looking back with the benefit considerable of hindsight, I can tell this lovely story about biotech and life sciences in Nottingham.

00:29:22 Will Rossiter

I don't think it was obvious, as was evident by that Sainsbury's report in 1999.

00:29:26 Will Rossiter

It wasn't obvious that opportunity was there.

00:29:29 Will Rossiter

Essentially, the RDA that I then came to slightly later work for, took a bit of a punt.

00:29:35 Will Rossiter

Saw an opportunity, took a bit of a punt.

00:29:37 Will Rossiter

May and may not have worked.

00:29:38 Will Rossiter

You know, there were other ingredients in the mix.

00:29:41 Will Rossiter

I think what's interesting is about how those ingredients relate to each other.

00:29:45 Will Rossiter

There was a strong policy component.

00:29:47 Will Rossiter

In the sense that around the millennium there was a big, this was the point at which in industrial policy, Michael Porter's ideas around clusters were particularly dominant and influential.

00:29:58 Will Rossiter

There was a push therefore from the national level for RDAs to be developing cluster-like initiatives.

00:30:05 Will Rossiter

At exactly that point in time, an RDA had been created with significant capacity to invest and with resources to invest.

00:30:15 Will Rossiter

But there were also some important local actors who got involved, advocated for the scheme.

00:30:20 Will Rossiter

The fact that BioCity, the complex or the Boots lab, also happened to be across the road from the EMDA head office, probably helped.

00:30:28 Will Rossiter

It was hard to miss the opportunity on the doorstep.

00:30:31 Will Rossiter

So there's a complex mix of things in that story. It may not have happened.

00:30:34 Will Rossiter

Indeed, if we sort of conduct a bit of a thought experiment and say, okay, let's move forward, pretend we're doing that in 2012 after the RDA has been abolished, it doesn't happen.

00:30:44 Will Rossiter

There's a lot to that, but it highlights, I think, the real sense in which...

00:30:49 Will Rossiter

you do need local institutions and actors who are enabled, empowered in some way and are able to access resources, but you also need a policy environment that is conducive and amenable to supporting those efforts.

00:31:01 Will Rossiter

You know, it's hard to have one without the other.

00:31:03 Will Rossiter

You do need those ingredients.

00:31:06 Will Rossiter

But coming back to where we started with sort of place-based policy making, you know, I would argue that, you know, putting place at the heart of national policy.

00:31:14 Will Rossiter

Is the only way you develop effective national policy because implementation is always local.

00:31:19 Will Rossiter

Implementation happens in communities, happens in places up and down the country.

00:31:24 Will Rossiter

If you don't understand, you know, the economic, the social, institutional context of implementation

00:31:30 Will Rossiter

and delivery, it is very hard at the national level to develop good policy.

00:31:34 Will Rossiter

And too frequently, actually, that's what we've seen.

00:31:36 Will Rossiter

We've seen national policy develop that is divorced from an understanding of the levers, the mechanisms, the realities of implementation on the ground.

00:31:45 Will Rossiter

You know, that is why I would argue you get better national policy when place is at its heart.

00:31:50 Will Rossiter

And that is also why I'm very enthusiastic and optimistic about some of the things we've been hearing from Andy Burnham

00:31:56 Will Rossiter

in recent weeks. Because you do sense a repositioning, pretty fundamental of place at the heart of policymaking.

00:32:04 Will Rossiter

That is evident in the creation of No. 10 North.

00:32:08 Will Rossiter

I'd like to see it go much further.

00:32:09 Will Rossiter

I recently advocated for the regionalisation of the Department for Transport.

00:32:13 Will Rossiter

That was partly because I was angry about those transport schemes being axed.

00:32:17 Will Rossiter

But actually, would those decisions have been taken, had responsibility lay with a regional.

00:32:24 Nicola Headlam

It's not even just that, Will.

00:32:26 Nicola Headlam

It's if people regularly used those bottlenecks, would they have made the same decision?

00:32:31 Nicola Headlam

I've been doing some work recently on same period as losing 200,000 people out of local government.

00:32:36 Nicola Headlam

We've added 1 1/2,150,000 civil servants.

00:32:40 Nicola Headlam

It's not that people aren't, it's that

00:32:43 Nicola Headlam

what is seen as salient about a place?

