






What follows is an illustration of the findings of an 18 month conversation in towns and cities across the UK, facilitated by Grant Thornton, exploring how we can create a vibrant economy. We highlight the big themes which have emerged from these conversations, the ideas generated and the inspiring people we've met along the way.





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“No one agent can provide solutions. It requires our collective talent and ingenuity as citizens, communities and businesses.”

# Foreword from Sacha Romanovitch

As it prepares to leave the EU, the UK finds itself at a crossroads. We have great strengths: innovative services, creative industries and advanced manufacturing. We have excellent universities, widely respected public services and we attract talented people from around the world.

Equally there are challenges. The UK has an aging population and issues of sustainability, transport and pollution to contend with.

For people and businesses to thrive those challenges need to be addressed. No one agent can provide solutions. It requires our collective talent and ingenuity as citizens, communities and businesses.

In launching our vibrant economy programme our thinking was: 'what if?' What if we could define a new normal, moving beyond the binary notion of GDP? What if we were to pool our knowledge and resources to tackle the challenges we face as a country? What could we achieve?

Our goal was to create a movement of people taking positive actions to shape a vibrant economy where no one is left behind. So we worked with our Vibrant Economy Commission to crowd source the Vibrant Economy Index. We set out to bring together businesses, the third sector and communities across the UK to debate, to dream and to create an aspirational vision of the future. We launched the Faces of a Vibrant Economy to showcase those progressive leaders from across sectors to inspire others.

**We set out to bring together businesses, the third sector and communities across the UK to debate, to dream and to create an aspirational vision of the future.**

## And we learnt some important things.

- A vibrant economy is so much more than GDP. Our Vibrant Economy Index gave us a more insightful picture of the opportunities and challenges which enabled us to focus on next steps.
- Moving away from a team of experts allowed us to start re-imagining how things are done. We've seen that by creating a shared purpose we can break down the barriers to inclusive, sustainable growth.
- We found that pooling all our talents and capabilities is critical. Diversity has to be at the heart of what we do – often in cities, seeing who wasn't in the room during our Live Lab discussions told us so much about where the real opportunity for growth lay.

## So what next?

- **A call to action for us all:** we've incorporated a lot of our insights into our 'Blueprint for a Vibrant Economy' – a set of recommendations to government. Yet government cannot create change on its own. Business, communities and the third sector must show the way.
- **Collaboration is key:** the public, private and third sector must combine their thinking, resources and networks to collectively solve the challenges the UK faces – it's too important to sit back and wait.
- **Scale and impact:** so much great work is happening around the country. Now is the time to share and combine our efforts to create impact at scale. This document brings together many of the ideas and resources available to do this and provides suggestions for how we all can get involved.

I believe more than ever that together we can shape a vibrant economy where no one is left behind.



# Vibrant economy: the journey so far

## What is a vibrant economy?

We believe a vibrant economy is one which realises the shared potential of businesses, cities, people and communities across the country. It is an economy founded on trust and integrity in markets, one which unlocks sustainable growth in dynamic organisations and creates environments in which people, communities and business can thrive.

## How can we achieve it?

We began our work on this by exploring the health, happiness and prosperity of people in towns and cities across England. Grant Thornton's Vibrant Economy Index is an in-depth piece of research that looks beyond productivity and gives us a more rounded illustration of 'place' in the UK. We see it as a tool with which to build on strengths and identify where work is needed.

The Index showed us that each place is unique with strengths to be celebrated and built upon. Economic prosperity doesn't inevitably correlate with positive outcomes in other crucial areas. Westminster, an area which shows high levels of dynamism and opportunity, faces some challenges when it comes to a sense of community, trust and belonging. Meanwhile Manchester, an area which has high levels of prosperity, needs to address health and wellbeing.\*

## Vibrant economy on the road

Inspired by insights from the Index, we embarked on a tour of the country. We sought to bring leaders, groups and people from the private, public and third sectors together through a series of 'Live Labs' and thematic dinners to discuss and debate the questions it prompted.

Our aim: to convene conversations and share ideas and best practice. We wanted to encourage business as well as the public and third sectors and local communities to collaborate, implement ideas and drive positive change in our economy.

From the outset we understood that some of the barriers to improvement have challenged the UK's brightest. We also knew great work was happening around the country already.

Rather than commission another report from experts, asking government to address those barriers, we sought to find out what could be achieved when people, businesses and communities come together to tackle an issue. By getting out there and eliciting ideas on how to address common issues, we've learnt you can re-imagine how things are done and collectively overcome challenges.

- We've convened thousands of people across all sectors
- Explored a number of significant themes
- Met with hundreds of inspiring business leaders

## What we have brought to life here: Possibility. Involvement. Impact.

What follows is a record of the diversity and ingenuity we've seen in the course of our vibrant economy activity, the insights we've garnered and some suggested next steps for how business might get involved.

Three key themes have emerged: the power of common purpose, the future of work and the importance of place in a vibrant economy. To show these themes in action, we share the initiatives and ideas of others that we've come across during our work as well as the opportunities that we've helped to shape. By sharing these, we hope to inspire further action. We also speak to some of the business leaders and entrepreneurs already making strides in our three focus areas and we've included their stories to demonstrate what can be achieved.

## Good things happen when people come together

The diversity of thought across the UK is illustrated through the unique ideas generated in the seven cities we consulted. There is a huge willingness for communities to work together, to share, achieve and have their say. By detailing some of these ideas, we encourage others to get together and re-imagine how things can be done.

