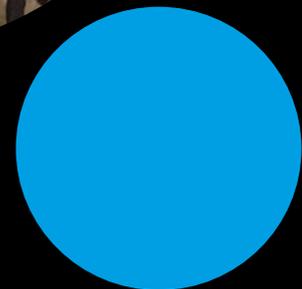
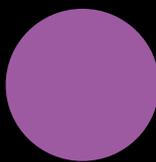


# Civil Society Futures.

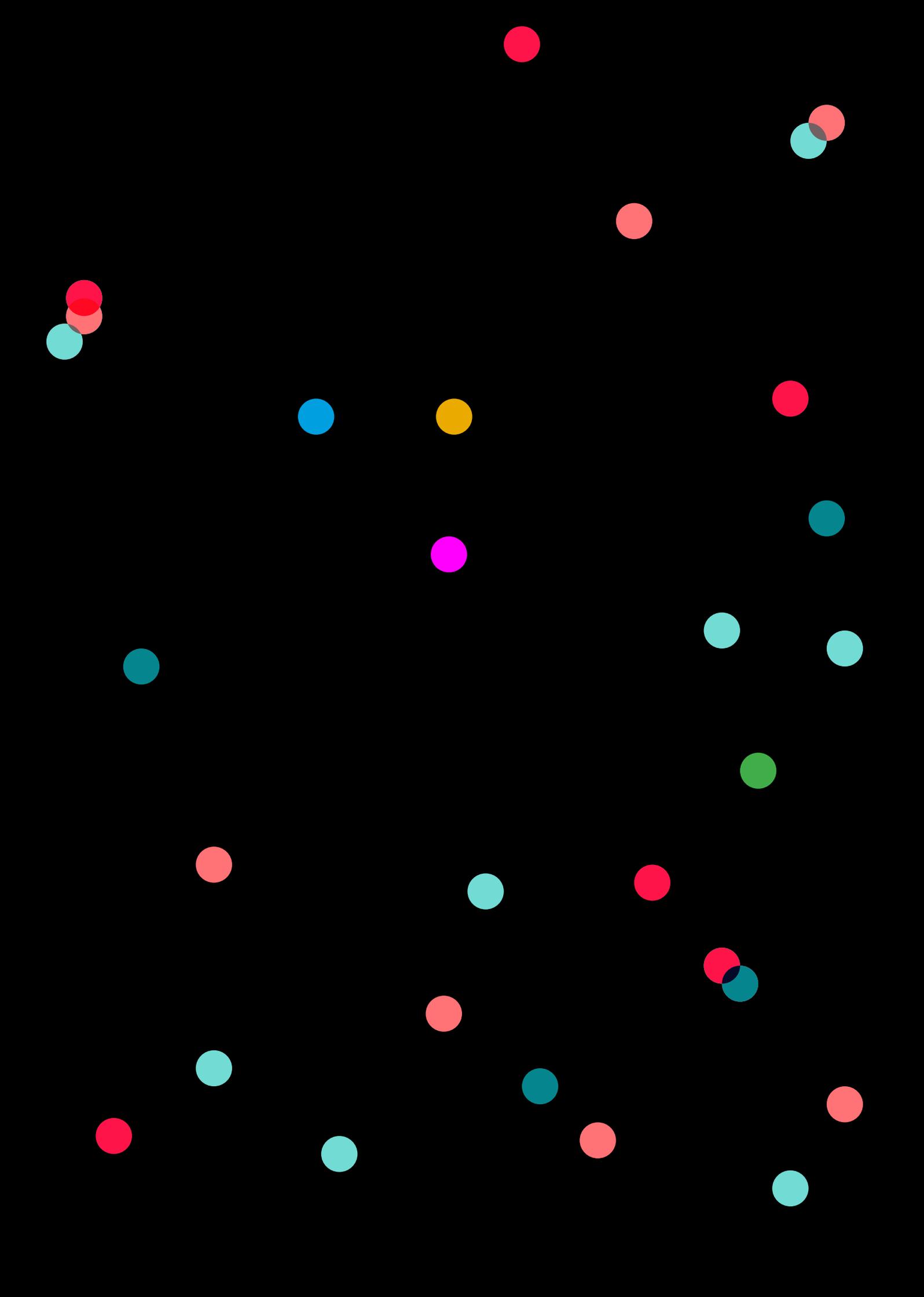
The independent inquiry



**Interim Research Report:  
End of Year 1**

**April 2018**

Work in Progress



# Interim Research Report

## End of Year 1

**This document is shared as a work in progress.**

**The Inquiry continues for the remainder of 2018.** There are still some months to go when more research, more workshops, more conferences, more events are taking place that will increase our understanding and continue

to add meaning, to challenge what we think we are finding and test out our ideas. So, this really is work in progress, an open invitation for you to tell us where you think we might be on to something or are just plain wrong.

If you have a perspective to share — do get in touch: [info@civilsocietyfutures.org](mailto:info@civilsocietyfutures.org)

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# Civil Society Futures so far.

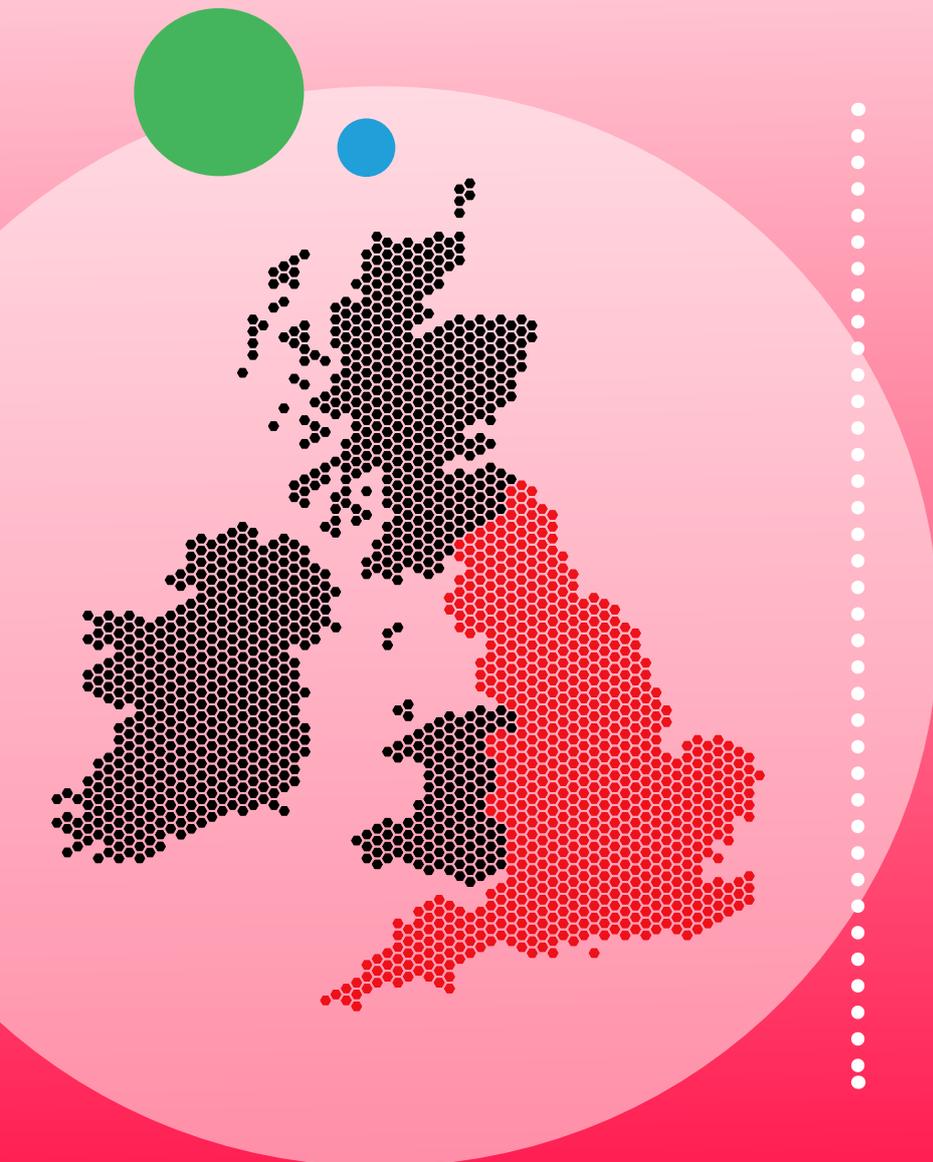


We are now at the end of the first year of the **Inquiry**. This report is a reflection of the huge amount of data that we have collected so far and how we are beginning to make sense of it all.

It is an attempt to relay what we have been doing and to begin to explain what it might mean. It draws on the daily work the inquiry team have been involved in through the very many meetings, conferences, workshops, conversations, submissions of evidence, participatory action research, interviews and the expertise of the

inquiry panel, in an attempt to reach across the vast array of activity that civil society encompasses, consider the futures that may lie ahead and how civil society can best prepare for them.

In our efforts to provide the means for as broad a range of people and groups to contribute to the inquiry and come together to articulate their own visions of the future, we have heard from over 1,500 people across the length and breadth of England.



We've heard from over **1,500** people



Community workshops in **9** places from Sunderland to Penzance



**64** open source conversations



**57** written submissions



**80+** blogs



**100s** of meetings

See who we've heard from:  
[civilsocietyfutures.org/where](http://civilsocietyfutures.org/where)  
 Learn more about our approach:  
[civilsocietyfutures.org/approach](http://civilsocietyfutures.org/approach)

# A note on...

## inquiry principles

**Civil Society Futures is guided by a set of principles and ways of working.** The report embodies the principles the inquiry is working to by:

- **Action-oriented:** drawing upon new ideas from civil society actors while being rooted in rigorous evidence.
- **A process that creates values:** we have taken the premise of participatory action research to try and work with rather than on civil society.
- **Sustainability driven:** through addressing long term social and environmental trends we are trying to see how civil society can develop in sustainable forms for sustainable ends.
- **Systemic:** by seeking to understand the social, political, economic, environmental and technological factors that provide the context in which civil society functions, we are developing complex, systemic insights into how power works within civil society and around it.
- **Iterative and open:** by accepting there is no single, definitive answer to the many challenges civil society face and embracing a

range of types of knowledge and experience we are treating this report as emergent findings that may well change over the coming months.

- **People-centred:** many people who have contributed to the inquiry have told us how much they value face to face conversations as a chance to develop relationships and seek deeper forms of understanding. We have tried to do this as much as possible reaching out across England from Newcastle to Penzance.
- **Fun:** civil society is often the place where people deal with the hard issues that society faces – increases in loneliness, problems with mental health, debt, unaffordable housing to name just a few. But it is also the place where people find joy and purpose. We have realised just how important it is to seek out the joy and remember to have fun - not as a glib aside for a civil society often operating at the hardest edges of life or a hard-stretched team working on the inquiry but as a fundamental part of human flourishing.

# What we have done so far

## Phase 1: Mapping the landscape of civil society research

We have looked carefully at existing research to cover the widest range possible of literature on civil society, digital democracy, volunteering, social movements, activism and protest analysis to track the latest trends and developments across areas important to social action and empowering communities.

We took account of social, political, economic, environmental and technological trends; focusing in on issues that allowed us to take a more systemic critique of power and the possibilities for change. This [initial review of research](#) in the field has underpinned and informed our thinking throughout.

We have tried at every juncture to ensure that we are not just thinking about the nature of civil society as we find it now or how change has happened to date, but also what might be on the horizon and therefore what social transformation might look like. This report is a continuation of this starting point. It has a visionary purpose through the lens of the present.

We have also mapped and convened conversations between the work of 6 other related inquiries many of which are ongoing and include:

- [Empowered Communities in 2020](#) (Local Trust, IVAR)
- [Future of Civil Society in the North](#) (IPPR)
- [The Social Change Project](#) (Sheila McKechnie Foundation)
- [Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations](#) (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation)
- [Future of Localism](#) (Locality, Power to Change)

- [Strengthening Families and Building Community](#) (Community Resources, Faith Action)
- [Creating Confidence - Good and Bad Help](#) (Osca, Nesta)

Whilst also seeking to take account of the work of at least 4 other related inquiries:

- [Future of Doing Good](#) (Big Lottery Fund)
- [Stronger Communities](#) (Comic Relief UK)
- [Citizens' Economic Council](#) (RSA)
- [Commission on Economic Justice](#) (IPPR)

## Phase 2: Collecting evidence from the more formalised civil society actors and organisations

Our [call for evidence and contributions](#) received substantive reports from 57 people or organisations (see Appendix 2) from within civil society who told us what they thought we ought to know about.

People within civil society also responded to our [call to hold 'conversations'](#), with 64 conversations taking place since May 2017 across England (see Appendix 3) and more to come. These conversations were based on an open source toolkit inviting communities of interest, locality and practice to host dialogues on a topic important to them concerning civil society.

The invitation was met with huge energy and appetite from a wide range of people, organisations, groups and collectives including leaders in the sector and grassroots activists – all echoing the need for more opportunities and spaces for genuine dialogue and exploration.

The conversation convenors were motivated by a variety of reasons: to enable people from their own organisations to reflect and discuss how civil society is changing around them, to convene different stakeholders around a specific topic or issue, or to host an open forum for debate for any member of the public to join in.

Going forward from this phase of active listening, the Civil Society Futures team will be working with conversation hosts to identify ways in which to build on these insights and enable routes into action and change.

### **Phase 3: Community workshops (Participatory Action Research 1)**

**Key themes identified in Phase 1 have been tested and elaborated upon in community workshops.** This has involved 9 qualitative workshops (organized either by Citizens UK as partners in the inquiry, or by other civil society groups/individuals based in the locales themselves) and undertaken in sites chosen to cover a mix of geography (because we know place matters); politics (because council activity, local infrastructure and support is also important); and socio-economic factors (because poverty and inequality are persistently relevant for civil society activity).

These variables were taken from important markers for civil society (see table on following page) that emerged from the literature review in Phase 1 and continued to be flagged in Phase 2.

Alongside the workshops we undertook a basic socio-demographic mapping exercise that sourced background data to inform the workshops including key socio-economic, cultural, historical and civil society characteristics of the locales we visited.

These were given to participants in the workshops and are being refined with feedback from them. Once this feedback has been incorporated, the summary analyses from each

workshop will be available on the Civil Society Futures online hub and will continue to be developed with each return visit as the research progresses.

148 people in total were involved in these initial workshops. Participants were recruited by people active in civil society in the area. We asked for as much diversity as possible, taking account of gender, age, ethnicity, faith, social class and disability in particular. (In the event, younger people, broadly conceived as 18-30, were under-represented in the workshops and as a consequence became part of separate line of inquiry.)