00:32:45 Nicola Headlam

If a place is just somewhere to get out of on a fast train, then you're not going to make decisions that are sensitive to that place.

00:32:52 Nicola Headlam

And one of the things that I do have a lot of time for certainly was you should be able to stay local but go far.

00:32:58 Nicola Headlam

And that was the kind of route of that kind of strand of like localist thinking that went into that sort of strand of it ended up as kind of leveling up.

00:33:05 Nicola Headlam

And I think that that's part of it is

00:33:07 Nicola Headlam

for too long, people that have come from the East Midlands but were on their way to London for an illustrious career. View it very differently than people that are rooted there.

00:33:18 Nicola Headlam

And as you say, you've worked on it most of your career.

00:33:21 Will Rossiter

I think that's right.

00:33:22 Will Rossiter

There's something really important, if you like, about the sort of tacit knowledge of place, and as an ingredient actually in policy making.

00:33:28 Will Rossiter

I believe this very firmly.

00:33:29 Will Rossiter

I mean, you might, I mean, Peter Hall had a lovely, you know, Doyenne of regional studies had a lovely phrase.

00:33:34 Will Rossiter

He talked about the planning imagination.

00:33:36 Will Rossiter

You know, there is something about, you know, understanding a place.

00:33:40 Will Rossiter

I call it perhaps a spatial understanding or imagination that is really central to economic development.

00:33:47 Will Rossiter

That kind of knowledge is hard won, easily lost, but universally under-recognised as a necessary ingredient in policymaking.

00:33:57 Will Rossiter

So I absolutely welcome Number 10 North as a move in that direction, just as I welcome the Treasury's economic campus in Darlington.

00:34:06 Will Rossiter

These things are good.

00:34:08 Will Rossiter

We need to get civil servants out of Whitehall.

00:34:12 Will Rossiter

Anybody who's worked at any time in a regional organisation would recognise the difficulty of getting, especially senior civil servants, out of London to get involved in stuff to experience things.

00:34:22 Will Rossiter

One can argue, actually, there's a case for making it mandatory.

00:34:27 Will Rossiter

Perhaps senior civil servants should have to spend one year in four based in a region.

00:34:32 Will Rossiter

Wouldn't that be interesting?

00:34:34 Nicola Headlam

When you mentioned Japan earlier on, there was some work done in part of the LPIP, Abi Taylor looking at secondments in Japan.

00:34:40 Nicola Headlam

And in some prefectures, you have to spend one year in four out of the centre.

00:34:47 Will Rossiter

What a great concept.

00:34:48 Will Rossiter

Why don't we?

00:34:49 Will Rossiter

Why don't we require that of our civil servants?

00:34:51 Will Rossiter

They would find themselves better able to make good policy if they had that experience of local and regional working, I would argue.

00:35:05 Nicola Headlam

This points towards one of the real problems in subnational economic development, which is often people who are kind of the worst friends of good subnational decision making are people who have relocated and become metropolitan.

00:35:22 Nicola Headlam

As a result, it almost matters more to them, their sort of almost social mobility out of areas and the area they have in their head, talking about some very specific examples of people that I work with who couldn't understand that it's all part of the same functioning.

00:35:37 Nicola Headlam

Most of the reason why the economy is London centric is that mentality that it's not possible to build meaningful, good, successful lives in the provinces.

00:35:48 Will Rossiter

I studied in London

00:35:49 Will Rossiter

and I've been heading north.

00:35:51 Nicola Headlam

Ever since.

00:35:51 Will Rossiter

Ever since.

00:35:52 Will Rossiter

You may have noticed what I did there.

00:35:54 Will Rossiter

It's a nice link to my summer reading, which was Head North by Burnham and Rotheram

00:35:57 Nicola Headlam

Yes, very good.

00:36:00 Will Rossiter

But you know, that is a very powerful,

00:36:03 Will Rossiter

powerful narration of that sense, isn't it, of how central government deals with the regions and localities and has done over a very long time period.

00:36:12 Will Rossiter

I think also in there is a powerful critique of some of the decision making associated with the Green Book, although I have always felt the issue is less with the Green Book and its principles, which are pretty sound, than the context of its use and the way it's used.

00:36:28 Will Rossiter

Burnham and Rotherham in that book make a strong critique.

00:36:31 Will Rossiter

Similar critique comes from a more academic background.