\*For more information on the Vibrant Economy Index: <http://www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/insights/vibrant-economy-index/>



## The vibrant economy programme so far



**1,500**

**Participants**

Includes individuals from across the public, private and third sectors



**7**

**Live Labs**

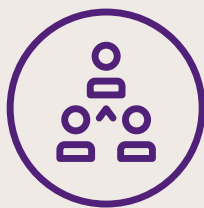
Active city workshops bringing together 300 people at a time



**12**

**Round tables**

In-depth thematic debates



**100**

**Faces of a vibrant economy**

Group of leaders celebrated for their dedication to vibrancy



**800**

**Companies involved**

Cross-sector businesses of all shapes and sizes



**324**

**Local authority areas**

Analysed in our Vibrant Economy Index



**13**

**Commissioners**

Our team of trusted vibrant economy advisers

# VIBRANT SHEFFIELD AS INI

unlock  
power  
Sheffield



unlocking  
the POWER of  
SHEFFIELD





# Executive summary

When we began our vibrant economy journey, we set out to stimulate action and help business, cities, people and communities unlock their potential. So far we've held dinners, gathered communities, celebrated individual contributions and conducted research.

We've found that shaping a vibrant economy involves three key areas of importance:

## 1 The power of common purpose

Collaboration is key when it comes to solving challenges and creating a fairer society. To bring about positive change, organisations, people and communities must share skills, opportunities and resources.

## 2 The future of work

Technology is rapidly transforming the world of work. If we are to create a vibrant economy, one in which everybody prospers, we need to prepare for tomorrow and ensure nobody gets left behind. This means embracing new ways of working and creating stronger bridges between business and education.

## 3 Re-imagining place

Our environments affect our ability to thrive and we need to consider what we can do to improve where we work and live.



**@LauraHBennett** Impressed that **@GrantThorntonUK** proactively brings together industry + universities to collaborate on industrial strategy **#vibrantsheffield**

**@lucy00001** Imagining community & business working hand in hand with education **#vibrantbristol**  
**@GrantThorntonUK** **#VibrantEconomy**

**@OhsInfo** "Cultural place, business space, living base"  
**#vibrantreading**



## Ten ideas to shape a vibrant economy

We've heard thousands of fantastic ideas throughout this process. Here are ten of the most powerful.

- 1 Turn underused public spaces into collaboration hubs
- 2 Bring education and business together to collaborate
- 3 Start and maintain mentoring across all generations
- 4 Shift mindsets towards lifelong learning
- 5 Introduce flexible working hours to eradicate commuting issues
- 6 Create grassroots healthcare initiatives
- 7 Create local bonds to pay for important infrastructure projects
- 8 Create brand identities for cities and regions to unite communities
- 9 Foster intergenerational schemes to tackle loneliness and isolation
- 10 Empower communities to help those most in need



## Section two

### Key themes of a vibrant economy

While each of our city inquiries considered topics of particular importance to their location, conversations converged around:

- 1 The power of common purpose – share, re-use, re-purpose
- 2 The future of work – embracing new skills and ways of working
- 3 Re-imagining place – environments which support growth

Here we will explore some of the many ideas that have been generated, see projects which are underway and hear from some of the entrepreneurs leading the way.

# The power of common purpose: share, re-use, re-purpose

Bringing different sectors and people together stimulates innovation, creates social and economic value and helps identify new ways to use existing or disused assets. In our inquiries people expressed a strong desire to pool resources and find local solutions to national challenges.

## Putting public resources to work

Making the most of under-used civic buildings to create working hubs caught people's imaginations.

The West Midlands was typical of many Live Lab discussions with attendees keen to find existing space in places such as libraries and sport centres and transform them into work and innovation hubs for people and local groups.

In Reading, work is now underway to create an innovation hub in the town hall, complete with video wall to attract more visitors to the City. And in Leeds, Live Lab attendees proposed turning unused plots of land into shared green space. This could be made available on a five-year lease, for community gardening or pop-up farms.

There's a big role for business to play in supporting local collaboration and networks by sharing expertise and resources. Oxford offers an example of where it can work.

## Oxford Parent POWER

TechPixies upskills mums and helps them return to work or start their own business. The award-winning social enterprise offers courses like 'Instagram for business' and a flagship course that covers branding, visual marketing and blogging.

It runs programmes at three locations including in Oxfordshire at Pow Wow, a purpose-built collaboration and innovation space at the local Grant Thornton office. The Pow Wow space is also open to the wider Oxford community.

Women who have taken part in the TechPixies programme describe it as a 'really creative, practical approach to training and their 'safe place.'





## The power of common purpose: share, re-use, re-purpose

### Some of the ways you can get involved

There are opportunities in every town and city for business to support the creation of collaborative, local solutions. Listed below are a few suggestions that may provide a simple route to action.

**Support collaborative networks:** OpenIDEO connects creatives, entrepreneurs, educators and leaders in cities to solve local and global issues. It enables people to design and work on projects that address issues in their local community and access resources to expand their impact: [www.openideo.com](http://www.openideo.com). You could create an OpenIDEO chapter in your city.