From these participants 36 people volunteered to act as Community Researchers who then went on to interview other people in the locale in an attempt to bring about broader and more inclusive discussions.

In all, 50 community researcher interviews were undertaken. The community researchers are now involved in feeding back as ideas emerge.

Further focus groups and interview based research will loop back to the community researchers as part of the next phase of research (see Phase 4).

Location	Geography	Politics	Socio-economic	Notable features	Session lead
Peckham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South London</li> <li>• Urban</li> <li>• Borough of Southwark</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labour Council since 2010</li> <li>• 72.8% voted Remain in EU referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Southwark ranks 41st most deprived local authority. Peckham is amongst the most deprived parts of Southwark</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Density of civil society activity</li> <li>• Gentrification</li> <li>• Rising property prices</li> </ul>	Peckham Citizens UK
Marks Gate, Romford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater London</li> <li>• Urban</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Borough of Barking and Dagenham</li> <li>• Labour MPs</li> <li>• Labour Council</li> <li>• 62.4% voted to Leave in EU referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barking and Dagenham ranks 1st on average nationally for income deprivation; 3rd most deprived for education, skills and training and 3rd for crime</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part of the neighbourhood programme Every One Every Day initiative run through the Participatory City Foundation</li> </ul>	Marks Gate Citizens UK
Mansfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nottinghamshire market town</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turned Conservative in 2017 for first time since 1885</li> <li>• 70.9% voted Leave in EU referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post industrial: coal mining and textiles</li> <li>• Ranked 59th most deprived local authority out of 326</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre of the bitter dispute over the Miners Strike in the 1980s</li> </ul>	Mansfield Citizens UK
Shirebrook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North East Derbyshire town</li> <li>• Rural</li> <li>• District of Bolsover</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MP: 1 Labour</li> <li>• Council – 16 Labour</li> <li>• 70.3% voted Leave in EU referendum.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-industrial mining town</li> <li>• Ranked 61st most deprived local authority out of 326</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sports Direct set up directly on the site of the old mine employing hundreds of migrant workers</li> </ul>	Citizens UK
Oldham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North West town in Greater Manchester</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MPs: 2 Labour</li> <li>• Co-operative Council:</li> <li>• Labour: 46; LD: 9; Conservatives: 2; UKIP: 1; Independent: 2</li> <li>• 60.1% voted Leave in EU referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-industrial mill town</li> <li>• Ranked 51st most deprived local authority out of 326</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High minority ethnic population</li> <li>• History of protest: Luddite, Suffragette etc</li> </ul>	Inquiry panel member – Oldham Council
Newcastle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North East</li> <li>• University City</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MPs: 3 Labour</li> <li>• Newcastle City Council: Labour 55; LD 20; Independents: 3.</li> <li>• 50.7% voted to Remain in the EU referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ranked 92nd most deprived local authority out of 326</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-industrial: ship building</li> <li>• Urban regeneration</li> <li>• Arts and culture investment</li> </ul>	Newcastle Citizens UK
Sunderland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North East</li> <li>• University City</li> <li>• Coastal Community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MPs: 3 Labour</li> <li>• Council: Labour 66; Conservative 6; LD: 2. Independent: 1.</li> <li>• 61.3% voted Leave in EU referendum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ranked 92nd most deprived local authority out of 326; ranked 9th most deprived for employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post -industrial shipping</li> </ul>	Citizens UK
Epsom and Ewell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market town in Surrey in South East</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MP: Conservative</li> <li>• Epsom and Ewell Borough held by the Residents Association with 26 seats; Liberal Democrats 6 seats; Labour 3 seats; Conservatives 3.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the 20% least deprived districts in England</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proximity to Greater London with Metropolitan Green Belt under threat of development</li> </ul>	Local civil society actor
Penzance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South West</li> <li>• Rural</li> <li>• Coastal Community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MP: Conservative</li> <li>• 57% voted Leave in EU referendum</li> <li>• Penzance Town Council: Independent: 10; LDs: 8; Mebyon Kernow: 1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treneere in Penzance is the most deprived neighbourhood in Cornwall with Cornwall ranked 143 out of 326 local authority areas for deprivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High levels of second (holiday) home ownership</li> <li>• Tourism (seasonal) economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local civil society actor – Volunteer Cornwall</li> </ul>

# What we will be doing next

## Phase 4: Extending our reach

Although the workshops and interviewees could never be representative of the local population when we look closely at the people who have been involved, we can see that **there are gaps we need to fill**. In particular, young people (below 30 years of age) are largely absent. As a consequence we are undertaking more work explicitly with young people to test out some of these themes and elaborate upon some of these ideas. In the months ahead we're running several events in towns and cities around England to hear more from young people about what they want for the future and to involve them in starting to create it, culminating in a big event towards the end of the summer for young people from around the country.

Furthermore, we will be extending our reach to get to the more informal locally networked groups in civil society and in particular the new range of grassroots activist and advocacy organisations in the workshop locations that we have found are an emergent (or sometimes long-standing but 'under the radar') force in many of the areas we have been visiting.

As well as taking a closer look at organisations and groups that have changed themselves and others through their work and have dealt with complex issues of inequality, values, identity and belonging that has been shown to be so crucial in the work we have done to date.

The qualitative nature of this research means that it will never be representative of society as a whole but are trying to gain as deep and as broad a sense of the whole picture as is possible with the time and resources we have.

## Phase 5: Deepening our understanding

**In addition, as part of our participatory action approach we will be returning to the areas we visited to reflect on and refine what we think we have found working with the community researchers who have become involved in the inquiry in the research sites.**

Citizens UK will be taking forward work in three of these sites (Peckham, Newcastle and Mansfield) to pursue key themes that have emerged from the inquiry so far and to see how these groups would like to self-organize around them. This will involve 3 workshops in each of the 3 areas with a view to developing a plan for campaigning/action.

For the remaining 6 sites there will be return visits with 3 clear purposes:

1. To meet with and discuss the emerging findings with the community researchers to reflect on them and refine them and to discuss what could be done to actively build on these findings within the locales.
2. To hold an additional focus group with members coming from groups known to suffer from exclusion and discrimination in the areas we have visited. The analysis to date is suggestive of who these groups may be in each area but this will also be discussed and decided upon with the community researchers themselves. The purpose of these focus groups will be to determine current conditions and possibilities of civil society in these locales through the eyes of those who often struggle the most to be heard. We will explore further what constitutes a failure in civil society and what success would look like to them.

3. Undertake interviews with up to 3 key actors in civil society in each locale from informal locally networked groups. These groups will have an explicit political/social or environmental justice and protest dimension/mission. Interviews with key protagonists in each group will be undertaken to ascertain:

- Why they came into being
- What they are doing now
- How they are organising and mobilising (include digital media)
- What they want to do in the future
- What would success look like to them.

To complement the above up to 10 further interviews will be undertaken with key organisations that are seeking to act in an umbrella or co-ordinating role across political/social or environmental justice groups and/or do not have a place-specific identity.

# A note on...

## method

### Civil Society Futures in a Participatory Action Research Framework

**There is a familiar refrain that comes out of many of the meetings, conversations and workshops we have been having with people and organisations from civil society since the inquiry began, and it goes something like this: “we are fed up with people doing research on us, taking information from us and then nothing happening”.** Of course, there are many reasons why research may not lead to ‘something happening’ but we were very keen that an inquiry focused on the future of civil society must focus on those people involved in creating it. For these purposes we have tried to enact a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework particularly for Phase 3 of the research but also to inform other aspects of the inquiry’s work.

PAR (Whyte, 1991; Bergold and Thomas, 2012) starts from the people at the centre of the research and is oriented from the outset towards social justice and social change. As an approach to investigating and understanding what the future of civil society could look like it works with people to understand and move towards the sorts of things that they want. Importantly, PAR is not just observation. It does not seek simply to explore what is out there, take the data back to the inquiry and leave the research subject just as it was found. Rather, PAR starts out with the intention of working with the research subjects to identify what change might look like and then to help them bring that change about.

In essence PAR attempts to be a democratic approach to doing research that is both critical and collaborative. It tries to be research that is flexible enough to adapt to participants’ needs

and desires; to recognize when it might be best to alter the direction of travel, to reconsider if the research questions are really the right ones, to recast intended outcomes to best suit those who will be most affected by the process. The idea is that in the process both the researchers and the research participants learn something.

PAR also puts the researcher in the fray. Rather than working from the outside looking in PAR is about working with people to see what would make change possible. So although we used traditional methods – facilitated discussions, interviews, focus groups and workshops – these were organized around questions that allowed us to consider the distribution of power, resource and voice both within groups and the wider society. We have discussed the changing nature of civil society, how to maximize the prospects for the positive effects of civic action and considered how we may be able to share ideas to realize these opportunities.

Of course, the inquiry team is limited and can’t be everywhere at once, so we have also invited people to hold their own ‘Conversations’ events wherever they are and to feed this material back to us to stimulate as wide and as inclusive a debate as possible with civil society as the beating heart at the centre of everything we do. All of this provides us with a mass of ‘data’ that we have tried to make sense of so that we can then feed that analysis back to the places it came from and stimulate further conversation and action in an iterative, open and dynamic process.

PAR is difficult to do well. It is a challenging and at times frustrating approach that forces each of us constantly to break down boundaries and barriers to our thinking and our practices; to consider what it really means to work together; to fully take stock of all forms of knowledge

that can have a bearing on the subject and our understanding of it.

It requires an ongoing commitment from researchers and research participants, a willingness to for each of us to step outside our comfort zones and meet each other on equal terms. Inevitably, it often needs a timeframe longer than research funding will allow. This has been as true for the inquiry team as it has been for the many people struggling with this on a daily basis in civil society at large.

Whilst we have not been able to fulfill the requirements of an on-going participatory action research approach as much as we would have liked – for example, we will only be able to return to the workshop areas a maximum of 3 times to work with people there – it has nevertheless underpinned our general approach of inclusivity and a desire to strengthen civil society as we go about our work.

Data has been captured in various forms. All of the workshops and interviews were recorded, fully transcribed and analysed thematically with the help of NVIVO software. The data fed back to us from the conversations came in report form

from the groups themselves.

The inquiry team and panel met regularly to discuss and develop an emerging analytical framework across all of the data sets. In order to ensure that we were all approaching the various types of data in similar ways that could be broadly cross-referenced and tested against each other, we have drawn upon the ‘Three Horizons’ framework (Sharpe, 2013) to help categorise and contextualise the findings.

The Three Horizons approach encourages you to think about the future from the conditions of the present. It identifies current systemic patterns and the ways we can expect those to develop if everything continues on the same trajectory, and then how to imagine different and better futures from what we can locate in the present.

# Where we are starting from

## Structural factors shaping civil society

**If we are to develop a compelling and relevant vision for what civil society in England could become, we need to understand the different connected factors that are shaping civil society now and may do so over the next decade.**

Across all the work we have done in the first year of this inquiry we have been exploring what those factors might be – what makes people feel optimistic or pessimistic about the future, what the future barriers and enablers might be for different people’s and groups’ visions for the future, what trends they feel are most important for civil society to consider, respond to or proactively shape.

We have also drawn on the many relevant foresight studies that have been conducted, for example by NCVO, Nesta and the World Economic Forum.

As the diagram on the following pages shows, there is a huge range of different factors we have identified for consideration, from the impacts of climate change to the decline of high streets, the growing mental health crisis to the emergence of a ‘platform economy’. They can be clustered under seven different headings:

- Social fracturing
- Personal precarity
- Environmental pressures
- Economic restructuring
- The end of the organisation
- Changing places
- Global volatility

These will be discussed in full in a separate document later in the year. For the purposes of this interim research report, there are a number of specific trends, themes and signals of change that are particularly important to discuss, as context for the analysis that follows.

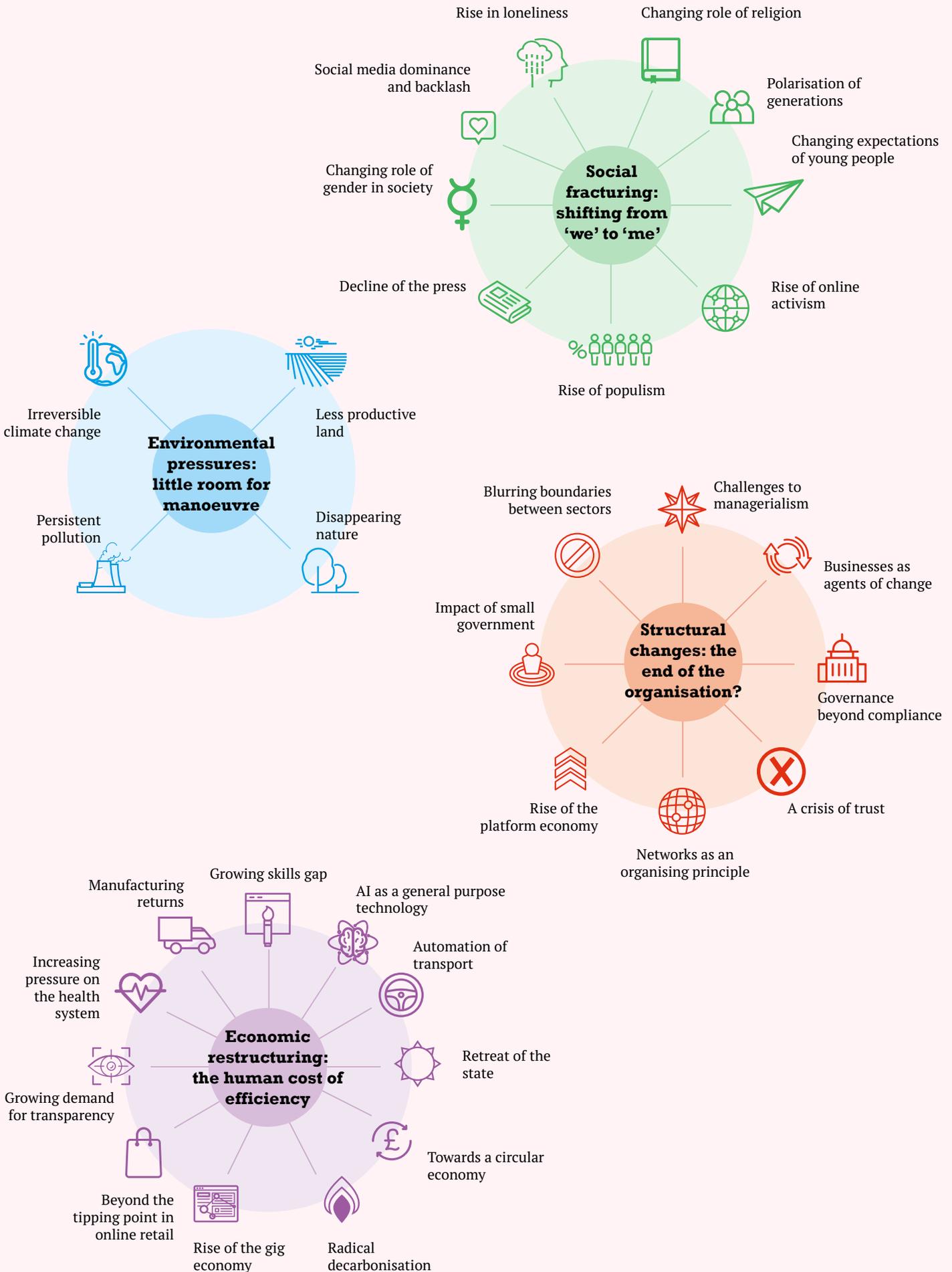
These have been consolidated from three main sources: futures experts (literature review), civil society experts (the inquiry panel, CSF Conversations, other related inquiries) and people with experience of civil society at the grassroots level (community workshops) and are discussed below:

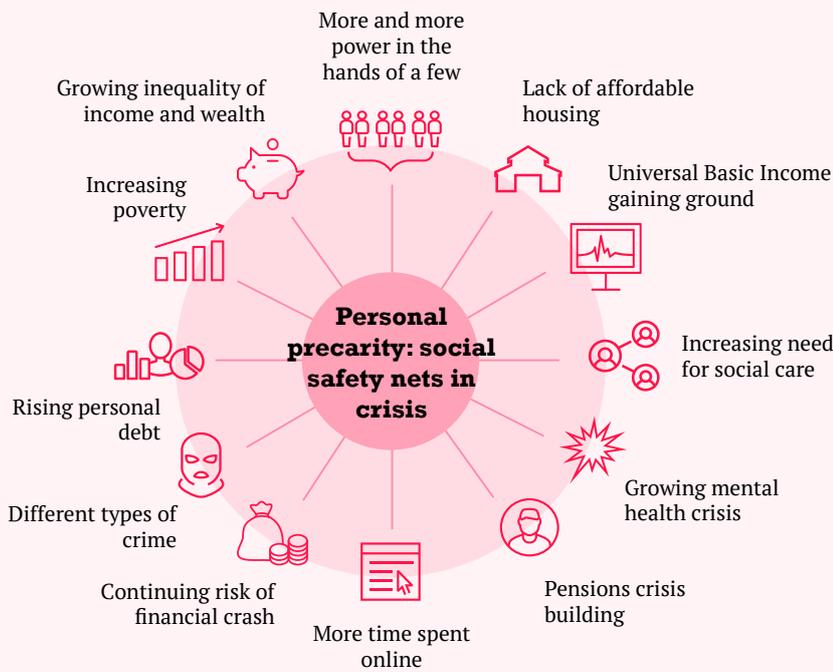
**Income and wealth inequality are continuing to rise.** Since the 2008 financial crash the wealth of the richest 1% in the world has grown at an average of 6% per year compared to 3% for the rest. At this rate, the world’s richest 1% will own two-thirds of the world’s wealth by 2030 (House of Commons Library, 2018). All around us we have analyses of how inequality damages our societies, our economies and our democratic systems (Picketty, 2013; Dorling, 2014; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009).

Inequality is linked to but different from poverty. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation defines poverty as “when a person’s resources are not enough to meet their minimum needs”. While poverty levels have remained fairly constant over the last decade at roughly 21% of the population (13 million people), an unprecedented 67% of British children in poverty now live in a household where someone is in work (Armstrong, 2018).

Last year UNICEF (2017) reported that nearly 1 in 5 children in the UK lack sufficient safe and nutritious food. The IFS (2017) has predicted that child poverty will rise from 15.1% in 2015 to 18.3% in 2020/21 mainly thanks to benefit changes forcing lower incomes down.

# What are the trends shaping our future?





**Explore the full interactive map:**  
[civilsocietyfutures.org/trends](https://civilsocietyfutures.org/trends)

In England between June 2010 and March 2016 welfare reforms enacted reductions of £26 billion in UK social security and tax credits spending, with ‘deficit reduction’ being the primary goal of government (Tinson et al., 2016). Young adults (16-24) were particularly hard hit with ‘rapidly falling real wages, incomes and wealth’ (Hills et al, 2015:3). Poverty is also strongly linked with disability and ethnicity, with people from black and minority ethnic communities experiencing multiple forms of socio-economic disadvantage.

Put starkly, in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008 those at the bottom are paying disproportionately for a problem created by those at the top producing a more polarized and politicised society “in which the conditions for a sustainable politics of dealing with more debt and less growth are undermined” (Blyth 2013:15). It may be difficult to call austerity politics a trend but it is certainly a key factor which has consequences for the future of civil society.

**A rapidly growing ‘gig economy’** characterised by insecure, temporary and freelance contracts have further eroded basic workers’ rights (Armstrong, 2017) as well as contributing to consumer concerns over safety and accountability. Zero-hours and short-hours contracts, the norm of the gig economy, have disrupted dominant markets and both exploited and contributed to a low-wage workforce with Uber growing dominant in personal transportation services and take-away food services like Deliveroo gaining in popularity.

The need for better regulation and protection for workers has not gone unnoticed. People are becoming increasingly aware of the downsides to modern forms of transactional production opening up the possibilities for alternatives that are non-exploitative and stem from a values-based approach that is different to a purely profit based mentality.

Artificial intelligence and machine-based learning is argued to be on the brink of bringing

forth major changes to the world of work as we know it. Job losses look likely although estimates vary hugely on the possible extent and nature of the impact (Lawrence, Roberts and King, 2017), opening up new ways of thinking about a fairer and better future for work and workers.

And so we have seen ideas such as Universal Basic Income (Lawrence and Mason, 2018; Painter, Thorold and Cooke 2018, Hirsch, 2015), Guaranteed Income (Hughes, 2018), Universal Basic Infrastructure (REF), community wealth funds (such as the Alaska Permanent Fund) (Cummine, 2016), the Enspirial Network driven by a desire to create more meaningful work (Miller, 2014) and a shorter working week (Srnicsek and Williams, 2015) discussed and in some cases, trialled; as well as community businesses expanding (Power to Change 2016), alongside a resurgence in cooperatives (Co-operatives UK, 2016; International Co-operative Alliance, 2017; Mayo, 2015) that point to notions akin to an inclusive citizens’ economy that is co-owned and co-run (Kelly, 2012; Davies, 2009).

**Concentrations of wealth come with concentrations of power** highlighting the gap between the privileged and powerful and the poor and powerless. People feel increasingly ignored and are ever more aware that elite and corporate power often occurs behind our backs (Crouch, 2004, 2011). So maybe it should come as no surprise that there is also a crisis of trust in institutions and particularly in the government, with 67% of people saying that the government do not deliver on policy promises that protect average people (Edelman, 2018).

Power is built in places we don’t even know about rather than actively or even unconsciously consent to (Miller 2014). People are fully aware that their consent is now only needed in particular circumstances and even then it can be distorted by media systems designed to maximize corporate profit rather than serve the public interest - systems that have been shown to exist in a sordid entanglement with political

power and used for political advantage (Fenton and Freedman, 2017). Social media, from formerly being seen as the answer to all democratic ills (Curran et al, 2016), is now subject to growing scrutiny relating to echo chambers, online influencers, covert advertising and revelations of the role algorithms play in our daily decision-making as well as in democratic processes.

**Democratic decay** has long-since been described as a continuing process of dissolution towards ‘post-democracy’, a state where ‘the forms of democracy remain fully in place’, yet ‘politics and government are increasingly slipping back into the control of privileged elites in the manner characteristic of pre-democratic times’ (Crouch, 2004: 6). It is a process that is now resonating across society and felt by many of our participants.

Austerity politics has meant that local authorities in England are dealing with a scheduled 40% cut in core funding from central government and many feel that core funding will never return to pre-austerity levels. As a consequence, councils and other public agencies have sought to further outsource and share services as a means of reducing costs and improving performance.

Compulsory competitive tendering for council contracts was introduced during the Thatcher years but there has been no research to prove whether outsourcing is value for money (Walker and Tizard, 2018). In the wake of the Carillion crisis - one of the largest private suppliers of services to the public sector that went into liquidation in 2018 – there is fresh consideration over whether the outsourcing imperative is running out of steam.

Several local councils (Croydon, Ealing, Harrow, Hounslow, Oxfordshire County Council) and other public institutions (the Southbank Centre, Nottingham Hospital Trust and English Heritage) are now returning services in-house as they take stock of the National Audit Office’s report in January 2018 that shows how PFI partnerships

have squandered £200bn mainly as a means of keeping debt off the Treasury’s books.

While an emphasis on out-sourcing has depoliticized decisions about public welfare and the public good, thereby detaching these services from democracy, it also enabled many voluntary organisations to survive and thrive.

Voluntary organisations have often been considered to bring added value to social services through being more in touch with people and having the necessary specialist skills that enable them to build social capital as well as provide services. But they find it difficult to compete with the large private contractors (Mohan and Breeze, 2016). With little hope of a reversal of cuts to core government funding and local councils considering whether they are better off running things for themselves – this could cause major difficulties for some voluntary organisations while also opening up fresh opportunities for citizen involvement in the public realm.

Meanwhile charities feel that their political voices continue to suffer from perceptions of the chilling effects of the Lobbying Act (NCVO, 2014).

**Generational polarisation** is a growing cause for concern: young people have experienced an unprecedented attack on their socioeconomic conditions (Hills et al., 2015). State support has been withdrawn and left many young people in poverty. The introduction of tuition fees for university degrees means that many young people are now facing a lifetime of debt with little prospect of secure employment and work stability.

Home ownership is increasingly an unrealizable dream for many and wages are low (Corlett, 2017). Mental health problems are on the increase (McManus et al., 2016). Across the country, only 36% of millennials think they will be financially better off than their parents’ generation and only 31% think they will be happier (Shrimpton et al., 2017). Young people

may be experiencing political disaffection but they are not necessarily disengaging from politics. Rather, we have seen an increase in political activism and voting amongst the young who are seeking out political solutions to an otherwise bleak future (Cammarts et al., 2014; Wybron et al., 2017).

At the other end of the generational divide, almost three-quarters of older people now say that they are lonely, but loneliness also occurs across all ages groups with Britain being named the loneliness capital of Europe (ONS 2018; Joe Cox Commission on Loneliness, 2017). We don't know our elderly neighbours.

As social institutions and community spaces for people to congregate have been sold off the role of civil society in patching back together a lonely country will become ever more vital.

**Gender fluidity** is one area where young people in particular are challenging norms and shifting perceptions. Half of British teenagers identify as something other than heterosexual (Dahlgreen 2015). The number of people who publicly identify as trans has grown drastically in a decade.

The feminist movement has had a fresh injection of energy with issues relating to gender inequality, sexual violence and harassment becoming more visible through high profile revelations and movements such as #metoo.

While emerging research is mapping the historical impact of a post-industrial society on gender roles (Bennett, 2015; Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012; McDowell, 2012), there has also been notable backlash against all of these changes and a huge increase in online trolling and abuse against almost anyone who is not white, heterosexual and male but particularly against those who are challenging norms of a post-colonial, patriarchal society (Gardiner, 2018).

**Traditional media** (TV, radio and print) are also changing but the drivers of change here are largely economic. The newspaper industry in Britain is in freefall. As Google and Facebook suck in advertising money, Gumtree and eBay eat small-ads income and people expect not to pay a cover price, the business model has collapsed.

Journalists' jobs have been cut back and made less secure with more and more news space to fill at ever faster speed, leading to news content that is faster but shallower (Phillips, 2014) and journalists who are more compliant with editors' primary concerns for the bottom-line, for fear of losing their jobs. Local newspapers are also struggling to survive, closing down or being bought out by the big national conglomerates and moving out of town and out of touch with the communities they are supposed to serve.

Despite their economic fragility the influence of mainstream news media remains. Convergent shifts in cultural production, journalism, political communication, marketing and data mining have contributed to the emergence of a mediated regime facilitated by deregulated, commodified and ever faster forms of communication. Here, political discourse is often commandeered by the stuff of entertainment while news all too frequently traffics in trivialities and repackaged public relations material (Davies, 2008).

This trend, traceable across the last forty years, to subjugate mediated activity to market logic and competition through ever-more commercialization, privatization and restructuring has prepared the way for what Will Davies has referred to as 'post-truth politics' based on an over-supply of 'facts' and an under-provision of meaningful analysis (Davies, 2016). Google and Facebook may claim to be exercising corporate responsibility in the face of fake news, but this distracts from the far larger problem that their very 'structure and economics [...] incentivize the spread of low-quality content over high-quality material.

Journalism has a civic value – journalism that investigates power, or reaches undeserved and local communities – is discriminated against by a system that favors scale and shareability’ (Bell and Owen, 2017:10).

The battle over what will replace legacy press has begun but no-one is yet sure of the answer. New news outlets have sprung up boasting different business models and are run as co-operatives, through membership schemes or crowd-funded, offering a range of benefits including democratic member control, equitable member economic participation, education, training and a concern for the community.

**The religious and secular make up** of England has become increasingly diverse since 1945. While historic churches have seen severe decline in attendance, there are now more Baptist, Muslim and independent church goers, as well as growing numbers of people identifying as non-religious (BSA, 2017).

Faith-based groups are also key to engendering longstanding and deep-seated forms of civil society participation (Dinham, 2009). The buildings of religious institutions have also proven to be important for civil society, often providing crucial meeting spaces in the wake of closures of community centres. And there are signs of the crossing of boundaries and bridge building between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ groups within civil society to build understanding and achieve new things in exciting ways such as the living wage campaign (Andrew Purkis, submission to the call for contributions).

In contrast to this however, we also see the notion of faiths as being oppressive and spreading sexist, homophobic, and violent extremism (Dinham, 2015). Islamophobia is on the rise (Elahi and Khan, 2017).

**Our relationship with place** has also shifted - as we go through the process of extracted divorce proceedings from the European Union, a

renewed focus on geographical asymmetries has emerged alongside growing social and economic geographical divides (revealed as pertinent for the Brexit vote).

Place has been shown to matter - with 73% of people never moving more than 15 miles from where they were born (ONS, 2017). Place also holds distinct and devastating markers of inequality. The economic gap between coastal and non-coastal communities has widened over the last 20 years in terms of economic output per head, low employee pay and high unemployment (Corfe, 2017).

Meanwhile, the well-known north-south divide is steadily morphing into one between London and the rest, with the difference between our capital city and the rest of the country being the biggest of any country in Europe. London boasts nearly all of the social mobility hotspots (Social Mobility Commission, 2017) with children going to school in Westminster and receiving free school meals five times more likely to go to university and then on to good jobs in London than elsewhere in the country.