00:36:34 Will Rossiter

If you recall that great paper by Dan Coyle and Marianne Sensier, the Imperial Treasury, you know, arguing particularly in relation to transport investment, going back to our discussion of roads in the East Midlands, you know, there's an inbuilt bias towards investing in projects in London and the South East simply because of inflated asset prices compared to pretty well anywhere else.

00:36:58 Nicola Headlam

Having encouraged northern taxpayers to go and slash the seats of the Elizabeth line on the basis that this is what we should have had connecting the whole North over the same period.

00:37:05 Nicola Headlam

I'm very much persuaded by the Imperial Treasury argument.

00:37:08 Nicola Headlam

Another thing I was thinking about actually, when I was looking through your bio, it was showing that you were doing work with senior fire officers.

00:37:14 Nicola Headlam

Do you still do that work?

00:37:15 Will Rossiter

I do. Yeah, I do.

00:37:16 Will Rossiter

I'm mentoring at the moment a member of the senior leadership team at Nottinghamshire Service.

00:37:21 Will Rossiter

I have no particular expertise in pouring wet stuff on hot stuff. That's not my thing at all.

00:37:25 Will Rossiter

But I've been doing some work around use of local and regional socioeconomic data to inform decision making, particularly in relation to stuff like fire prevention, community outreach, that sort of thing.

00:37:36 Will Rossiter

So interesting work, very interesting organisation though, the fire service, in the sense that what they offer on a very professionalised basis is skilled manual labour.

00:37:45 Will Rossiter

And in the context of a de-industrialising region, like these Midlands, organisations that do that are really quite unusual, quite unique.

00:37:54 Will Rossiter

It is still the case in the fire service, and this is not just the case in Nottinghamshire, but in other fire services.

00:38:01 Will Rossiter

It's possible to join a fire service at 18 as an apprentice firefighter and end up as the chief.

00:38:06 Will Rossiter

There are not many places where that is still genuinely the case.

00:38:11 Will Rossiter

They stand out, and I think they stand out partly because of the quality of employment,

00:38:17 Will Rossiter

that they offer to, yes, graduates, but also non-graduates.

00:38:20 Will Rossiter

And for me, that goes to the heart of the challenge of inclusive growth, because for me, it is about generating quality, accessible employment at scale.

00:38:32 Will Rossiter

That doesn't depend on having a degree.

00:38:33 Nicola Headlam

“Good growth in every postcode!”.

00:38:35 Nicola Headlam

I was thinking about that because it was my experience of having worked in partnership context, the chief fire officer, particularly in neighborhood renewal kind of era, they were always so good and so front-footed and were very, very happy in that era.

00:38:49 Nicola Headlam

to be match funding everything on the basis that fire prevention is good, economic development is, And I've been thinking a lot about that this summer with this wildfires and all the rest of it and how a lot of the partnership infrastructure that we used to kind of rely on for resilience.

00:39:04 Will Rossiter

But there's also a lesson there for academics because, I mean, in a sense, you know, I had no particular reason to be working with the fire service.

00:39:11 Will Rossiter

I certainly wouldn't claim any expertise in fighting fires, absolutely not.

00:39:15 Will Rossiter

But, you know, somebody approached me asking for a bit of advice around using local

00:39:19 Will Rossiter

socioeconomic data, granular data, you know, so I got engaged, did some project work for them, and it's led to other things, but being open, you know, to those kind of conversations

00:39:29 Will Rossiter

and opportunities are really important in terms of, as an academic, keeping you in touch with real life, keeping you in touch with the sort of problems and concerns of real organisations in places.

00:39:40 Will Rossiter

I would say the same thing about work I've been doing with a local primary school in the Meadows, one of Nottingham's more deprived neighborhoods.

00:39:47 Will Rossiter

But that engagement with Welbeck Primary School has really changed how I understand some of the problems I've been concerned about in the city of Nottingham for pretty much as long as I've worked here.

00:39:58 Will Rossiter

As long as I've worked here, I've been aware that we had this challenge, if you like, that if you look at outcome measures of performance for the local economy, it doesn't actually look that bad.

00:40:07 Will Rossiter

Look at the economic standing, though. of local people and we see a very different picture.

00:40:13 Will Rossiter

We see in Nottingham the third lowest level of gross disposal household income per capita in the entire UK.