**Creating sustainable towns:** the Transition movement helps communities tackle big challenges by starting at a local level. It encourages people and groups to come together and crowd-source solutions. The idea is to create sustainable local economies, spark entrepreneurship, re-imagine work, re-skill people and weave webs of connection and support. Find a Transition group in your town or set one up here: [www.transitionnetwork.org/](http://www.transitionnetwork.org/)

**Impact Hubs:** Impact Hubs are a global network of hubs that foster entrepreneurship, idea incubation, business development and co-working spaces. Investigate setting up an Impact Hub here: [www.impacthub.net](http://www.impacthub.net)

**Making the most of empty and underused buildings:** 3Space is a non-profit urban agency with the aim of getting more out of buildings, giving them new purpose and making them work for local communities. It works with corporates, government and developers to unlock and maximise their otherwise underused or surplus commercial property, providing short-term affordable creative studio and workspaces for local innovation. [www.3space.org](http://www.3space.org)

**Brixton Soup Kitchen:** if the story of Solomon Smith and Mohamed Hashi inspires you (see right) and you think you can help – get in touch. The team are always looking for volunteers to contribute to their work. [www.brixtonsoupkitchen.org/](http://www.brixtonsoupkitchen.org/)

**Business in the Community** is the Prince of Wales' Responsible Business Network. Members work together to tackle a wide range of issues that are essential to building a fairer society and a more sustainable future. They offer a number of practical ways for businesses to collaborate and address some of the key issues facing society. [www.bitc.org.uk](http://www.bitc.org.uk)



# Be the change: harnessing the power of community

## Solomon Smith and Dr Mahamed Hashi

Instead of being the complainers, be the campaigners. That's what motivated us to open our community centre and food bank in South London, Brixton Soup Kitchen. Reacting to footage we had seen of people on the streets in the cold, we set up a food service for the homeless and needy. When we launched, we imagined it would last for a couple of months. We are now in our fifth year.

Our story is not the traditional one; instead of setting up a funding pipeline and devising our objectives, we hit the streets on day one. Along the way we've received incredible support from the community and the project has gone from strength to strength. So, how do you get the community behind a cause?

For us, we do it by focusing on the visibility of the issue and providing ways for people to get involved in solving it.

We wanted to tackle homelessness and that led us to launch the centre – it was that same concern that got the community behind us. Social media means you can show supporters the impact they're having in real-time. We use it to update people on what we need, as well as good news stories. We find that Twitter's blue tick – designated to verified accounts – gives what we say legitimacy.

We encourage as many people as possible to come in to the centre and help: whether by dropping off supplies,

fundraising or taking food to people in need. By spreading good energy and having your HQ be a happy place to volunteer and spend time, people will gravitate towards you.

Similarly, if you want to get the community behind you, you must be honest. People will know if your intentions are not genuine or if you're trying to mislead them. If you're doing it for fame, you will be found out.

Finally, share your knowledge and contacts with others. Community spirit is a tool to bring people together, not keep them apart. We want to live in a future with no soup kitchens, where no one is allowed to fall through the cracks. Embracing the power of the community is the only way that such a future is possible.

**Solomon Smith and Dr Mahamed Hashi, co-founders, Brixton Soup Kitchen**

“By spreading good energy and having your HQ be a happy place to volunteer and spend time, people will gravitate towards you.”

# The future of work: embracing new skills and new ways of working

The future world of work touches on issues such as the pace of technology development, current and future business priorities and skills requirements. As the country prepares to leave the EU, the question of how the UK sources the skills it needs to grow is becoming more pressing.

How can we make sure businesses, communities and people have the skills they need to grow? How do we make sure no one gets left behind?

## Mentoring

An easy yet effective way to upskill people is through mentoring and this appealed to many we spoke to. Reverse mentoring gives those who are senior in age or who are experienced, the chance to gain new capabilities; and younger or less skilled employees the opportunity to develop confidence and communications skills. Everyone benefits.

### Mentoring that delivers excellence

Elevate – based on the third floor of Reading library – is an example of successful mentoring in action. There are 180 organisations involved in mentoring in Reading, Elevate brings them together under one roof.

The organisation launched in 2014 as a website linking 16–24 year-olds with training schemes and opportunities to access voluntary, temporary and paid work placements. It now helps hundreds of young people each year to upskill, re-skill and pursue their professional ambitions.

With help from local business, Elevate has developed its materials and resources to attract the very best business leader mentors for Reading's young people.

## Business and education: bridging the gap

Most of our city inquiries tackled how best to make training and skills development more 'business-relevant'. When we talk to employers about what's needed to address skills shortages, they tell us it's greater employer engagement with education and training. This isn't just good for workplace skills, it is also great for young people. Young adults who've had four or more interactions with employers at school are 86% less likely to be NEET (not in employment, education or training). They also earn 16% more. Greater interaction works.

In the West of England we heard how teachers at Bridgewater College Academy spent a week at a Yeo Valley dairy plant. The goal: for them to gain a greater appreciation of the world of work and the kinds of jobs that their pupils could aspire to. Key to this was the ability of teachers to be able to contextualise and bring to life academic subjects in the classroom by relating them to practical applications in the working world.

Teachers reported that they came away with an appreciation of the need for problem solving ability in industry and that algebra is a required skill even on production lines.

And each region had its own examples of initiatives designed to bridge the gap between business and education.

Our own Grant Thornton School Enterprise Programme develops the financial and entrepreneurial skills of 11–13 year olds and supports global entrepreneurs in the developing world. The programme plays a role in upskilling the next generation, providing the young with access to business people and fostering links to local schools in the community. And in Leeds, our work as part of the national initiative; the Access Accountancy programme, is giving work experience to local pupils from disadvantaged schools. We hope these schools will become feeders for new employee training.