Recent signs of economic growth in Bristol, Manchester and Liverpool are pointing to a new east-west divide and disproportionate disadvantage in the rural areas of eastern England. Leaked predictions estimate that leaving the EU will mean England’s regions will grow 13-16% less than they would have done (Hutton, 2018), threatening to exacerbate further regional inequalities.

**Online activism** has grown, it is easier than ever before to protest and ever easier to ignore. Online protest may spread awareness of social and political issues, enable the mobilisation of huge numbers of people in a matter of seconds and offer quick click responses for those who want to be politically involved, but on its own it is unlikely to fix structural problems of society. In a world of digital abundance Government consultations may attract many thousands of

responses but they are beginning to treat online petitions (often orchestrated by organisations such as Avaaz or 38 Degrees) differently from those now termed 'direct responses' (DCMS, 2018).

The British Government has also been revealed to be engaged in mass digital surveillance programmes coordinated by the Government and Communication Headquarters (GCHQ), giving cause for concern for many activists and Facebook have been shown to have precious little regard for data privacy. It is no surprise that ever more people are suspicious of online content with concerns over fake news simply adding to this mix. Although offline activism is often a desired feature of digital mobilisation, frequently it remains the domain of a lone individual connected to like-minded others but isolated from human contact.

Our participants spoke of a real need for qualitative social interactions, the importance of meeting people in person, discussing issues at length, seeking understanding over differences, so they could develop meaningful relationships (see below).

Other traditional ways of organising, such as trade unions, have struggled to respond to increasingly precarious workforces and restrictive trade union legislation and have, on the whole, seen union membership numbers decline.

Rather than capitalise on the new appetite for activism, charities have been increasingly focusing on strengthening their individual brands in a competitive marketplace. This is leading to brand-specific types of engagement, that have not been able to connect with a felt need for more collective forms of struggle.

Spaces for political engagement have expanded in a digital mediascape, but our orientation towards them is changing too. People are recognizing the need for a shift away from atomised expressions of social activism and trying to search out new

political projects that offer hope and inspiration for a different way of living and better ways of doing democracy.

**Populism** has stepped into the breach created by massive inequality, democratic deficit and an increasingly pervasive sense of 'us' and 'them' that contributed to the collapse of the main parties in the French presidential elections of 2017, the election of Donald Trump in the United States, the resurgence of the anti-austerity politics of Jeremy Corbyn and the decision taken by UK voters in 2016 to leave the European Union.

These events have brought to the fore the economic dislocation that has taken place since the 1980s revealing deep class as well as generational and ethnic divisions. Marginalised voices have kicked back against a post-war party system that has failed them and a professional political elite that has largely ignored them. These are also the circumstances in which civil society's democratic credentials have been sorely tested.

**Environmental stress** continues to grow. By 2030 the planet could have warmed by more than 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels, taking humanity into uncharted climate territory, threatening our communities and way of life. In England, as elsewhere, we are likely to experience higher temperatures, sea level rise, heavier rainfall and more serious flooding but also prolonged periods of drought.

As soil loss and decline in soil fertility due to intensive agriculture continues, English agriculture will likely face conflicting pressures to become more efficient at the same time as rebuilding degraded land and ecosystems.

Nature is in decline. We have already lost half of our wildlife globally and research suggests that the extinction rate is running at something like a thousand times the historical norm (McKie, 2017). As children are spending less time outside

and in natural environments, a trend that has been associated with the epidemic of mental ill health, civil society may well need to help reconnect people to the natural world.

Air and water pollution, and the epidemic of plastics pollution, are likely to continue to affect our lives. Somewhat surprisingly, environmental issues came up seldom in our workshop discussions. This heightens the fact that civil society has a major role to play in campaigning for awareness over environmental issues and promoting the role of people and communities against corporate interests and regressive environmental policies in the decade ahead.

### **What issues do these trends raise for civil society?**

**In England, the impact of crises relating to inequality, poverty and democratic decay are particularly marked for working class and minority communities as well as young people.**

An important question for civil society is whether social stability and consensus politics can prosper where poverty and inequality are apparent across so many intersecting fault-lines: young and old, black and white, religious and secular.

Prominent reports in the UK have observed, '[t]he need for change; the need to seek the voice of marginalized and disadvantaged people in decision-making processes is of undeniable and acute local, national and global relevance' (RSA, 2017). Ensuring that structures of governance – the places where decisions are made about resource allocation, the way things are run and developed or discarded and decommissioned – must be devised and driven by those whom those decisions will affect. This is as true for foundations and grant making as it is for local authorities and charities.

Many of the above trends point to a disregard for ordinary people in decisions that affect their

lives. If sections of the public no longer think that change is possible then has liberal democracy failed?

Where governments no longer carry out manifesto pledges, when elite interests prevail and the political system no longer works for the mass of ordinary people, when people feel that they are dispensable, that their lives no longer matter and they do not need to be listened to, has liberal democracy failed? If this even comes close to being an accurate representation of English life then does this also mean that civil society has failed as well?

### **Key questions for civil society**

- What would our society look like if power was put in the hands of ordinary people and communities?
- Who is pioneering approaches to putting power in the hands of people and communities? What does it look like and how can you tell the practices remain true to the principles?
- What would civil society become if co-production, co-ownership and co-operative principles were the starting point for all activities and practices?
- What if we had a fairer kind of internet with search functions supporting the public interest and social media platforms that are owned by and accountable to their users, with algorithms designed to serve the public good rather than corporate gain? Could civil society have ownership in common of data?
- Putting co-production, co-ownership, and co-operative working centre stage will also require non-cooperation with and resistance to financial systems that promote selfishness over solidarity and profit over people. What if civil society came together to do this?
- It is time to reinvent our democratic futures and search out what democracy could become – shouldn't civil society be leading the way?

# What we are finding

## A note on... language

In discussing these issues and raising these questions we are also painfully aware that language can elicit trust and power and at worst mistrust and alienation.

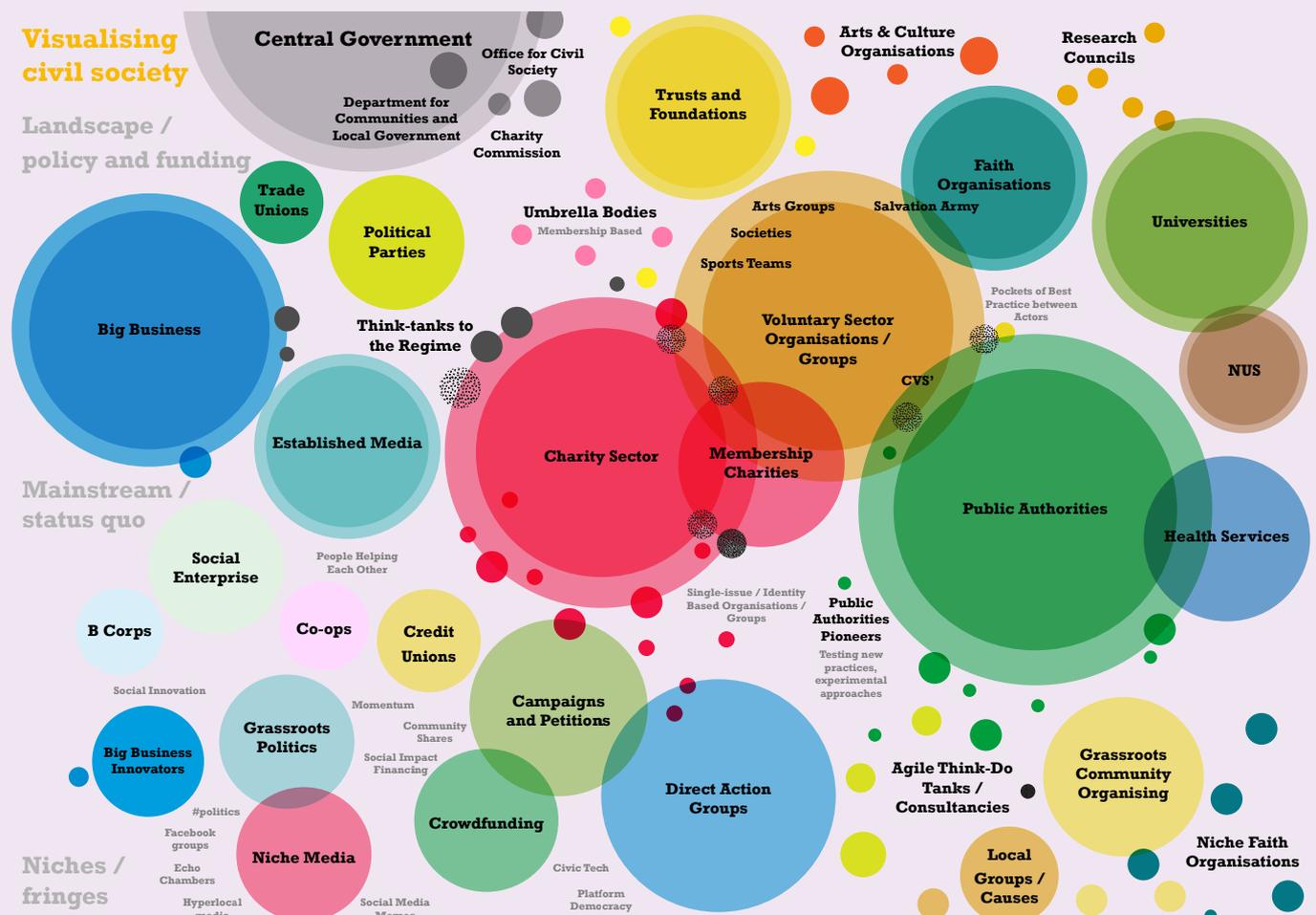
We are aware that for some people, the way we are talking about some of these ideas is imperfect and there will be other ways of describing them. We also recognise that how we share things here won't reach everyone, excludes many and that there will be other ways of communicating the same ideas.

The purpose of sharing these things one year

into the inquiry and not at the end of 2018 is to help refine and evolve this process. If you have feedback on the language used and the communications employed, we would really welcome your input - contact us at [info@civilsocietyfutures.org](mailto:info@civilsocietyfutures.org)

The trends analysis above has been used to frame, contextualise and interrogate the evidence that we have collected in all its forms throughout the inquiry. We have encountered civil society in a myriad of forms and we are well aware that there are many more besides.

The civil society and actors map below offers one way of visualising the richness and diversity of civil society activity and has been a useful tool to remind us of the vast array of interests and activities that the term civil society encompasses:



**The evidence we have collected is large and multi-faceted. It speaks to individual experiences and collective desires; the impact of social, economic, political and technological factors; as well as civil society as organisations working within our communities.** Each of these aspects is complex and interrelated requiring a holistic and systemic approach.

Of course, notions of civil society, its purpose and how we conceptualise it, change over time. We have encountered notions of civil society that speak not just to traditional ideas of associational life – that part of society that sits between the state and the market most commonly referred to as the “voluntary”, “third”, “NGO” or “non-profit sector” where people come together for un-coerced human association (Walzer, 1998), for a whole host of activities from running the local football team to welcome groups for refugees. But also, a strong sense of civil society as something that runs counter to particular ideologies that derive from competitive individualism and me-first approaches to life deemed dominant for too long. This is a conception of civil society driven more by a values-based understanding of what makes the ‘good society’.

It is not necessarily connected to philanthropic impulses – the desire to do good, rather it is concerned to practice and promote social norms of tolerance, non-discrimination, cooperation and trust. The fact that this notion of civil society as the ‘good society’ has come through so strongly in the workshops in particular, is also indicative of the perception of participants of a dire lack of trust, tolerance and co-operation being pervasive in a deeply unequal society, coupled with a strong desire for a different way of living based on kindness, compassion and understanding.

Bound up with each of these interpretations is the clear sense of civil society as public sphere – the space where people come together to gain understanding, learn about difference and engage with systems of power. It is in these

spaces where civil society as the good society meets new forms of politics, economics and public policy and ultimately translates into better forms of democracy. Such ideas form the basis for the current resurgence of interest in new forms of civic agency, participatory democracy, cooperative practices and renewed forms of self-determination. The common denominator across all these initiatives is more power in the hands of more people to shape the decisions that affect their lives creating new publics in the process. “In this sense civil society – as a set of capacities – and politics – as a set of processes – become united in the public sphere, providing an essential antidote to the depoliticisation and fatalism that are so marked in contemporary societies” (Edwards, 2014:71).

To focus on one dimension of civil society could only ever give an overly simplistic account of the places, spaces, people, organisations, practices, politics, hopes and desires of the multiple civil society realms and offer little by way of understanding what the futures of civil society may hold. What we have attempted to do here is to be led by what people tell us is important now and what their vision of the future of civil society is.

What we are finding is that this is deeply entangled with conditions of the state and the market; that it springs from seeds relating to notions of associational life; but these are fed by an increasing desire to tend to the common good against pervasive and ever extending inequalities; that the means to do this requires social, political and economic strategies developed from a whole new way of thinking about the ways in which economic and social life connect.

This is explained in more detail below through the themes that have stood out in the analysis: **places that matter; belonging together; reimagining work and purpose; ways of organising; power and powerlessness** with this final theme running through all the rest and discussed first below.



# Power in the hands of people and communities

## Power and powerlessness

People feel irrelevant. In the workshops around the country it was clear that although it has never been easier to express views and opinions very few people feel they are heard let alone responded to or actually involved in any decision-making. We were told that politics has become something that is done to people and places not by people in places.

Clearly, the Localism Act (2011) - the aim of which was to facilitate the devolution of decision-making powers from central government control to individuals and communities - and the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act (2016) - to make provision for the election of mayors - have not (yet) had the desired effect. People feel that those in power don't think that they need to be listened to, or worse, that they are dispensable.

Jobs are insecure and life is precarious, social services are being withdrawn from those who are most unprotected - the poor, the homeless, the undocumented - yet participants frequently noted how those in power seem unable to recognise or respond to the consequences this has on the ground. When people feel that their voices no longer matter and they are ever more cut adrift through economic inequality, precarity and non-recognition, they lose faith in the institutions that are supposed to represent them.

They see a political system that ignores them and fails them. When democracy has evidently failed for so many yet pretends it still exists, it shuns legitimacy.

**“People are just that tired... they've seen that no one's been listening**

**to them” (Newcastle community workshop)**

In post-industrial towns where markers of deprivation are high, people feel that the places where they live have been brushed aside by politicians, forgotten by government and a sense of abandonment prevails.

A profound change is taking place as people feel the full force of the end of the so-called 'post-war settlement' with a mixed economy of state and private sector (and a commitment to full employment), to a situation where we have gone through a global financial crash, the prospect of full employment ever again seems unlikely, and a policy of debt reduction has left Local Authorities experiencing massive cuts with welfare benefits slashed.