00:40:21 Will Rossiter

But that should be the case in Nottingham, I find shocking, absolutely shocking really, but it is the case and it points to this disconnect.

00:40:28 Will Rossiter

A disconnect between too many local residents and the economic opportunities on their doorstep.

00:40:35 Will Rossiter

What's interesting about the work I've been doing with the school, some of the insights that I take from that marvelous play by James Graham, Punch, we talked about previously, is really to do with what that reveals about the challenges faced by young people growing up in places like Nottingham, the life chances available to them, and just how early

00:40:53 Will Rossiter

one needs to intervene if you're going to improve those life chances.

00:40:57 Will Rossiter

Particularly concerned in Nottingham at transitions in education, particularly from primary to secondary.

00:41:04 Will Rossiter

This is something I've been completely unaware of until I worked with this particular school.

00:41:08 Will Rossiter

And yet it seems to me that in so many ways, if you get that transition, you know, age 11 wrong,

00:41:14 Will Rossiter

you're so much more likely to end up as a young person who is NEET, for instance. So much more likely to become excluded permanently from school to be in alternative provision, warehoused, you know, rather than taught in a mainstream school.

00:41:28 Will Rossiter

A lot of these problems compound, but if we want to do something

00:41:32 Will Rossiter

about the inclusive growth thing, we've really got to unpick some of the perhaps path dependencies that lead to some of these negative outcomes and be prepared to invest in creative ways early, which is really the focus of that work with Welbeck.

00:41:46 Will Rossiter

Much needed.

00:41:47 Nicola Headlam

I'm going to put in the show notes the link to the story of the play Punch because it is fascinating.

00:41:53 Will Rossiter

That is really insightful because of

00:41:56 Will Rossiter

its portrayal for me I mean yes there's a tremendous story about restorative justice and its value on a human level it's an incredibly emotional story so powerful and James Graham working with Jacob Dunn has done a phenomenal job to kind of present that in the form of a play. It's so impactful. I believe there are still opportunities to see it if not now coming up so if people get the chance if it visits a regional theatre near you do go because it's absolutely stunning but within that is a really interesting portrayal of

00:42:26 Will Rossiter

of the life chances available really to a young person coming out of the meadows with no or low qualifications.

00:42:34 Will Rossiter

And what opportunities does he describe?

00:42:36 Will Rossiter

I mean, Jacob Dunn in his book described stints working, picking and packing in the warehouse at Boots.

00:42:42 Will Rossiter

And various other forms of nefarious income generation, you might say it's not a positive picture.

00:42:47 Will Rossiter

There's also a lovely line in there that kind of sums up the challenge of deindustrialisation.

00:42:53 Will Rossiter

And this is delivered by Jacob's college lecturer character in the play who says, “We used to make stuff, now we just move it about.”

00:43:03 Will Rossiter

In one line, you know, that tells you pretty much all you need to know about the transitions of Nottingham's economy and the nature of the challenge that we face, essentially.

00:43:11 Will Rossiter

It is the shift to a largely service-orientated economy, you know, that's probably served graduates pretty well, actually, but has left a lot of others behind, or trapped them in relatively elementary, casualised, low-paid, low welfare, low well-being kinds of work and economic activity.

00:43:33 Will Rossiter

So it's a really interesting play.

00:43:35 Will Rossiter

And if you contrast that with another famous representation of Nottingham's labour market in literature.

00:43:41 Will Rossiter

I would highlight Alan Salito's Saturday Night, Sunday Morning, that fantastic tale of Arthur Seaton and his life on the production line at Raleigh.

00:43:51 Will Rossiter

He described a labour market in which if the gaffer got on your back, you could tell him where to go, walk around the corner and have a good job next morning kind of thing.

00:44:00 Will Rossiter

That was the labour market of the 1950s, early 60s in Nottingham to a tee, very different environment.

00:44:08 Will Rossiter

But the people, I mean, it's not to say we shouldn't over-romanticise that work.

00:44:11 Will Rossiter

It's hard work on the production line, sealed, semi-skilled, manual work, but it was possible for somebody leaving school at 14 to be doing that work, to be maintaining a household, having a social life, participating in society in a meaningful sense.

00:44:28 Will Rossiter

I don't think we can say that about too much employment in our current economy.