## A mind-set shift

And it's not all about young people. The future of work will demand a mindset shift from us all: from a mentality of 'a job for life' to one of 'continual learning.'

That's a principle that Linbrooke Services, a Sheffield-based engineering firm, has grasped well. Its military re-settlement programme, working in tandem with the Ministry of Defence, offers training, industrial placements and employment to former military personnel.

## New possibilities

The future of work doesn't just bring challenges, many of the people we spoke to were alive to the possibilities that technology offers.

In Leeds, people brainstormed ways in which the City could support self-employed entrepreneurs and micro businesses. Their suggestion was an 'Uber for desks' – a bookable platform to find unused hot desks and workspaces.

## An end to the daily commute

In Cambridgeshire, people looked forward to an end to the daily commute. People visualised how Cambridge could become a 24/7 centre that attracts businesses, improves work-life balance and reduces congestion. Now a working group that includes Cambridge County Council has been set up to explore – amongst other things – developing an agile working accreditation for organisations that offer this and meet key standards.

**When we talk to employers about what's needed to address skills shortages, they tell us it's greater employer engagement with education and training.**

## The future of work: embracing new skills and new ways of working

### Some of the ways you can get involved

**Connecting employers and schools:** Founders4Schools provides an easy way of connecting businesses and their people with schools which are looking for people to speak about their job and organisation: [www.founders4schools.org.uk](http://www.founders4schools.org.uk)

**Inspiring the Future is another great way of connecting with schools:** [www.inspiringthefuture.org/](http://www.inspiringthefuture.org/)

**Mentoring:** if you'd like to mentor a young person or develop a partnership for your organisation, The Princes Trust has an excellent track record and a network across the UK: [www.princes-trust.org.uk/support-our-work/volunteer/mentor](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/support-our-work/volunteer/mentor)

**Mentor a social enterprise:** you can lend your expertise and insight to a social enterprise with the help of Unltd: [www.unltd.org.uk/partners/mentoring-social-entrepreneurs/](http://www.unltd.org.uk/partners/mentoring-social-entrepreneurs/)

If you'd like to hear more about the work that Kathryn is doing at Decoded (see right), get in touch: [www.decoded.com/en-gb/](http://www.decoded.com/en-gb/)







“We taught a 70-year old journalist to code recently and it was a triumph to hear him talk about how he felt it had given him a further ten years in the industry.”

## Learning for life

**Kathryn Parsons**

Technology is radically reshaping and impacting every single business, industry, economy – as well as our behaviours.

When you combine a longer working life and the rise of millennials in the workplace, it's no surprise businesses are seeking ways to keep their teams at the top of their game.

It's essential that we dispel myths that tech is only for a certain few; that tech isn't for 'someone my age', 'someone with my job', 'someone of my academic background', 'someone of my gender'. Leaders need to help empower their entire workforce, because when taught in the right way, it's possible to unleash the inner coder, data scientist and hacker in everyone.

This mindset has also seeped into new hiring strategy: ask any business leader what they're looking for and they'll tell you it's a propensity to learn, not necessarily a complete, practical skillset. Innovative leaders are already closing the gap between the developers and the rest of the business – allowing them to communicate and operate in this new era of business.

At Decoded, we have taught people of every age and have witnessed time and again how tech literacy is far from reserved for the under-18s. We taught a 70-year old journalist to code recently and it was a triumph to hear him talk about how he felt it had given him a further ten years in the industry.

It's important for leaders to appreciate how scary the concept of continuous learning can be. We must avoid the jargon and make the upskilling and re-skilling process fun and accessible for the whole team. It is a period of radical change – and it will take brave, digitally empowered leaders to navigate it. Those that do will adapt, evolve and thrive.

**Kathryn Parsons, co-founder & co-CEO of Decoded**

# Re-imagining place: environments which support growth

For economies to thrive, they require local environments that support growth. Successful businesses and organisations have to engage with the local economy and create stronger communities.

It goes beyond ‘corporate social responsibility’ and involves taking more ownership of issues such as health, education and social inclusion. When businesses do this, the beneficial outcomes include resilient supply chains, access to more and better skills as well as new products and services that meet social needs and create the wider environment for business success.

## Local pride

What stood out in our city inquiries was people’s deep pride in their area and a desire to take ownership and responsibility for local outcomes. It was clear that on a range of issues, people felt they were best able to find the right solutions for their city.

## Grassroots healthcare

Local, personal responsibility for outcomes was a recurring theme when it came to healthcare and this was at the heart of the debate in Manchester. Grant Thornton’s Vibrant Economy Index shows that although the City scores highly on prosperity, it must improve its health and wellbeing if it is to fulfil its potential.

Rather than rely on an overly-centralised, healthcare system incentivised financially to treat the symptoms rather than the cause of illness – there was a strong conviction that people should take ownership of their health and be proactive in managing it. And with the development of wearable diagnostic technology, it was argued this was increasingly possible.

How could people take action? A wealth of ideas supported the clarion call of the day that ‘health is everyone’s business in Manchester.’ They included an ‘I Care’ campaign to celebrate good health habits and celebrate caring for others. It was also suggested that employers could be rewarded for providing quality healthcare and other services including access to private GPs, childcare as well as the encouragement of practices such as walking meetings.