Few people believe that actually existing democracy can solve our problems any more. Trust in politicians and the media is at an all-time low.

**“People think, ‘Well I haven't been listened to before so why would they start listening to me now?’” (Peckham community workshop)**

**“I have a fear of civic breakdown - people are so angry and people get so angry about politics, they make irrational decisions, that to them are completely rational.” (Penzance community workshop)**

**“...there's a big polarisation of class, there's a working man**

**against the government and establishment, there's a mistrust. You talk about accountability, because the first thing you hear is, well the council have got the money the council have got the power, where does it go?**

**They don't trust, they think everything is being syphoned off, are there all these private business decisions being made that aren't actually in the best need of the community? And all that mistrust comes up time and time again."** (Sunderland community workshop)

Feelings of irrelevance are linked to felt experiences of inequality. We have a changing population with increasing needs alongside massive increases in inequality and in concentrations of power amongst elites (whether political, corporate or charitable). Austerity has exacerbated the conditions in which inequality is experienced and enhanced anxiety and fear about the future from those who feel left behind.

Inequality makes certain people less visible. Exclusion further fosters a lack of trust in the system that is supposed to represent the views of the population. Our participants spoke of their own power over their lives as being depleted; a sense that existing democracy doesn't work for the majority and never will unless there are new forms of governance in which everyone can challenge and change the social and political system they are part of.

Brexit, terrorism, and most recently the Grenfell Tower tragedy, have opened up new questions and challenges that have given rise to unsettling assumptions about the sufficiency of the political and economic status quo.

**"I'd like to see more power being given to the people...[We need] a punk era"** (Voluntary

## **Organisations Disability Group Conversation)**

**"...you'd have to put a rocket up their [the council's] arse to get real action and real change and real local representation, and the people that represent Sunderland actually living and being involved, and living with the consequences of the decisions that they make about Sunderland."** (Sunderland community workshop)

The usual answers to this problem are to expand access, particularly digital access. And we heard of instances where local councils have successfully used their websites to communicate with local people. This may be a quick fix solution but we often forget that the digital divide is still a live issue.

Digital technology changes the dynamics of communication, ostensibly facilitating opportunities for individuals to participate. But this online presence is most effective when linked to offline activities (Cammaerts, 2008, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2012).

**"...it's not just social media but there's all sorts of things that people feel that they can't engage because they haven't got the skills. [...] And finding out what is going on, because that's the hardest thing. The previous director of public health said she was at a meeting and it was all to do with Sunderland but none of them knew what all the services were they provided."** (Sunderland community workshop)

Furthermore, connective activity online does not transcend social and economic inequalities. In the UK, almost all of the wealthiest people use the internet while this falls to 58% amongst the

lowest income group (less than £12,500) (Dutton et al., 2013). Seventeen percent of people in the UK do not have broadband access in the home (Ofcom, 2017).

Just as patterns of economic inequality are replicated in access to healthcare and educational attainment (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009) so they map onto access to and uses of technology (Pew, 2015): internet users are still younger, more highly educated and richer than non-users, and more likely to be men than women, and more likely to live in cities.

Social media does not exist in a vacuum. While it has the potential to bring new voices into political debates, it can also reflect and reinforce existing social relations and patterns of privilege (Fenton, 2016).

It also misses the crucial point that people want to have productive lives where they are fully recognised as human beings. This came through loud and clear in the workshops. Relevance and recognition comes in part from forms of **substantive relationality** - only in relationships that count can you feel relevant. It is only in relationships that matter that caring and being cared for is most keenly felt and most deeply appreciated. This is civil society as associational life but it is much more than this phrase suggests.

It is about communality; it is where strong social ties are more likely to give rise to an ethos of care. Importantly, people recognised that strong social ties were unlikely to come from social networking online. Indeed, forms of digital communication were so seldom raised that they seemed to be habitual or normalised to the extent that they are hardly deemed relevant.

However, what the digital age does not appear to satisfy or respond to, and may well be part of, is a pervasive sense of disconnection that skirts around thin forms of sociality – a case of being ‘alone together’ (Turkle, 2011) with like-minded folk that may offer a sense of familiarity but

rarely builds deeper relations or extends sociality to those who are different from you.

**R2: “Big community events, we used to have, [...] teddy bear’s picnics in Mowbray Park, everybody used to go and all families from all over Sunderland [...] would all come together into Mowbray Park. We used to have fancy dress parades down Forsett Street and we didn’t have two buttons to rub together, [...] but the whole of Sunderland would turn out, [...] we need to have the community events and the community activities that aren’t necessarily church based or school based.”**

**R5: “I think we’d all struggle with that nowadays [...] with mobile telephones and the internet and what have you, you can Face Time somebody from Australia that you haven’t seen, whereas the street parties everybody got together, and at events you would see people who you hadn’t seen for a long time” (Sunderland community workshop)**

In this context, civil society often reaches beyond a voluntary sector as providers of services or meeters of need, and steps in as a catalyst for community action and participation, a promoter and builder of social values and social justice and a voice for the marginalised and the mainstream in society. Yet this is seen as diminishing:

**“What has been – and continues to be – lost is the advocacy (voice) role of civil society – both at levels of individual /case advocacy and collectively” (Angus McCabe,**

## **Birmingham University, call for contributions).**

The experience of individual disconnect has led to collective responses (these may stem from already existing organisations but they may not). Rather than increased access to information online, people spoke of the urgent need for the deep involvement of ordinary people in decisions that affect their lives; the need for different voices to be heard and different ideas about the good society and the values that underpin it to be contested and debated.

Such ideas are emerging from particular histories and the contradictions between how people are told the world works best and their experiences of it.

**“There are huge numbers of community activists on the ground in Cornwall, that are dealing with street homelessness, street food projects. Environmental programmes are looking at different economic models, they’ve done that in Penzance. That was done two years ago.**

**That’s a huge amount of active, pissed off, determined people who are trying to deliver all sorts of change within Cornwall. So I think that’s where the hope is, that the people are hopefully getting ticked off enough that they’re actually starting to do something about it.”** (Penzance community workshop)

Although the stories we heard were often bleak they were also hugely inspiring. We found a real hunger for involvement in decision-making, for co-production co-creation and co-ownership but a lack of knowhow and power to realise the

changes people want to see in their own lives and in the world around them.

People feel powerless from a lack of communication, transparency and clarity of process from local authorities and had little understanding of mechanisms for access and deliberation. People wanted co-development in decisions from the very start as equal partners in power leading to forms of co-production, rather than “decider and consultee” (GLA workshop, Hackney 2017).

**“It’s about being brave - change is coming, we can either let it happen to us or be in front of it.”** (Penzance community workshop)

**“They send in consultants for hundreds of thousands of pounds to tell us the bleeding obvious. It’s like, thanks, but just give us the money and we would have done that 10 years ago.”** (Penzance community workshop)

But this is not matched by mutual enthusiasm from those who have power:

**“At the moment civil society lacks respect by politicians and the corporate world, however without it society would not function and the economy would unravel. Millions of pounds are spent in shaping and developing the economy and very little on building social capital. The complexity of issues facing us requires this imbalance to change.”** (Ian Jones, Volunteer Cornwall, call for contributions)

We also found that there is a continued reluctance to accept the expectation that citizens will sweep up deficiencies in the delivery of public services – participants clearly wanted to be involved in decisions about how these services

were delivered but not to substitute the work of the welfare state.

**“The Big Society was actually the state doing nothing and leaving everyone else to pick it up.”  
(Newcastle community workshop)**

The creative response, that has been borne out of necessity, has been to try and work within civil society to find solutions that could lead to long-term thinking focused on problem solving and away from crisis management.

Civil society is trying to be authors of their own stories and agents of their own futures, but it is not made easy. There is a disconnect across civil society and tensions between the established formalised elements that often self-identify as a (voluntary) sector and the more informal elements of civil society.

The latter tend to be the disruptors and the protestors often driving change and rather than service provision they operate in the more creative/cultural parts of civil society (but may not recognise themselves as part of it). As a consequence they often offer a response to issues around identity and belonging rather than power and powerlessness.

The above discussion brings to the fore that in order to better understand politics and extend the possibilities for progressive social change we need to interrogate the relationship between politics and power and test power against equality. We need also to understand what powerlessness feels like.

The sorts of people-powered processes that we have been consistently told are necessary, come from bids for recognition and resource allocation alongside the willingness of people to grasp responsibility for change.

# The places that matter



**Local places matter to many of us, perhaps even more in a digital age - meeting face to face and talking in person offers a qualitatively different social experience.**

Healthy civil society is often rooted in places and even big organisations need local networks of engagement. But - as the Brexit vote showed - people in many places feel unheard, neglected and ignored and are hungry for a new vision and the power to make it happen. Too many people feel that the places where they live have been forgotten.

**“Central UK Government thinks the north ends at Manchester.” (Sunderland community workshop)**

**“A whole part of the city which should be the creative kind of hub of the city, that’s just completely derelict now and no vision.” (Sunderland community workshop)**

It is clear that government (local and national) and politicians are no longer trusted to deal with issues or able to meet need where it occurs. Local responses are felt as the only possibility for progressive change to happen. Place and the spaces within it matter. It is where you meet people at the school gates, at the local takeaway, at the pub, at the doctor’s surgery, it’s where your children can play, where you remember them growing up.

**“My fears are ... it’s becoming a place that I won’t recognise and I’ve lived here for 34 years.” (Peckham community workshop)**

It is also in the places where people live that they feel proximate enough to centres of power

that involvement in decisions still feels like a possibility (albeit, in many cases, a distant one). It is in the places where people know others that they can see the possibility of working together for change.

It is in the places where people have seen things change that they want lived citizenship to be a reality so they can be part of the changes of the future, and make a difference to their own lives and those of their community.

**“We’ve got all these social groups in Peckham, like Peckham Citizens and Peckham Vision, and that’s how we influence the council.” (Peckham community workshop)**

**“If the council didn’t do it then nobody did it, but we actually need to get away from that.” (Oldham community workshop)**

Lived citizenship also creates a sense of belonging and makes people feel part of something. Partly, this is fuelled by memories of what places have been and what has happened in them and nostalgia for times gone by. It is about long histories deeply embedded in places – the mining community in Shirebrook, the old mills in Oldham – that evoke emotions rarely captured through quantitative survey techniques (so often relied on by policy makers).

But it is also fuelled by a desire to create places that they can be proud of now; where young people would choose to settle; where people come together in all their diversity:

**“To say ‘Yeah Marks Gate’ not**

**‘Urgh Marks Gate’.” (Marks Gate community workshop)**

**“I would love to see Peckham as a place that has communities that are very different but come together.” (Peckham community workshop)**

**“...But people who live in those poverty situations [...] the first thing they always say to us is ‘I want this place to look nicer, I want to be more proud of where I live, I’m sick of the dog dirt being around the on the floor.’” (Sunderland community workshop)**

Place is also connected to the spaces within it, who has access to those spaces and on what terms. Different places have different resources available to them. People often lack adequate spaces to come together. Church buildings and schools were seen as vital resources but also unlikely to feel welcoming for people from different faiths or for young people in particular.

In Marks Gate in East London, when we asked where young people got together the only place the participants could think of was outside the fish and chip shop since so many community spaces (as we heard in several workshops) were either considered unsafe or had closed down.

**“Space for playgrounds and things is being taken.” (Peckham community workshop)**

**“I mean just doing that and putting a social meeting place in the neighbourhood [...] is a huge thing, and just opening up that space, that space for dialogue, that space for people to organise themselves, from that things come out like walks around the neighbourhood explaining the murals there are,**

**which are fantastic, and just getting people to be proud of their own neighbourhood, organising litter pickups, things where you don’t need a huge amount of money for it but it’s getting, it’s just getting people together, talking to each other, meeting a neighbour.” (Sunderland community workshop)**

Although a relationship to place is often where we found people hungry for involvement in their communities, there was also recognition that opportunities for participation are not equally available to all. This is as much to do with levels, forms of and access to (lifelong) education (that came up many times in the workshops), as it is to do with spaces and places.

**“As someone working in education I would say the education system is getting worse, I think it’s actually a lot worse because of funding cuts, [...] we’re cutting arts, we’re cutting drama, we’re cutting music, it’s exam factories, [...] mental health amongst young people is horrendous.” (Sunderland community workshop)**

Sites perceived as ‘forgotten places’ often have diminished spaces for civil society activity and so the gap widens between the rich citizenry and the poor citizenry.

Encouraging active citizenship has been a recurring theme in public policy over at least the last two decades, from New Labour’s ‘Active Citizens’ and its emphasis on civil renewal and ‘double devolution’ to David Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ and the ‘localism agenda’, yet there are inevitable structural limits to how much communities can do for themselves and for some the problems feel overwhelming - mass unemployment with little prospect of change and the power of multinational corporations were keenly felt.

As Mohan (2018) states, '[t]he localist rhetoric and policies of the present government are likely to benefit rich, stable communities, not poorer communities characterised by considerable population turnover'.

**“It ties up with Brexit and austerity, but if Nissan decided to go, we'd be in one hell of a mess.” (Sunderland community workshop)**

Spaces and places tell part of the story but this theme also links back to power and powerlessness and the mechanisms by which people can be involved in decision-making that impacts directly upon their lives. In Peckham, the people we spoke to found it difficult to access decision making processes at a local council level particularly in relation to housing development plans and the role of private developers, this was echoed in many of the workshops.

People consistently stated the importance of feeling represented and being able to participate in local decision making – both elements of civic engagement that they perceive as lacking. They want to be involved in the futures of the places in which they live. They don't see this as volunteering (the word rarely came up) but as a civic imperative.

Arts and culture are also perceived to be important place makers. It is through arts and culture that people often gained a sense of pride about where they live and found forms of storytelling that made visible what they felt was so often overlooked.

**“But we also believe that we have a civic responsibility and I have to say as an organisation we're a public art gallery and our business is not just about showing art. It is about the community in which we sit, and we have a programme called Postcard to Penzance, where we have invited publicly**

**through the newspaper and the radio locally, people to come in and discuss certain issues that concern the town.” (Penzance community workshop)**

These sorts of spaces form the connective tissue of place and offer a qualitatively different means of sociality from chatting to friends on social media. Rather it is about participating in one's own history through creative expression and learning about shared living through creative practices.