00:44:34 Nicola Headlam

I really could talk to you all day, but I need to move on to the last pair of questions.

00:44:40 Nicola Headlam

Can you think of a specific person who's a really good broker?

00:44:44 Nicola Headlam

And then coupled with that, can you think of a really good place leader?

00:44:48 Nicola Headlam

I should say that essentially, obviously the two things go together like Lego bricks, however you kind of conceptualise, but you've clearly met everyone that has come through the East Midlands.

00:44:58 Nicola Headlam

Can you think of a specific good broker?

00:45:01 Will Rossiter

There's a few that come to mind.

00:45:03 Will Rossiter

Locally, there's been some really interesting initiatives.

00:45:08 Will Rossiter

I mean, at NTU, the Nottingham Civic Exchange, led by Rich Pickford, really nice example of brokerage that I'm very keen to kind of support.

00:45:17 Will Rossiter

You know, there's one local example.

00:45:19 Will Rossiter

But somebody who really comes to mind in that brokerage role, particularly straddling academic and policy worlds, our very own Anne Green, I would say.

00:45:26 Will Rossiter

Actually, as an academic who I have worked with over a long period of time, who is absolutely on that interface between high-quality academic research and policy.

00:45:38 Will Rossiter

She's one of the few academics who I see as being equally comfortable on either side of that divide, as capable of publishing in top flight academic journals as she is interacting with senior policymakers.

00:45:52 Will Rossiter

You know, the best example I can think of and somebody I'm very keen to carry on working with.

00:45:56 Nicola Headlam

I'll tell her.

00:45:57 Nicola Headlam

And a place leader?

00:45:59 Nicola Headlam

As you said, the quality of decision making relies on the quality of the evidence base.

00:46:04 Nicola Headlam

And so imagine we've got somebody of Anne’s caliber as the broker they need to connect with, as we've talked about, the institutions that are thick or thin in different places.

00:46:14 Nicola Headlam

So can you think of a good place leader that would be good to dock a good broker into?

00:46:18 Will Rossiter

Maybe that's a bit more challenging and a bit more political.

00:46:23 Will Rossiter

I mean, I'm struck by the quality of place leadership.

00:46:27 Will Rossiter

I see as associated with Manchester actually over the long term.

00:46:30 Will Rossiter

And I'm not just talking about Andy Burnham.

00:46:32 Will Rossiter

I think Bernstein, that story is important.

00:46:36 Will Rossiter

It's not about any one of those.

00:46:38 Will Rossiter

It's the fact that you have had, if you like, strong and effective place leadership in Manchester over an extended period of time.

00:46:46 Will Rossiter

Now they haven't all been active throughout that period, but collectively,

00:46:51 Will Rossiter

we're looking at a place there that has been characterised by strong place leadership and that's what we need.

00:46:57 Will Rossiter

I think elsewhere, I've probably seen it as being a bit more patchy, if I'm honest, and a bit more inconsistent.

00:47:02 Will Rossiter

But that again points to the importance of institutional capacity because strong institutions, I suspect, beget effective place leaders and vice versa.

00:47:11 Nicola Headlam

Okay, Manchester men in box.

00:47:21 Nicola Headlam

I'm going to let you have a wave of my place-based innovation magic wand.

00:47:26 Nicola Headlam

Careful with it. Itcan grant you a wish.

00:47:28 Nicola Headlam

You have absolute power to do one of these things, but you must use your powers to make a tangible change to the East Midlands.

00:47:34 Nicola Headlam

Your change will be specific, measurable, actionable, recordable and transferable, SMART.

00:47:39 Nicola Headlam

SMART magic is hard to get hold of at the moment and is subject to a 20% reducing multi-year budget settlement.

00:47:44 Nicola Headlam

You won't be surprised about that.

00:47:46 Nicola Headlam

You may have, Will Rossiter, £10 million in a project fund.

00:47:50 Nicola Headlam

Half an hour with the cabinet and a slide deck, and Anne Green if you want.

00:47:54 Nicola Headlam

Editorial control of the front page of a tabloid.

00:47:57 Nicola Headlam

A clause to insert into a bill, and I'm being extra generous with the new government.

00:48:01 Nicola Headlam

You can have a whole act, a whole bill to go into the King's Speech.

00:48:06 Nicola Headlam

You can have something to go viral on the socials, God forbid, TikTok, etc.