## Joined-up thinking

The broader point from all of the discussions on healthcare was the need for a more holistic, integrated approach: between business, charities and healthcare. This would encourage people to live more healthily, to manage their own health and to seek treatment from agencies within the community rather than centralised healthcare.

## Greening our cities

Getting and keeping people moving was a frequent topic of discussion. Measures designed to promote physical activity often had the added benefit of improving the environment.

In Birmingham people thought that a congestion charge would ease traffic levels and suggested funds could be channelled into creating a Park and Ride service. Sheffield Live Lab participants wanted to understand and overcome the barriers to travelling by bike. Cycling Sheffield has since made recommendations to make cycling safer in the City.

**Rather than rely on an overly-centralised, healthcare system ... there was a strong conviction that people should take ownership of their health and be proactive in managing it.**



## Financing our ambitions

Vibrant economies depend upon the right infrastructure to support sustainable growth. During our conversations we found people wanted to find ways of raising local finance for projects. In this way, they could invest in their community, in the infrastructure needed for local businesses and people to thrive and get a financial return from doing so.

People in Leeds suggested creating a Leeds Bond funded by local investors or even by crowdfunding. It could be used to finance innovative, environmental initiatives including green transport, low emission buses or solar panels. The bond would bring returns for investors and at the same time create a thriving and green city.

Cambridge also saw similar possibilities. A regional investment fund could provide opportunity to use locally collected tax for social purpose and re-investment across the region to support satellite cities and not just Cambridge. Discussions are now underway about creating a Cambridgeshire Wealth Fund.

**People wanted to find ways of raising local finance for projects. In this way, they could invest in their community and in the infrastructure needed for local businesses and people to thrive.**



## Re-imagining place – environments which support growth

### Some of the ways you can get involved

Successful businesses depend upon a wider set of social and environmental factors: a healthy workforce, healthy, engaged employees able to meet caring responsibilities and affordable housing are all part of the picture. Below are some national organisations which provide information and opportunities to support.

**Investment and finance:** if you have an idea for a social project that needs funding but which has a sustainable revenue model, you can find out if it's eligible for funding with Big Society Capital: [www.bigsocietycapital.com/what-we-do/co-creating-new-ideas](http://www.bigsocietycapital.com/what-we-do/co-creating-new-ideas)

The Big Lottery Fund also provides grant funding for projects in communities.

Abundance is a crowd-funding platform that helps raise money for renewable energy and community infrastructure projects through peer-to-peer investments

and tradeable debentures (similar to bonds): [www.abundanceinvestment.com/invest/marketplace](http://www.abundanceinvestment.com/invest/marketplace)

Community shares are a form of equity enabling communities to invest in local shops and pubs, renewable energy schemes, community facilities, local food growing, new football clubs, magazines, heritage buildings and even local whisky distilleries: [www.communityshares.org.uk](http://www.communityshares.org.uk)

**Health in the workplace and community:** GoodGym combines running and fitness activities with helping older people. Check if there is a GoodGym in your area: [www.goodgym.org](http://www.goodgym.org)

Public Health England has produced a guide for employers on how to support healthy eating in the workplace: [www.wellbeingcharter.org.uk/media/Healthy%20Eating%20Topic%20Guide.pdf](http://www.wellbeingcharter.org.uk/media/Healthy%20Eating%20Topic%20Guide.pdf)

“Creating cities of the future is no small feat, it takes optimism, resilience and hard work. Such attributes abound in the UK and make me confident that we will continue to positively shape the urban world of tomorrow.”



# Building the city of tomorrow

Laurence Kemball-Cook

Can you imagine a world where the pavement is playing birdsong and lighting your way home – not just providing a means to get from A to B? By re-imagining the role that infrastructure plays in our cities, we take the first step to developing urban centres that put a smile on our face as well as respond to our practical needs.

For example in Odense, Denmark sensors at traffic lights measure when it's raining and give cyclists up to 20-seconds longer of 'green light', which means less time at a standstill in the rain. Meanwhile, in London's West End, we recently trialled a stretch of pavement that generates electricity, counts the number of visitors, emits birdsong and light to create a friendly ambiance. Small things can make a big difference.

Technological innovations and our ability to collect and analyse data in sophisticated ways mean we can now expect more from the infrastructure that surrounds us.

This includes the installation of the next generation of public transport – Elon Musk's ultra-high-speed, underground transport system, Hyperloop, among them. It also involves diversifying power sources so that the most environmentally and economically friendly options are easily available.

However, progress will remain fragmented until there are clear channels for collaboration between early-stage companies, big business and the public sector. To do this, local government needs to reduce barriers to entry and be open minded about future partnerships on infrastructure projects. Creating cities of the future is no small feat, it takes optimism, resilience and hard work. Such attributes abound in the UK and make me confident that we will continue to positively shape the urban world of tomorrow.

**Laurence Kemball-Cook, founder and CEO of Pavegen and a Face of a vibrant economy**

# Celebrating unique ideas from across the country

## Seven conversations

During the course of our vibrant economy work, we asked people what would help their community to become more vibrant. There have been hundreds of ideas, many of which fall under similar themes, as explored in the previous section.

And there were also many unique ideas. We'd like to share some of them here.



# Ideas from our cities

## Sheffield

Two hundred people, including business, arts, charity, public sector and university leaders, joined forces for a day to think of ways to make Sheffield the innovation and creativity capital of Europe. Here are some of the ideas suggested:

### Sheffield Ambition

Sheffield is known for its creativity and innovation, with a rich history of manufacturing. Live Lab participants felt that by channelling some more of the city's ambitions – it could achieve even more. "There are five words that capture the heart of Sheffield and signal its future direction," says Paul Houghton, Partner, Grant Thornton Sheffield. "Creativity, innovation, collaboration, leadership and ambition."