Importantly, it also offers the possibility for thinking how life could be otherwise. Time to dream, time to unleash the imagination and a time to be bold. But funding for arts organisations has been hard hit by cuts in public spending. This is one of the reasons why Sunderland's bid to become City of Culture 2021 was so important to the people there. The bid had generated much creative thinking across civil society (even though ultimately, it was unsuccessful):

**“I think it's got a lot of people thinking about this vision and how it can be. I hope that won't dissipate [...] if we don't get it. But I think there will be enough vision to say what we want.” (Sunderland community workshop)**

The Gulbenkian Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations (2017) resonates strongly with our findings. It notes that arts organisations with a civic role share common features including that people and local communities are central to their practice; that place matters; and developing relationships and strong connections are key.

They also found that leaders are over-stretched and under-supported; that co-production with communities requires particular skills that often need additional support and that approaches to funding and evaluation can make sustaining civic work in arts organisations difficult.

# Belonging together



**We all want to belong and to be treated fairly and equally by others in society. Relevance and meaning in our lives come from relationships, expressing our own identities and being heard, but also from being part of something bigger – recognising that we have things in common as well as identifying as individuals in particular ways.** This is central to civil society's purpose in an increasingly changing, global, individualised and digitalised world.

**“We regularly talk about and campaign for the black ‘community’, the Muslim ‘community’, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans ‘community’ [...] We can miss opportunities to respond to bigger, structural challenges [...] to improve the things that could make us all most happy.” (Asif Afridi, inquiry panel member)**

Belonging is not always or simply connected to geography but is also firmly rooted in relationality. Where people have or find relationships that matter to them, a sense of belonging is more likely to be felt. Spaces where people can talk to each other and support each other.

People spoke about feeling they belonged if others thought they belonged, if they felt welcome and accepted. A feeling that is quickly dissipated through the experience of discrimination. A felt sense of belonging seems to suggest people are more likely to want to become involved in civil society. Hence a civil society that

engenders substantive relationality in the future may well be more likely to flourish.

The people in our workshops and ‘Conversations’ spoke about the need for “an end to selfishness” (Mansfield community workshop); that society has become too much about individuals and competition and too little about caring for each other and sharing resources.

**“Me instead of we. We all build our own little empires, we all have our own little gates at the front of our houses.” (Epsom and Ewell community workshop)**

**“We’re pushed further apart by competition for smaller resources and a desire to find our uniqueness, not our common ground.” (CEOs of Youth Organisations Conversation)**

People also spoke about civil society being the space where difference and differences can be overcome:

**“It creates the space for the fact that you and I have completely different lifestyles and ideas, but it doesn’t stop us doing certain things together.” (Peckham community workshop)**

In the most recent Community Life Survey (DCMS, 2017), 81% of people agreed that ‘their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together’, a decrease of 8% on the previous year. This shift must be seen against a rise in reported hate crimes in

recent years. Between 2014 and 2015 there was a 326% rise in reported street-based anti-Muslim incidents (Hansard, 29.6.2016). In the days after the EU referendum (23-26 June 2016) there was a 57% increase in reported hate crime, with more incidents reported in areas that voted leave (Stone, 2016).

**“... because I live in Roker, [...] we’ve got a lot of asylum seekers, we’ve got a load of international students, we’ve got a load of white working class and a load of white middle class, and I’m seeing attacks up and down Roker Avenue and burnt doors and bleach and paint and all kinds, and union flags being flown in back gardens and it’s like you say, it’s just becoming more disparate, it’s not, it’s not a good climate.” (Sunderland community workshop)**

While some have linked a decrease in community accord to the effects of spatial segregation, with high concentrations of minority ethnic communities living in separate neighbourhoods from their white British counterparts (Cantle, 2001; Cantle and Kaufmann, 2016), a recent comprehensive review of social scientific evidence has shown that income inequality and deprivation are far more important determinants of community discord in the UK (Demireva, 2015).

In its response to the Casey Review (2016), the Runnymede Trust argued that these inequalities are ‘persistent and widespread’, they ‘remain a major barrier in modern Britain, and that responding to these inequalities and creating the condition for everyone to interact as equals should remain the starting point for any integration policy’ (Khan and Finney, 2016).

Inequality is recognized by people as a major barrier to community well-being and citizen engagement. This concurs with Dalton (2017) who argues that although there are new forms of

collective action that point to an interested and engaged citizenry, opportunities for participation are not available to all and there is a sizeable and growing socio-economic participation gap across all types of political action – those with higher levels of education and higher income possess the skills and resources to enable them to participate beyond the voting process.

**“Well when you’re working class and you go there you feel a bit uncomfortable.” (Peckham community workshop)**

As noted above, poverty is also strongly linked with disability and ethnicity. People from black and minority ethnic communities experience multiple forms of socio-economic disadvantage and often feel that institutionalised racism means their needs are unlikely to be represented in local decision making.

In a review of the black minority ethnic voluntary sector, Mayblin and Soteri-Proctor (2011) point to one study that found that the absence of community organisation left the African-Caribbean community of a multi-ethnic town in the South of England disempowered and unheard. But other studies note how for some civil society organisations being defined by ethnicity alone has been problematic.

BME civil society organisations have a long history of responding to and fighting racism and discrimination but their shape and function have also been constrained by dominant views of what BME organisations can achieve and the level of race inequality that is acceptable in British society (Afridi and Warmington, 2009).

Amongst the people we spoke to there was both concern and complacency about racism and our collective identity as a society. Tensions that are often heightened by the mainstream media and the internet.

**“Brexit is changing our notions of**

## **cultural identity and what it means to be British and brown.” (Clare Fellowship Conversation)**

Civil society sometimes reinforces divisions, putting us in separate boxes defined by singular identities ignoring intersectional understandings of power (Crenshaw, 1989). But the people we spoke to are also acutely aware that it is difficult to speak to others outside of their own networks and to engage with people who aren't like them. This can create fear of the other and mitigates against understanding and tolerance.

Civil society is not always civil and can (whether wittingly or not) reproduce disadvantages in society and act, or be perceived as, a zone of exclusion, without always working to overcome these barriers.

However, we also found a strong desire for ways to come together that transcend divisions based on ethnicity, class and religion. A desire for all parts of civil society to focus on defeating racism and division.

## **“Where is the thing that makes us more than the sum of our parts.” (Peckham community workshop)**

**“We need to recognise the many identities we all hold simultaneously and to create routes to civic engagement and representation that can cope with that complexity.” (Asif Afridi, inquiry panel member)**

Society is characterised by a diverse mix of beliefs, ideologies, identities and ways of being but very limited understanding and literacy of these is brought to bear in political and public life. The question of how race in particular has been represented in the media has been a longstanding issue.

Recently, the social media campaign

#Oscarswhite highlighted the continued racial imbalance within the Hollywood film industry, but such forms of low-level representation of racial difference, as well as its misrepresentation are issues that cut across all forms of mainstream news and entertainment media (Saha, 2018).

A lack of genuine engagement with alternative meta-narratives of how society could be otherwise (whatever these may be) closes down opportunities for greater mutual understanding.

The internet, and social media in particular, also stands accused of naturalising the segregation of society into echo chambers. Based on the notion that birds of a feather flock together the internet predicts who we are depending on who we follow on Twitter, who we 'like' on Facebook, the ads we linger over, producing network analytics that naturalises the segregation it finds and making a commercial and political virtue out of the fact that we tend to be similar to our friends.

The 2018 Digital Attitudes Report notes that only 12% believe that the internet has had a positive impact on society and that there is public demand for technology companies to be more responsible and accountable. Civil society has an important role to play in shaping the future of the digital world.

**“We need to make sure that we can shape the way in which we are able to participate in public spaces — and this is as true of Twitter as our town squares.” (Joy Green, Forum for the Future)**

If civil society is to offer the space to come together and get to know and understand those around us who share the same streets, services and shops then there also needs to be opportunities and places to enable people to identify and negotiate their common interests and shared concerns. In Mansfield we heard how difficult people found it to bring different elements of the community together to get to

know each other better and so in response they created a welcoming committee in the town for new arrivals and strangers to meet each other.

**“We’ve got to get away from this every man for himself business.”  
(Shirebrook community workshop)**



# Reimagining work and purpose



Dependable, well-paid, meaningful work continues to disappear, with automation and AI signalling more change is on the way. Work has become increasingly insecure, low paid and with long hours. It's making life harder for people - and affecting how much they can take part in civil society.

**“We’ve lost the main industry that supported the town.” (Mansfield community workshop)**

Proposals that seek simply to increase volunteering as a means to build community capacity without recognising the consequences of long term industrial decline and deeply felt, multi-layered forms of deprivation connected to place will not be able to effect social change.

In Shirebrook we heard how the closure of the local pit led to thousands of job losses. During the process of rebuilding the local economy two businesses bid for the site where the pit had been. One was an engineering firm that said it could bring 2,500 jobs to the area, the other was Sports Direct that said it could offer 5,000 jobs.

The tender went to Sports Direct on an acorn rent right on the site where the old mine had been. The company immediately outsourced recruitment to agencies bringing in migrant workers on low wages who were placed in multiple occupancy housing in the old pit village. Work, place and purpose combine in a brutal rendition of the felt experiences of post-industrial England.

**“You pick your wages up on a Friday. You get told there and then if you’re working the following**

**week. Because you know it’s zero hours contracts. You can’t plan your life. You can’t get a mortgage.” (Shirebrook community workshop)**

Many now experience or see the future of their working lives in precarious, low-paid and temporary jobs. In December 2017, according to an ONS survey, around 901,000 people were on zero hour contracts. Since so many of these people need more than one job to make ends meet, the survey found 1.4 million zero-hour contracts in place – 5% of all contract agreements.

To avoid negative publicity attached to zero-hour contracts, many companies are now shifting to short-hours or 336 hour contracts. If you work a 40-hour week on one of these contracts you lose your rights to hours and payments after about nine weeks. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2017) estimates that full-time employees make up 60% of the workforce.

Badly paid temporary and insecure contracts create a poverty trap that is hard to escape. UNICEF state that an unprecedented 67% of British children in poverty now live in a household where someone is in work (Armstrong, 2017).

This research also shows that the reality of working life for many people today - insecure, low paid, zero hours contracts – means people are ever busier surviving and often find it difficult to do much else (Mohan, 2018). If you are worried about where your next meal will come from, volunteering your time for free is unlikely to be a priority. This makes it extremely difficult for people to commit to volunteering and renders

calls for time off work to do so unrealistic (Mohan, 2015). The Community Life Survey 2017 (DCMS, 2017a) noted that volunteering levels have fallen for most age groups since 2013/14 with just over half of those who said they didn't volunteer in the last year citing work commitments as a factor (Weakley, 2017). Charities Aid Foundation (2015) state that only 7% of employees are able to have some time off work to volunteer.

**“The greatest crime about poverty is no time.” (Peckham community workshop)**

**“People can't volunteer if they have to feed their children.” (Epsom and Ewell community workshop)**

The increase in insecure employment and the gig economy do not favour regular commitment to voluntary action. As the population ages and unpaid caring increases, the likelihood of volunteering outside the home is also likely to diminish (Mohan, 2018).

**“We somehow find ourselves in a city where to have one job, or one income in a family is not enough.” (Peckham community workshop)**

The post-recession period has also been the worst period for pay growth in 200 years (Armstrong, 2017). At the end of 2016 the GMB union ran ONS data on average earnings for 170 occupations between 2007 and 2016 and found only 19 of them have kept pace with inflation.

Pay is stagnating because it has been decoupled from productivity (as profits go up workers get paid less with capital taking a disproportionate share of the benefits). On the horizon, growing automation in the economy will most likely benefit owners of industry rather than workers. Digital platform monopolies will continue to dominate and soak up global advertising revenue which will also result in job losses across many

industries.

**“I fear robots will replace workers.” (Clare Fellowship Conversation)**

**“I fear a future where our ability to support cohesion of a society where digital tech / AI create such different relationships across and between communities.” (Inquiry Funders Conversation)**

Opportunities for meaningful work are also geographically divided with job creation over the last 10 years heavily weighted towards London and the South-East (Clayton et al., 2017). Civil society is beginning to step up to the challenge. The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain was founded in 2012 and has a membership of primarily low paid migrant workers in London. It provides employment representation for its members and campaigns over low pay, bullying and harassment.

But to bring a social justice framework to these interlacing trends requires policies based on redistribution: such as progressive tax policies, union friendly laws to strengthen the collective power of the workers and enhance their bargaining rights and the expansion of employee ownership schemes giving staff majority ownership of companies (Lawrence and Mason, 2018). This opens up the potential for work to be redefined within a more generative people's economy that functions for the local public good rather than for private profit.

**“Externally, the funding environment and growing pressure from consumers for more ethical businesses is potentially changing the face of civil society. Social enterprises are an example of this change. They have been growing in recent years and 28% of them are based in the most deprived**

## communities in the UK.” (Caroline Howe, Lloyds Bank Foundation, submission to the call for evidence)

‘Community business’ is emerging as a potential solution to many of the above endemic and systemic problems and has been the subject of an associated research project undertaken by Forum for the Future and Goldsmiths (Grayson, 2018).

Community business has a long history, from mediaeval guilds and friendly societies to philanthropic communities but has recently been adopted as a term by Power to Change, a grant maker set up in 2015. They refer to community business as initiatives which are locally rooted, trading for the benefit of the community, accountable to the local community and with broad community impact.

Power to Change estimate there are 6,600-7,000 community businesses in operation in the UK (Diamond et al. 2017), with a total market income in 2017 estimated at £1.2 billion. Community businesses have 35,500 reported paid staff and involve around 119,500 volunteers. They have a range of positive social impacts, including improved health and well-being and facilitating reductions in loneliness.

Community businesses could offer positive ways of reimagining work and purpose in the future, including meeting growing care needs, harnessing technology for equitable ends, keeping investment in the real economy, reorienting trade away from profiteering, providing homes rather than investments, building resilient local economies and addressing inequalities. Other benefits could also include adapting to resource scarcity and decarbonisation, enabling co-productive relationships with the state, and embedding democratic participation in everyday business structures (Grayson, 2018).

Community businesses can be considered a subset of social enterprises (asset-locked trading businesses, designed to deliver social goods, in

which profits are reinvested into the business or into other activities with social benefit).

Pearce (2003) argues that the language of social enterprise shifted focus away from “an emphasis on collective action to individual entrepreneurialism, albeit for social benefit”, to “emphasising the ownership and accountability structure of organisations to focus on the social purpose” and from “a political perspective working towards fundamental change to a more technical approach aimed at getting on with the job in hand” (2003, 66).

A central question for the sector is whether community business and social enterprise is fundamentally conceived of as a more communal way of doing business, or about bringing market values and business practices further into the community (Grayson, 2018).

Other forms, business models and terms for organising work that broadly operate under the principles of social benefit include Co-operatives (organisations owned and run by members using cooperative principles); Mutuals (“an organisation owned by, and run for, the benefit of its members”) (BIS 2011, 2); Community Interest Companies (the legal structure created in 2004 for social enterprises); Community Anchor Organisations (“place-based, multipurpose organisations, which are locally-led and deeply rooted in their neighbourhoods”) (Localities, 2016: 6); and Development Trusts (“community-led organisations using a combination of enterprise and creativity to improve the quality of life for local people”) (DTAS 2018).

