

Delivering Productive Places: The contribution of the built environment to productivity

On Wednesday 31st October [ResPublica](#) and [WSP](#) hosted a panel discussion in Parliament to launch WSP's [Productive Places paper](#) and debate its findings. The report outlines how places that are designed and delivered with Space, Health, Accessibility, Resilience and Engagement (WSP's SHARE approach) in mind can boost UK's productivity. Building on the Industrial Strategy at a national level, WSP put forth the idea that the local dimension to improving UK productivity requires a greater focus on the role of the built environment and that Local Industrial Strategies offer a prime opportunity to embed a productivity culture across the planning, implementation, and use of new local developments, strategies, and projects

Joining the panel were: **Larry Elliott**, Economics Editor, The Guardian (Chair); **Clive Betts MP**, Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee; **Cllr Sue Murphy**, Deputy Leader of Manchester City Council; **Ian Liddell**, Managing Director, Planning and Advisory, WSP in the UK; **Jim Hubbard**, Head of Regional Policy, CBI; **Tom Bousfield**, Senior Economic Advisor, National Infrastructure Commission and **Baroness Neville-Rolfe**, Co-Chair of the Conservatives Energising our Economy Policy Taskforce.

Key Takeaways

- Productive Places is a welcome contribution to the productivity debate as it is the first paper for some time to make an explicit link between place, planning and productivity. Considering the role of place and the built environment can make a real difference to solving the UK's productivity issues.
- It is important to consider the social determinants of health and how the design of buildings can make an impact. For instance, projects including cycling and green community places reduce noise and pollution and improve wellbeing. Healthier employees are more productive.
- The planning system needs to be more adaptable and if it is working well it should provide certainty to investors to make decisions. There is a need for simple planning process and building regulations that can be introduced at speed.
- Mixed use development is key to making places attractive for highly skilled people. A planning system that is efficient that preserves mixed land use is required in part because flexibility of place is important in supporting women's ability to work productively.
- Engagement and clear visions are key when developing plans to tackle productivity. A cohesive vision on the industrial strategy is needed from all cabinet ministers across all government departments. There needs to be greater collaboration between businesses and central government on the industrial strategy.
- Local and combined authorities require greater devolved powers and should create a clear vision when developing local industrial strategies and open-up the consultation process to the public.
- How transport is run and where funding decisions are made is important. Intracity connectivity needs to be improved as it will lead to productivity gains. Greater investment in how local transport connects into intercity links would allow communities to be connected to places with a higher quality of built environment.
- Transport alone is not a silver bullet in improving productivity, education and adult skills have to be part of the solution too.
- Major infrastructure and individual buildings need to be part of good placemaking, and design needs to be incorporated into the planning process from the very beginning. For example, the National Infrastructure Commission have said that nationally significant infrastructure projects should have a board level design champion and use a design panel to maximise the benefits the infrastructure will bring.
- The UK has a real productivity problem which isn't unique to one part of the country. It is not a straight regional divide and occurs within sectors and regions where a lot of high and low productivity areas exist.
- London is 50% more productive than our regional cities, 75% in the case of some Northern cities and how to bridge this enormous gap is key when thinking about how to address the productivity challenge.
- Councils need long term stability of funding to properly make decisions about housing, transport and planning and to be able to work with the private sector as equal and meaningful partners. A concern however is whether local authorities have the capacity to develop good local plans.