Sheffield hosted a dinner that focused on how future leaders from across the world could be persuaded to choose to live and work in Sheffield. Two proposals are now being developed: the first involves building a framework for Sheffield's student population to get more involved in the future direction of the city. The second, a programme involving collaboration between Grant Thornton and the City's two universities, will look at ways to get young talent to spend more time in the City. A 'story bank' is also being developed, highlighting an array of positives as told through the eyes of local entrepreneurs. Looking forward, Vibrant Sheffield workshops involving 25 local leaders will look at how the City can embrace the future and the innovation and creative opportunities that it offers.



## Pedal power and café culture – two more ideas for the city

- 1 Cycling City:** cycling can help citizens to lower their carbon footprint and get fit. Sheffield Live Lab participants heard about the efforts being made to encourage more cycling in Sheffield by understanding and overcoming the barriers to travelling by bike and enthusiastically gave their backing. Using the Vibrant Sheffield online hub as a tool to engage the community, Cycle Sheffield has now made a number of infrastructure recommendations to make biking around the city safer.
- 2 Power to Pedestrians:** Sheffield City planning team agreed to join with others to discuss plans for more public space to encourage cafe culture and art exhibitions on wide-pavement areas.



**@linds\_harley** Blown away at how **#innovative** our city is! Thank you **@ITMPowerPlc @thefloowltd & @DrenchedLtd #sheffieldissuper #vibrantSheffield**

**@Andrewjgates** Great reminder for me from **#VibrantSheffield** event that great ideas are out there. As a public servant I just need to go and listen more.

## Reading

200 people, including business, arts, charity, public sector and university leaders, joined forces for a day to re-imagine ways to make Reading a world class, connected community. Here are some of the thoughts from the day and some actions and ideas which came out of it:

### Town seeks ethical businesses: Reading and its reputation

In today's business world, ethical practices go far beyond CSR. They make business sense. The focus for Reading was to consider how to make it a better place to live and work in. The idea of developing Reading's reputation as a home for ethical business has steadily gathered momentum since it was presented at the town's Live Lab in 2016.

Reading Council, the Local Enterprise Partnership and the town's corporates and third sector organisations formed a group that will take responsibility for developing Reading's ethical reputation. "If Reading were known for its ethical businesses, it would attract more millennials, more startups, and more progressive and socially-orientated businesses," says Jim Rogers, Practice Leader of Thames Valley, Grant Thornton UK. "A brighter future for the town, indeed." A social enterprise: Ethical Reading has now been established, dedicated to promoting amongst other things, profits with purpose. The aim is to offer regular events and training. Find out how you can get involved at [www.ethicalreading.org.uk](http://www.ethicalreading.org.uk).

## Buy local and discover more: two more ideas for the city

- 1 The Reading Pound:** to celebrate and support local independent businesses, Reading could create a local currency, only to be spent in local businesses.
- 2 A 'Reading Go' app:** to get people out and about, the creation of a Pokémon Go-style app was put forward. It would use augmented reality to offer loyalty discounts for shops and restaurants, information about the town's sites and the ability to volunteer.



#MondayMotivation is knowing you can count with other local businesses @ConnectRdg @Launchpad\_RDG @tafishergroup #vibrantReading



## Manchester

Business, arts, charity, public sector and university leaders met to think of ways to make Manchester a pioneer of world class health. Here are a number of the thoughts from a day of ideas:

### Intergenerational engagement

The ageing population is one of the biggest trends of the 21st century. The percentage of the population that is 65 and over is growing, creating new challenges around care and isolation. Encouraging greater interaction between young and old was a theme for Manchester and the Live Lab participants came up with a number of ideas to engage the elderly.

One idea was to create a buddy scheme that would tackle social isolation among the elderly. It was hoped that this could create an intergenerational community, which would spend time together, sharing skills and experiences.

Another idea was to create a competition for young people to design and make an app that would also aim to reduce social isolation. This would encourage young people to work with older people to understand their challenges and develop technological solutions that can help, whilst hopefully befriending them.

## Green and caring: two more ideas for the city

- 1 Mapping Green Manchester:** encouraging people to stay active was a big theme of the Live Lab in Manchester. One solution was to develop a green spaces directory, which includes organisations that have 'get-fit' activities happening, such as park runs, which could be hosted on Facebook.



@JeremyScrivens The future of health in #Manchester is a social movement, not the institutions or the hierarchies alone

@haighclaire Well @sarah\_e\_howard6 today was fab! Let's get going connecting #vibrantmanchester to build the coalition for social change #CollabOutLoud

@bbmyster Every idea has been unique – this is amazing! Can't wait to see these come to life #vibrantmanchester #Health



## West Midlands

Representatives from the West Midlands' leading private, public and third sector organisations gathered to imagine a future where the region is synonymous with positive collaboration and thriving growth opportunities. Here's what came out of the day:

### Advancing the West Midlands' manufacturing credentials

As an established centre of manufacturing, the West Midlands wants to build on its reputation and become a hub of advanced manufacturing. This would play to the existing strengths of the region, building on its history and put it in a position to lead in the future.