In varying ways, each of these seek to make a difference through ‘how and who they employ, through where they invest their profits, through where they are based and how they operate’ (Nick Temple, Social Enterprise UK, submission to the call for evidence).

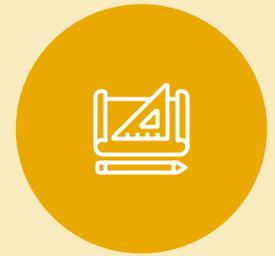
As the welfare state retracts and work becomes more precarious and low-paid, solutions that seek

to embed (local) businesses in co-productive and accountable relationships with communities, may offer ways of sharing resources and power more fairly with the possibility of building social capital.

**“...the corporate world has to recognise that without a strong civil society their businesses would fail.” (Ian Jones, Volunteer Cornwall, submission to the call for contributions)**



# How we organise



**For many of the people we spoke to, large-scale institutional charities seem increasingly out of touch, out of reach and lacking in significance.** As the largest charities have got ever bigger so inequality and poverty have increased. Charities are not widely understood as being significant to ordinary people's lives or recognised as vital levers to social change. And there is a real danger that they are no longer viewed as a crucial part of civil society.

Although much of our data came in before the Oxfam and Save the Children scandals relating to sexual exploitation and sexual harassment, it has clearly not helped this perception (Edwards, 2018). For some, the larger charities more closely resemble the establishment. Penny Wilson from Getting on Board (a charity that helps people become new leaders in communities through board-level volunteering) notes that there are an estimated 100,000 vacancies for charity trustees in the UK and that 59% of charities say that their boards were not representative of the communities they serve:

**“In practice this means homeless charities with no one on the board with experience of homelessness, prison education charities with no one on the board who has been in prison, carers charities with no trustees with caring responsibilities and so on.”**  
**(Penny Wilson, Getting on Board, submission to the call for evidence)**

Wilson notes that there is significant under-representation on charity boards from other groups including those with professional skills, young people, women, members of BAME

communities and disabled people. The blurring between state, for profit and not for profit also makes each sector increasingly indistinguishable from the other.

Charities seem to be in a no-win situation with the public lagging some way behind the reality of the practical problems they are facing in delivering what is required with the resources available:

**“Funding systems and structures are driving detrimental change and are inhibiting small charities from flourishing. The challenges of public sector commissioning ... [mean] that it is ever harder to access coupled with rising demands that have led to a capacity crunch that sees fewer than 1 in 2 charities confident they will still be operating in 2021. This aligns with evidence from NCVO which shows that since 2008/09, funding has been directed towards the biggest charities while grants to those with an income of less than £1m have seen decreases of up to 48%.”** (Caroline Howe, Lloyds Bank Foundation, submission to the call for evidence)

The voluntary sector think-tank New Philanthropy Capital (Butler, 2017) notes that two-thirds of charities say they have used money from public donations to prop up key health and social services they have been hired to provide. Half the charities surveyed turned down contracts because the operational risks of trying to deliver a quality service on the cheap were too high.

Others handed contracts back because they felt they could not deliver value to beneficiaries with the available funding.

**“The process of chasing grants or contracts in the face of the wholesale retrenchment of statutory provision, and the resultant mangling of ideals, approaches and democratic practice, to fit tender briefs, is the principal determinant of change in civil society at present.” (Martha Wilkinson, Community Foundation, submission to the call for evidence)**

Alongside the huge restrictions on funding from contracts, the industrial approaches to fundraising undertaken by the larger charities are rarely felt to engage people in the work of the organisation or build relationships with them (despite changes introduced as a result of the Etherington Review) (NCVO, 2015).

Charities are at risk of being caught between a rock and a hard place - no longer seen as able to give voice to the powerless or trusted to act on their behalf and no longer able to compete for contracts against private companies who can either do the work cheaper because of efficiencies of scale, or are prepared to do it on the cheap by cutting corners and jobs.

**“Professionalized, brand-driven and beholden to government for their multi-million contracts and big business for their ‘partnerships’, charities are seen to have become part of the very system they were set up to challenge.” (Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, inquiry panel member)**

Instead, a civil society that works is seen as being about people rather than organisations;

it is found amongst people you know, in neighbourhoods and locales, where proximity to need brings understanding as well as the possibility of response or solution to problems as they are experienced, often by those who experience them. Micro-organisations, with an average annual income under £10,000 constitute approximately half of all civil society organisations (NCVO, 2017).

People are finding that they can organize themselves in new ways without the need for restrictive and onerous structures of the more formal charities or organisations that are frequently perceived to be depoliticized, overly large and excessively obedient.

In every place we visited we found people coming together to garner collective power and pursue social and political goals but rarely did this involve large formal charities. These micro-organisations that sometimes operate out of a community development model play a significant role in society yet are often overlooked in terms of funding.

**“There are two major trends: (a) people are finding that they can organise themselves in new ways, cheaply and effectively. There is much less interest in ‘charity’ structures which are both onerous and restricting - particularly regarding politics. (b) Many organisations are increasingly commodified and corrupted by their relationship with government who treats them as a service provider.**

**Survival depends on obedience and increasing size - this hollows out the community that the organisation was originally developed to serve and undermines the role of advocate often expected of such**

**organisations. The great advantage citizen action has over actions rooted in power is that it is easier for citizens to collaborate and to work over wide-ranging networks. As power and money is further concentrated I expect to see more divergent action in the spaces between.” (Simon Duffy, Centre for Welfare Reform, submission to the call for evidence)**

There is an awareness that ‘anchor organisations’ are required to locate activity in and coordinate activity from. Infrastructural support also helps to nurture small community organisations who can engender the trust of the community and be accountable to them. The lack of local linking organisations such as local CVS offices etc. leaves many groups disconnected from each other and operating in silos. Battles over scarce resources can turn people against those who ‘are not like us’. Facilitation is required to bring different groups together so that people can get to know the diverse groups that make up their communities and so that these groups can work together to be more effective.

**“In the future there has to be an emphasis on collaboration working with communities constructively using the necessary tools to address the emerging challenges. To address the STEP issues as highlighted there has to be improved dialogue across sectors and within civil society itself. Also national civil society bodies have to work differently with local groups instead of parachuting in with national agendas.” (Ian Jones,**

## **Volunteer Cornwall, submission to the call for evidence)**

Funding systems and structures are also felt to be inhibiting the smaller more informal elements of civil society from surviving and flourishing. These are groups who are not professionalised and don’t necessarily possess the cultural capital required to fill in grant applications and reports. It is also difficult to get funding for continuity and structures with so much funding being project based. Similarly, public sector commissioning has made it ever harder for smaller organisations to access funding opportunities. It is notable how these funders are very much seen as ‘them/the other’, part of the establishment and part of the problem.

Looking to the future, funders need to find a means of meeting people on equal terms and taking risks with groups who may not look or sound like them. They also need to free themselves from the tyranny of an audit culture that disallows certain practices that may not tick the right boxes. The Edge Fund is one example of a grant-making body that have tried to do just this. They support efforts to achieve social, economic and environmental justice and to end imbalances in wealth and power and in the process they give those they aim to support a say in where the money goes.

This raises a further and much larger concern. Small scale civil society activities will continue to make important contributions to the lives of individuals and communities but who will have the courage and resource to take on the really big issues – socially, politically, economically and environmentally when charities have been fundamentally politically disempowered?



# Being bold enough to imagine what the future could be

At the end of his book, *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams concludes:

**‘There are ideas, and ways of thinking, with the seeds of life in them, and there are others, perhaps deep in our minds, with the seeds of a general death. Our measure of success in recognising these kinds, and in naming them making possible their common recognition, may literally be the measure of our future.’ (1961: 324)**

It was Williams who pointed out that a key contribution of the Labour movement was in its creation of social institutions (unions, co-operatives, the Workers Education Association, mutual support arrangements, like the forerunners of the NHS in Welsh mining communities) that prefigured a different and more just society.

It is from within certain elements of civil society, from forms of associational life with a desire for an inclusive, equal and just society that we find ideas based on more equality and better democracy with the seeds of life in them. The local, proximate and accountable forms of civil society of the kind where it seems possible that democracy might become something that is done by us rather than something that is done to us.

If democracy means anything today, then it must be of the people, it must bring publics into being in the places where they live. What we are witnessing, in a myriad of forms, from micro-experiments to pilots and prototypes, new strategic approaches and ways of working with things like cooperative councils, participatory

budgeting and community businesses is the re-establishment of the value of the public good and of public goods outside of the public/private dichotomy; an attempt to reframe collectivism and put more power into the hands of more people.

**“I’d love to be in a place where we have joint decision making, where we co-produce things, co-deliver things.” (Oldham community workshop)**

The question then becomes, how can diverse publics with divergent views achieve sufficient consensus so that citizen participation can be translated in to institutional and social transformation? How is it possible to achieve the real participation of all publics as equals?

Broad participation requires the defence of the economic interests of the weakest, a renewed administrative effectiveness grounded in a new social pact and in new constitutions that give rise to new structures within a transformed state. For a renewed contributory democracy to work, its institutional translation must not end in institutional power for itself, rather it must create the means whereby the potential for everyone to share in power is realised. Democracy cannot work for some and not for others.

Ultimately, the civil society we have found is searching for a means of organising society as a kind of shared ‘commons’ - a shared resource, which is co-owned and/or co-governed by its users and/or stakeholder communities, according to its own rules and norms. This is both related to physical spaces that are shared or pooled; the co-production of the resource, the means

of maintaining that resource as well as the mode of governance – how decisions are made collaboratively to distribute and use the resource.

Thinking in terms of the ‘commons’ is a challenge to traditional civil society organisations because they have largely developed through formal organisational structures designed to operate in competition for scarce resources to solve a particular problem.

A people-led approach turns that on its head and begins with a logic of ‘abundance’ (Bauwens and Niaros, 2018), since all inhabitants of the commons are co-productive participants engaged in collective problem solving. It requires a rethinking of the institutional dynamics that has pitched state/private sector/civil society in distinct realms. This could signal a shift in focus away from charity and volunteering towards publics and citizenship.

More importantly maybe, it puts the commons and not the market at its epicentre with civil society becoming the places where the institutions of the commons are located. The principle of the market then changes from one focused on the accumulation of capital to one which serves the accumulation of the commons – for the public good and for public goods (in much the way we have seen some versions of community businesses aspire to) (Grayson, 2018).

As part of our work we have also been looking further afield to see what we can learn. The collection of what Harvey (2012) has termed ‘rebel cities’ offer interesting insights. In Barcelona we see the early forms of a new radical municipalism that acknowledges and then seeks to bypass the current limitations of the nation-state. The movement behind it, En Comú, refers to the commons and seeks to work with civil society actors and existing political parties to create new platforms that foster greater participation in governance.

Bologna is developing new institutional processes for public partnerships and shows how new kinds of experimental forms of governance alongside legal tools are needed to allow citizens and others to begin to co-design processes for the city.

Naples takes account of citizen-based claims on public spaces. While Milan is engaged in a rather more mainstream practice of the ‘integrated sharing city’, which sees forms of mutualisation of infrastructure, mainly through collaborative consumption, as a key strategic development for the city. Closer to home, both Frome and Oldham illustrate how local councils can play a key role in enabling communities to face current challenges together.

What this tells us is that there are echoes of what we have found in civil society in England all over Europe and the world. Nurturing the seeds of these ideas to germinate and take root puts people back in the picture; it allows the re-imagining of the sorts of institutional and regulatory frameworks that may be required to support such a radical repositioning; it will provide civil society with futures thinking that will conjoin civil society organisations with local and national governmental bodies, with a generative private sector to develop structures to support civic and economic forms that can be integrated into contributory forms of democracy.

# What might all this mean?

**What we are finding has different ramifications for different types of organisations across private, state and civil society sectors.** One finding has extensive significance for all sectors – the need to put more power in the hands of more people – based on the work of this inquiry, this is the one clear way that the futures of civil society will begin to flourish and work towards the ‘good society’.

The work we have done to date suggests that change is most likely to happen away from government, with people, in the places that they live. Expertise exists in abundance in communities and needs to be recognised and valued. There are many ways we could look to translate this finding into practice and as the inquiry progresses we will be exploring some of them.

The findings also suggest that narratives about civil society need to acknowledge and promote civil society as the ‘good society’ and as multiple public spheres – this gives a more political hue to the work of the sector that embraces its campaigning function and recognises power and politics as critical to democracy, purposes that have been, for too long, disparaged and legislated against.

The assault on democratic institutions, values and imaginaries, on public good and public goods, on social justice and on citizenry has generated a democratic crisis. Civil society and all the infrastructures that support it, need to affirm that politics is about people and campaigning is part of life.

A braver bolder sector is emerging that is looking towards distributed power and a citizen’s economy to bring about that change.

The findings in this report raise a range of questions and possible responses for specific sectors. Below are just a few that have risen to the surface but there are many more to be explored in 2018. **We would like to hear from you with your own ideas and suggestions:**

## Civil society:

How can today’s movements, organisations and institutions transform - and tomorrow’s emerge - to put more power in the hands of people and communities?

What are the new models for people led decision making, governance and accountability that work? What are some of the unintended consequences of these approaches?

How can you start to change cultures and ways of working across civil society in your own network or organisation? What are some of the hurdles and challenges that need to be overcome to do this?

How can we work with shifting and fluid networks rather than single solid organisations?

What is the funding ecosystem required to support these different models and approaches?

How can big charities refocus on their mission and on building relationships with people, making meaning from the ground up, democratising their practices and governance?

How can civil society ensure that in every town and every city there are an inclusive and diverse range of people trained to sit at the tables where decisions are made?

## Local councils and regional authorities:

What is needed to create porous boundaries between the state and civil society, with different models of decision making premised on the active involvement of and regard for civil society at every stage, so that people can be involved in co-designing, co-producing and co-delivering services?

What sort of things would encourage and enable local authorities to focus on long term solutions rather than short term sticking plasters with all departments looking across issues with the community in joined up problem solving?

How can local/regional authorities be actively transparent with mechanisms and processes?

Should communities be given first refusal on assets that have gone out of use rather than simply a right to bid?

## Foundations and funding bodies

How can foundations and funding bodies be encouraged to take more risks in the projects and people that receive funding supporting intervention and innovation in the full awareness that not all will go the full distance and the benefit of some may not be known for a long time?

How can foundations and funding bodies build co-production and co-design into every stage of the grant making process?

What would it mean for the funding ecology if more longer term projects were to be funded?