00:48:11 Nicola Headlam

You can have anyone in the world as an advocate for the East Midlands, or you can have the answer to something that's bothered you forever.

00:48:18 Nicola Headlam

Which would you like?

00:48:20 Will Rossiter

With such power, what can I do? I'm a little torn actually.

00:48:24 Will Rossiter

On the one hand, I'm quite tempted to suggest to advocate for a right to analogue in terms of public service provision, because I perceive actually both in the commercial sector, the private sector and the public sector, a real tendency to unthinking exclusion.

00:48:41 Will Rossiter

On a digital basis that is hugely problematic and is denying people the ability to access services.

00:48:47 Will Rossiter

So a right to analogue could be a bit of legislation.

00:48:52 Will Rossiter

My other candidate maybe is a bit more technical, and that stems from the work I've been doing with this local school, and that is I've become increasingly concerned about the way in which the educational sufficiency test is assessed and acted on by local educational authorities and government.

00:49:11 Will Rossiter

I think the sufficiency test is far too focused on numbers at a local authority level, not enough focused on the extent to which community needs are being met.

00:49:23 Will Rossiter

And I perceive very significant failures at that level in educational provision in my area, but also elsewhere.

00:49:29 Will Rossiter

So I probably am leaning that way on the basis that it's one of the things one could do that is systemic, structural, but long term could

00:49:39 Will Rossiter

make a difference to things like the NEET crisis we're currently facing with more than a million young people not in employment, education or training.

00:49:48 Will Rossiter

Some of the reasons for that are to do with decision making in education.

00:49:52 Will Rossiter

And that is one lever that I'd like to see pushed.

00:49:55 Will Rossiter

Sadly, I don't think the department for education is capable.

00:49:58 Nicola Headlam

To be honest, and this is a whole nother podcast.

00:50:01 Nicola Headlam

What we haven't had in terms of rolling back the Gove reforms, the governance of, I mean, academisation has been a disaster.

00:50:08 Nicola Headlam

The Educational Research Foundation have proved that the only different variable in deprived places is teacher turnover because the teaching classes have absolutely been mullered.

00:50:19 Nicola Headlam

One thing that's my only concern about the Burnham regime is that education, education, education has been missed so far.

00:50:26 Nicola Headlam

And it didn't get going under Starmer either. And the job is enormous.

00:50:31 Nicola Headlam

As you said, you share your office with a teacher.

00:50:33 Nicola Headlam

I'm presuming that is a member of your family.

00:50:35 Nicola Headlam

My sister's taught English in a deprived coastal area, trying to participate in getting kids in comprehensive schools, which are being starved of resources, unacademised through, it's just been hellish.

00:50:47 Will Rossiter

Now, academisation, I mean, it's been anti-democratic.

00:50:50 Will Rossiter

It's stimulated, it's prevented local education authorities

00:50:56 Will Rossiter

being able to plan and coordinate education in their patch, quite obviously.

00:50:59 Will Rossiter

I couldn't agree more.

00:51:00 Nicola Headlam

So I think my place-based magic one for the day would be roll back academisation, have a curriculum review.

00:51:06 Nicola Headlam

Because also the irony is that some of those reforms around wanting people to be able to pontificate at high table or whatever he was thinking of was massively detrimental to kids being prepared for work.

00:51:18 Will Rossiter

And think about the mental health impact of everything being on the final exam.

00:51:23 Will Rossiter

If we wanted to create an education system that was going to maximise the stress on our children, it would look like the Gove reforms.

00:51:31 Will Rossiter

I think that is just unconscionable and we are not recognising the role of those education policy decisions in creating

00:51:42 Will Rossiter

youth mental health crisis, I find very surprising, really.

00:51:45 Nicola Headlam

Thank you so much for joining us, Will.

00:51:46 Nicola Headlam

We set out to mine insights from experts, that was you, and you performed that role absolutely brilliantly.

00:51:52 Nicola Headlam

We've been right around the world.

00:51:53 Nicola Headlam

We've been through about 300 years of economic history, fantastic.

00:51:57 Nicola Headlam

Real world case studies, practical tips, career advice, God help us all, and to spotlight some solutions as well as wave the place-based innovation magic wand, and we have. Thank you.

00:52:07 Will Rossiter

Thank you.