The arrival of the Mayor for the West Midlands has given the local business community confidence that real change is on the horizon.

"Birmingham Council, Innovate Birmingham, the Chamber of Commerce and local business have been in discussions with a view to helping drive collaboration and making progress on this front. There is optimism that with the Mayor on board, the private, public and third sectors can work together to get things done" argues Grant Thornton Partner, Birmingham, David Hillan.



### Proud and iconic: two more ideas for the city

- 1 Commonwealth Games:** why not put Birmingham on the map, by launching a campaign for the city to host the next Commonwealth Games?
- 2 Iconic Landmark:** could the creation of a recognisable landmark be used to boost Birmingham's instant recognition? This was one of the popular questions posed in the West Midlands discussions.



[@DJWcareers](#) [@romanovsun](#) open door here  
[@StraUponAvonSch](#) for [#apprenticeships](#).  
How can we help each other? [#VibrantWestMidlands](#)

[@blakeyt](#) A great day [@GrantThorntonUK](#) event and hopefully the start of something great for the region  
[#VibrantWestMidlands](#)

## Leeds

Leeds's private, public and third sectors gathered to plan a future Leeds City Region renowned for inclusive growth and successful collaboration. Here are some of the ideas:

### Opening up opportunities to all

Leeds is the fastest growing city in the UK and in 2016 saw the fastest rate of private sector jobs growth of any city in the country. Yet the City is struggling to ensure that all Leeds people can take advantage of its success. On the one hand there is inequality, on the other businesses are struggling to find talent at the school leaver and graduate level. If you look at these two challenges together, opportunities start to emerge.

Participants at the Live Lab were brimming with ideas to tackle the disconnect. In order to create stronger bridges between the world of education and enterprise, participants suggested that every employer should be linked to a Leeds education institution. Another suggestion was for The Leeds City Region to create a bank of mentors – accessible to everybody, whether they're students, the unemployed or start-up entrepreneurs.

Grant Thornton is doing its bit to address the challenge with its school-leaver programme. Young people can join the firm on a five-year programme where they balance client work with study and revision for professional exams.

"Together we will agree a way forward that makes a difference, for everyone who calls Leeds home," says Andy Wood, Managing Partner, Grant Thornton, Leeds.



### Hub for makers and home of entrepreneurs: two more ideas for the city

- 1 Made in Leeds:** Leeds is a city of manufacturers. But do the goods made there have something that ties them together? Live Lab participants suggested creating a recognisable brand for products made in the city.
- 2 Uber for Desks:** to support the City's self-employed and encourage others to come to Leeds, the teams suggested creating a bookable platform to find unused hot desks and workspaces for entrepreneurs and micro businesses.



[@emmadavies1000](#) How can we work together placing collaboration at the centre of the Brexit strategy?  
[#vibrantsheffield](#) [#vibrantleeds](#)

[@MentoringGB](#) [#vibrantLeeds](#), we are very proud to be helping [#startups](#), [#Entrepreneur](#) [#digital](#) [#fashion](#) [#FoodandDrink](#) & new [#exporting](#) co's at our events

## West of England

The West of England's leading businesses, charities and public sector institutions came together to imagine the region as home to world-class talent and skills.

### Developing a commercial curriculum

Greater collaboration between business and education was top of the agenda for the West of England. "How to educate, train, attract and retain the talent this region needs to keep growing has been the focus of so many of our conversations over recent months," says Grant Thornton Bristol Partner John Panteli. "Businesses want to know how they can help schools develop a curriculum and provide skills that will enable young people to reach their potential when they enter the workplace and take advantage of the opportunities that are right here in the West of England."

Grant Thornton has identified three key external organisations that are already active in this field. It plans to work with them to expand its internal knowledge and understand how it can best play a role.



@AdinaWatt The role of @SETsquared\_Br so important in scaling up businesses #vibrantbristol



### Productive and proud: two more ideas for the city

- 1 Open Opportunity:** sources for employment and training opportunities are often fragmented, with job seekers and students looking in multiple places for offers. Live Lab participants in the Bristol region suggested creating an online hub where all opportunities are posted.
- 2 West of England Identity:** to popularise the unique qualities of the region, a unified West of England brand to promote business, culture and recreation, quality of life, education and career opportunities was put forward.

## Cambridgeshire

Regional leaders from the worlds of business, politics and the third sector came together to discover, dream and design a near future where Cambridgeshire is a centre for collaboration. Here are just a few of the ideas and actions which emerged:

### Educating Cambridgeshire: a Young Persons Live Lab

The worlds of education and business should be brought closer together, that's the premise for one of Cambridgeshire's most popular ideas to develop a more vibrant local economy. "Too many young people are leaving school without the skills that organisations need," says Anne Bailey, co-founder of social enterprise Form the Future. Anne is part of a new working group created to set up a second regional Live Lab – this time dedicated to young people. This Live Lab will provide a forum to exchange ideas and ensure the next generation contribute to Cambridgeshire's and their own future.



@PaulBrown1pcb Connectivity is vital in todays world #vibrantCambridge

@\_TracyWilkinson I'd like to see #VibrantCambridge use connectivity to link local charities to businesses for win:win



### Inquire and improve: two more ideas for the city

- 1 Regional Investment Bond:** a proposed 'Cambridgeshire Wealth Fund' that would channel investment and community spirit into the region's future infrastructure projects.
- 2 Housing Inquiry:** secure Cambridge's future as an attractive place to live and work by co-funding equity in housing projects, this could be made possible through employer contributions and investment pools.