Can funding requirements be adjusted so that movements and disruptors as catalysts for change can apply and the unaffiliated and non-registered groups be seen as legitimate, important and worthy of funding?

Can systems of accountability be adapted so that funders continue to care about the outcome of grants without owning the outcome?

What would a mechanism for standardised forms of reporting on what gets funded look like and how could it be implemented so that people seeking funding can see quickly and easily where best to apply?

How can funding bodies work collaboratively?

## Government policy

What would it mean to change charity law so that it relates to activities and not just to organisations?

What would it mean to make the promotion of the political public sphere in the public interest a charitable purpose?

What might a Civil Society Bill of Rights look like that goes beyond the right to bid and the right to challenge (in the Localism Act 2011) and enables co-ownership and co-production?

Publicly owned businesses have a fiduciary duty to maximise returns to their shareholders; how might that be amended to ensure businesses deliver social and environmental value?

What would reverse accountability look like? In other words, how could we reverse the relationship between private industry and the law so that businesses/corporations have to demonstrate that they are minimising harm to a community through community co-development rather than the community having to prove that private businesses are causing it?

How can we grow community businesses, the cooperative sector and social enterprise in a manner that stays true to the principles of social justice and a citizen's economy?

# Will you make it happen?



Civil Society Futures continues until the end of 2018. Please be part of it — and together let's create lasting change.

Take part at [civilsocietyfutures.org](http://civilsocietyfutures.org)



## 1) Tell your story

Are you struggling to have power over the things that matter to you? We will be doing more to involve communities from Newcastle to Peckham to Penzance, people who are disabled, LGBTQI+ and others — whoever you are, we want to hear your story too.



## 2) Share an inspiring example

Have you already been involved in making ambitious change to put power in the hands of people and communities? We know there are great examples of change all around the country — we want to hear yours to help others see how change is possible.

Are you already working on tackling one of the issues raised or have an idea you can pursue? Tell us what you're doing so we can share it.



## 3) Kickstart change in your community, group or organisation

How can you put power in people's hands where you are? Reflect on what you're doing already, experiment, discuss, run an event. We'll have a DIY toolkit ready by the end of May you can use to help guide you — sign up to our email newsletter to hear when it's ready.



## 4) Develop a big idea

We'll be exploring some of the ideas for change we've mentioned in the previous sections - want to take part? Sign up to our email newsletter to hear how.

## Young people

In the months ahead we're running several events in towns and cities around England to hear more from young people about what they want for the future and to involve them in starting to create it — culminating in a big event towards the end of the school holidays for young people from around the country.

Sign up to our email list to hear when they're happening and how you can take part.

## Civil Society Futures Festival

Autumn/winter 2018 — take part in our festival celebrating inspiring examples of change and bringing together people creating the future from across civil society to plan change from 2019 into the next decade. More coming soon...

Go to [civilsocietyfutures.org](http://civilsocietyfutures.org) to take part, sign up for email updates on everything that's happening and find a longer report, animation, films, blogs and more.

# Who we are



Civil Society Futures is a national conversation about how English civil society can flourish in a fast changing world.

Through community events, academic research and online debate, Civil Society Futures is trying to create space for a much needed conversation among those involved in all forms of civic action – from informal networks to vast charities, Facebook groups to faith groups. Considering how both the nature of civil society and the context it exists in are changing fast, we are investigating how to maximise the positive effects of civic action and provide a guide to how to release its potential to drive positive change.

The conversation is guided by an independent panel of people with perspectives ranging from theatre making in South Wales to tech investment in Gaza, local government in the North of England to the world's alliance of

civil society organisations. It is chaired by Julia Unwin, the former chief executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and is made up of Asif Afridi, Sarah Gordon, Debu Purkayastha, Danny Sriskandarajah, Rhiannon White, Carolyn Wilkins, Steve Wyler. Bert Massey was also a member of the panel but very sadly passed away last year.

This panel is powered by a collaboration of four unique organisations. Citizens UK has its roots in communities across England. Goldsmiths University brings skills in academic research, looking at the changing trends in civil society. openDemocracy facilitates wide ranging discussion about the powerful institutions in our society. And Forum for the Future brings years of experience of helping people figure out how the world is changing and how best to respond.



# Appendix 1



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# Appendix 2

## Responses to the call for evidence and contributions

Name	On whose behalf are you sharing this information?	Organisation/group/network name (if appropriate)
Alan Twelvetrees	Individual	Citizens UK, Wales
Andrew Purkis	Individual	Individual contribution
Angus McCabe	Individual, Research organisation	Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham
Ben Young	Individual	Individual contribution
Bill Kerry	NGO	The Equality Trust
Carol Webb	Individual	Individual contribution
Caroline Howe	NGO	Lloyds Bank Foundation for England & Wales
David Beel	Individual, Research organisation	Staffordshire University / WISERD (Cardiff University)
David Menham	Individual	David Menham
Dr Christala Sophcoleous	Research organisation	WISERD
Dr Robin Jackson	Research organisation, NGO, Network of citizens	The Centre for Welfare Reform
Ed Mayo	Trade association	Co-operatives UK
Ella Sips	Individual	Chester Voluntary Action
Fred Garnett	Individual, Research organisation	Learner-Generated Contexts Research Group
George Lueddeke	Academic Researcher	Individual Contribution
Hugh Small	Individual	<a href="http://www.democracy150.uk">www.democracy150.uk</a>
Ian Jones	NGO	Volunteer Cornwall
Jackie Rosenberg	Collaborative Commission	London Communities Commission
John Mohan	Academic Researcher	Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham
Jonathan Lindsell	NGO	Charity Futures
Lyn Winter	Individual	Individual contribution
Maggie McAndrews	Individual	The Mac Gallery
Maria Rovisco	Individual	University of Leicester
Martha Wilkinson	Community Foundation	Devon Community Foundation
Nick Temple	Membership body	Social Enterprise UK
Nina Hathway	An independent network of local charities and community organisations working in Westminster.	Westminster Community Network
Paul Hackwood	NGO	Church Urban Fund
Penny Wilson	NGO	Getting on Board
Professor William Maloney	Academic Researcher	Newcastle University
Rachel Rank	NGO	360Giving
Simon Duffy	Research organisation, NGO, Network of citizens	Centre for Welfare Reform
Tim MacDonald	Individual	Individual contribution
Vicki Sellick	NGO, Foundation	Nesta
Wendy Baverstock	Individual	Individual contribution

# Appendix 3

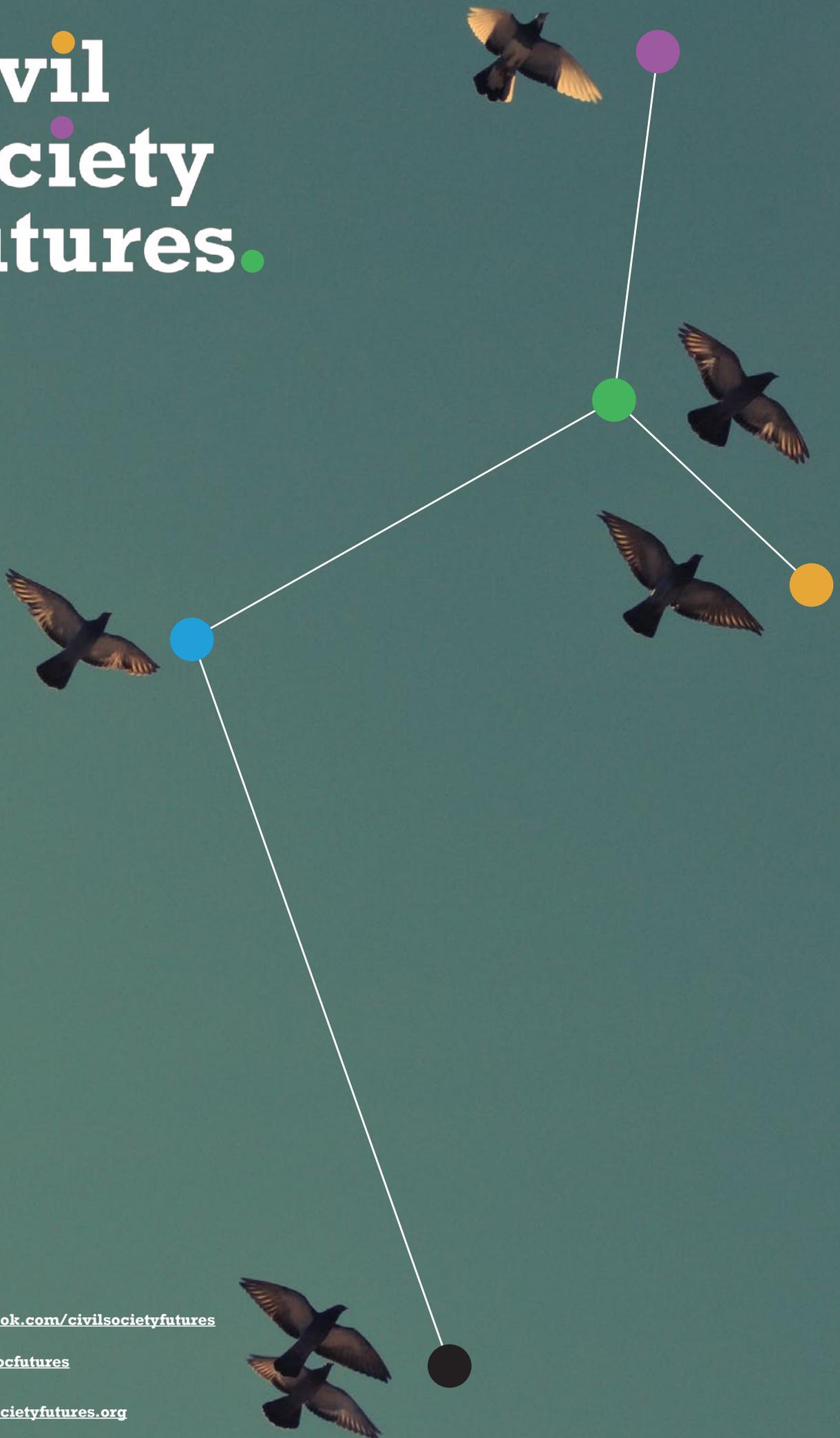
## List of Conversations held

A map version of this can be found [here](#). The list below only represents the conversations which have fed back their insights to us and which have therefore been analysed as evidence as part of the research process.

Title of Conversation	Date of event	Location	Host
Danish Civil Society Field trip	02/05/17	Skip Garden, Kings Cross, London	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
Charity Commission	08/05/17	Charity Commission, 1 Drummond Gate, Pimlico, London SW1V 2QQ	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
Inquiry funders	09/06/17	Barrow Cadbury, London	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
Unusual Suspects Festival	16/06/17	Barbican, London	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
CEOs of large charities/voluntary groups	20/06/17	NCVO, London	Stuart Etherington, NCVO
Forum for the Future staff 1/2	10/06/17	Forum for the Future, London	Forum for the Future
Connecting the tech sector to civil society	06/07/17	Somerset House, London	Cassie Robinson, DotEveryone
Funders staff session	12/07/17	Interface, London	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
Living Change - Civil Society Futures	17/07/17	The Library, London	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
A business take on Civil Society	18/07/17	Elmley Nature Reserve	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
Forum for the Future staff 2/2		Forum for the Future, London	Forum for the Future
London Youth Network	31/07/17	London Youth Network	Civil Society Futures Inquiry
Future of student volunteering	16/08/17	Liverpool	Student Volunteering Network
The future of civil society in Milton Keynes	25/08/17	Milton Keynes	Community Action MK
Civil Society Futures - CEO's of Youth organisations	30/08/17	London	Girl Guides
The future of civil society in Milton Keynes	06/09/17	Milton Keynes	Community Action MK
How can local and national civil society organisations work most effectively in places?	07/09/17	Southampton	Southampton CVS
Local Conversation	09/09/17	Leicester	Leicestershire VCS
How can VCS' inspire change for sustainability at a city level?	21/09/17	Plymouth	Plymouth Octopus Project (POP+)
How can civil society tackle economic inequality and social inequalities (related to identity of one form or other) in an integrated way and in a way that doesn't increase divisions between different communities and parts of society? 1/2	25/09/17	London	Caroline Ellis
Office for Civil Society Conversation	28/09/17	London	Office for Civil Society
What is the future of different types of value exchange in civil society?	03/10/17	London	Karen Morton, Management Development Network

Future of grant making	04/10/17	London	Danny Sriskandarajah
The role of Comic Relief in Civil Society	10/10/17	London	Comic Relief
What is the emerging direction of travel for the criminal justice sector and how is this affecting civil society when working in this area?	12/10/17	London	Barrow Carbury Trust
What is the future of the youth organisations and how might we tackle the changes needed from a place-based angle? Conversation and interactive session with Rhiannon White (Inquiry Panel member)	24/10/17	Winchester	The Blaggrave Trust
A Southwark Conversation	24/10/17	Southwark, London	Community Southwark
Civil Society Futures, what does this mean for policy and civil servants?	24/10/17	Cambridge	Centre for Science and Policy - University of Cambridge
The Future of English Charity Law and Regulation: Is the English model of charity and its regulatory framework fit for purpose for the future?	26/10/17	Liverpool	Charity Law & Policy Unit University of Liverpool School of Law & Social Justice
Building on community – the power of relationships	30/11/17	London	Community Resources
How can civil society tackle economic inequality and social inequalities (related to identity of one form or other) in an integrated way and in a way that doesn't increase divisions between different communities and parts of society? 2/2	30/10/17	London	Caroline Ellis
Local conversations	27/11/17	Kingston	Kingston Voluntary Action
The future of civil society and disabled people's services	28/11/17	London	Voluntary Organisations Disability Group
The future of civil society: A North East Perspective	30/11/17	Newcastle	Voluntary Organisations' Network North East
Making sense of the insights from conversations ran by NAVCA members in Autumn	05/12/17	London	NAVCA
Role of art in civil society	05/12/17	London	The University of East London
Local conversations	06/12/17	York	York CVS
Reimagining Governance (part 1)	07/12/17	Birmingham	Association of Chairs
Future of democracy	13/12/17	London	Newspeak House
Future of organisational forms	10/01/18	London	Julia Unwin, Hareed Sabeti
Civil Society Futures and Big Lottery	11/01/18	London	Big Lottery Fund
Civil Society Futures and the West Midlands in the next 10 years	30/01/18	Birmingham	Barrow Cadbury and West Midlands Funder Network
Funding the Cooperative City	05/02/18	London	Eutropian and Everyone, Everyday
Reimagining Governance (part 2)	08/02/18	London	Association of Chairs
Role of civil society for a flourishing city	07/03/18	Bradford	Bradford Cathedral

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