



## Building Back Better: Learning from Lockdown

### Speakers

**Zoë Billingham,**  
Head of Policy,  
Centre for Progressive Policy

**Caroline Bostock,**  
Head of Business Development,  
Maximus UK

**Helen Dias,**  
Director of Strategic Planning,  
Atkins

**Jonathan Guest,**  
Senior Economic Policy Manager,  
South Yorkshire Mayoral  
Combined Authority

**John Hanratty,**  
CMS Cameron McKenna Nabarro  
Olswang LLP  
(Chair and Facilitator)

**Ithfaq Hussain,**  
Business Development Manager,  
Remploy

*In July 2021 the BSA, in collaboration with CMS Cameron McKenna Nabarro Olswang LLP, organised the latest regionally-focused online seminar on lessons from the lockdown period for achieving inclusive and sustainable growth in future. The focus of the discussion was on Yorkshire.*

*Local and devolved government leaders across Yorkshire had promised to unleash the region's potential; deliver recovery and renewal after the pandemic; and make sure that the national Levelling Up agenda was delivered for the people, businesses and communities of Yorkshire.*

*The seminar looked at what this meant for the public sector across the region, for place leadership, and for private and VCSE organisations delivering service and infrastructure projects.*

John Hanratty opened by setting the context for the discussion. He believed Yorkshire was in a prime position to deliver on Building Back Better and levelling up. There was a sense of optimism in the region about the future.

Zoë Billingham was the first speaker.

Zoë outlined the work of the Centre for Progressive Policy and the Inclusive Growth Network, with reference to national developments and emerging themes.

Mayors had played an important role in responding to the pandemic, demonstrating the importance of local leaders.

Emerging lessons on place-based leadership included the importance of cross-sector structures for effective communication; the role played by local business leadership and the growing expectations being placed on business to contribute to shared objectives; and the ongoing importance of collaboration between place leaders.

Jonathan Guest developed these themes with a focus on Yorkshire, and South Yorkshire in particular. Jon set out the backdrop of the last 18 months, and the stark differences that had emerged across the UK, between different sectors, and also within particular regions. All had implications for the Building Back Better agenda.

Skills and education had been especially badly affected, as had young people in general. The wider economic impacts of the pandemic had varied hugely by place. South Yorkshire had had fewer people able to work from home, and many of the towns had had more people returning to their urban centres than had bigger cities. Towns and village centres were more resilient than city and principal town centres during the pandemic, partly due to 'Zoom shock', with less footfall in the latter.

South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority had drawn up a Renewal Action Plan. There was an opportunity to reset and rebuild, especially around social value, in terms of procurement and grants across a wide range of institutions; pathways for people to progress their careers; and digital.

Helen Dias was the first to provide a specifically private sector perspective. Helen focused in particular on strategic planning: what we need to build, where and why, and how to make those choices. The key question was what was meant by good growth; how we live, work and play was changing over the longer term.

Growth needed to be inclusive and sustainable but also needed to be adaptable and flexible as requirements were continuing to evolve. There were ongoing challenges not only due to Net Zero but also security requirements in areas like food, water and energy.

Yorkshire was well placed to deliver future growth which met those challenges, with action grounded on good data and with social, environmental and economic value built in from the start - with a shared vision between people, groups and sectors. That required inclusive meaningful engagement.

Growth needed to be outcome-driven, with outcomes considered at the earliest stages, before the project definition - 'Left of Zero'. This required early genuine partnership working in order to identify shared outcomes.

The three key considerations were people, process and technology. Helen applied these considerations to the theme of low carbon infrastructure, with a case study of how an outcomes-based vision was developed at a spatial, regional and local level in Yorkshire. It was strategic considerations that lay behind the Blueprint for the North and many of the plans of individual combined authorities. The construction Playbook also provided the tools required.

John drew out key themes so far, including collaboration between the sectors, and opened a discussion.

One issue raised was the ability of people from a wider variety of locations now being able to access jobs which were once only available in city centres. People could access jobs while staying local. There were real opportunities here as well as challenges. It was thought that, to take full advantage of this, different areas had to collaborate rather than compete. This built once again on the theme of collaboration between areas, which lay at the heart of the Blueprint of the North. This strategic spatial vision was key, so every area could play to its strengths.

The second session then focused on the theme of partnership working. Caroline Bostock and Ithfaq Hussein led the discussion.

Caroline highlighted the weaknesses in the UK labour market, highlighted by the pandemic, and the adverse impacts on particular people groups, sectors, and areas. There were clear lessons in terms of particular regions, skills, youth employment, vulnerable groups, and digital.

Ithfaq then looked at how partnership, social value and community impact were all being embedded in the Restart programme in west and south Yorkshire and D2N2, being delivered through a collaborative approach by Remploy / Maximus. This was divided into four areas of partnership: local engagement and alignment with local and devolved government priorities; an Economic Recovery Forum; the Community Partnership Network, involving a wide variety of organisations to provide wrap-around support; and social value including through a local impact fund. Engagement with local SMEs and VCSE organisations was central to this approach and to building back better.

There was then further discussion of how employment had been focused on the key cities, but that remote working may enable a wider group to access these jobs. The Restart programme itself allowed coverage over a wider region, especially with many employment support services moving online and being accessed by more people. There was much more openness now to innovation, both through digital delivery and other measures.

Discussion also covered the 'any job' versus 'good job' priority. There was a desire amongst place leaders to create better opportunities but also to ensure everyone had access to those opportunities. Embedding skills was part of this. It was also important to listen to local businesses, so upskilling could be linked with sectors with jobs available; construction was given as an example of such a sector.

There was general support for the changes taking place in the public procurement space and the emphasis on social value and on good employment charters. However, it was also thought that social value was not a silver bullet; what was required was widespread culture change.

John Hanratty drew out some of the themes from the discussion, and in particular once again the importance of engagement and collaboration between sectors.

This was the third regional BSA discussion on Building Back Better, and further discussions would be organised in other regions which would build on these lessons.