# Shaping a vibrant economy: how do we do it?

We've shared our vision for a dynamic, inclusive nation – one that thrives economically by realising the shared potential of businesses, cities, people and communities. This has invited a passionate and creative response from the people and communities we engaged.

We'd like to thank all of the participants in our inquiries and wider programme so far who have brought their expertise and creativity to the task at hand and contributed to the discussion.



## Get involved

To find out more about our vibrant economy programme: [www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/about-us/what-we-stand-for/](http://www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/about-us/what-we-stand-for/)

Contact us to get involved: [vibranteconomy@uk.gt.com](mailto:vibranteconomy@uk.gt.com) or [Octavia.AS.Wolton@uk.gt.com](mailto:Octavia.AS.Wolton@uk.gt.com)

## What next?

We have seen the appetite to bring about positive change. And the journey has just begun. We want to build on what we've learnt.

Based on what we've heard we're consulting with other organisations and stakeholders on the development of a 'Charter for Good Growth' for business. The goal is to share what Grant Thornton has learnt from its vibrant economy inquiries and from becoming a purpose-driven business. The plan is to suggest practical steps that businesses can take in regards to people, place, planet and profits.

We also want to continue the conversation and will be hosting a series of discussions around the UK, exploring the skills landscape and the future of work. The future role of London in a vibrant economy is an area we're keen to examine in the coming year. We'll be engaging business as well as people who live and work in that city on their thoughts as part of our 'Vibrant Capital' inquiry.

We've been studying closely the drivers of and barriers to, growth for businesses in the UK in relation to key themes such as skills, engaging CEOs and founders on their views. We'll publish what we've learnt early in 2018.

And we're also conducting an inquiry into how best to nurture and develop our world-leading Fintech sector – one area crucial to shaping the UK's position on the international stage.

## Shaping a vibrant economy – the role of business

We want to encourage action from business. In the course of our journey we have seen that it has a key role to play in shaping the environments that support growth. And this report offers some suggested routes for how business can get involved.

We're also keen to collaborate with those that have the ideas, resources and expertise to help shape the economy we envision. If you would like to be involved, get in touch.

If our research has taught us anything, it is that collaboration is not only possible, it's essential. If we share ideas and resources we can start to solve some of the big problems facing us all. When this happens, we'll build markets people trust and embrace innovation. We'll have environments that enable business and people to flourish. We'll have dynamic organisations, growing sustainably. We'll have a vibrant economy.

# My vibrant economy

Views from our commissioners

“A vibrant economy is everybody’s business. The time to act is now.”

## Jean Oelwang

### President of Virgin Unite and Vibrant Economy Commissioner


An economy where the private, public and third sectors work together to drive and deliver the changes we need. An economy where people from all walks of life have the opportunity to achieve their true potential, in and out of work. An economy that runs on possibility and positivity – not fear. That’s what a vibrant economy means to me.

At Virgin Unite, our mission is to bring people together and encourage them to never accept the unacceptable and to turn challenges into opportunities. We believe entrepreneurial ideas can unite people and create a better future. Whether its equality in the workplace or the health of our oceans, we’ve engaged groups across the world to solve our biggest challenges.

I’ve also had the great pleasure of being part of Grant Thornton’s Vibrant Economy Commission. We are committed to taking action, stepping up and working towards an economy that no longer accepts things just because ‘that’s how they’ve always been.’

Part of this has involved looking at the future world of work and how we might prepare for it. We’ve found there is a role for everyone here: for government, to help train and re-skill people whose careers are being transformed by technological innovation. In the business world, a new relationship between employer and employee must be shaped. Old-fashioned hierarchies must be replaced by collaboration and true meritocracy. While the third sector is perfectly placed to give a voice to communities that have been left behind.

Hope alone is useless – that’s why we’re turning conversation into action. No more private, public and third sector divides. We need all hands-on deck. A vibrant economy is everybody’s business. The time to act is now.

A portrait of Will Butler-Adams, a middle-aged man with short brown hair and a friendly smile, wearing a blue and white checkered button-down shirt and a brown leather belt with a gold buckle. He is standing in what appears to be a factory or industrial setting, with blurred lights and machinery in the background.

“We are all responsible and the issue demands cross-sector collaboration, ensuring that commuters are safeguarded and urban centres built in way in which they can flourish.”

## Will Butler-Adams

### Chief Executive of Brompton Bicycle and Vibrant Economy Commission co-Chair

For me, a vibrant economy is one which supports healthy environments where people are able to thrive not just survive. Place is paramount when it comes to economic success and I believe there is work to be done in cities across the UK and beyond. They are becoming places of stress, of pollution and poor mental health – we must act now to solve this.

Local and national government might point the finger at one another, but no one can tackle this alone. We are all responsible and the issue demands cross-sector collaboration, ensuring that commuters are safeguarded and urban centres built in a way in which they can flourish.

At Brompton Bicycle, we’ve been speaking to cross-industry experts, from urban planners to electric vehicle specialists, to collect innovative solutions. We plan to reveal these in our Manifesto for Movement, which we hope will become a powerful catalyst for change in our cities.

The business community must take responsibility and act now, or face the repercussions of an unproductive, unhealthy and unmotivated workforce. By re-imagining place and working together we can start to build dynamic cities and communities across the UK, which give both people and businesses the opportunities to fulfil their potential.

# Appendix: glossary of terms

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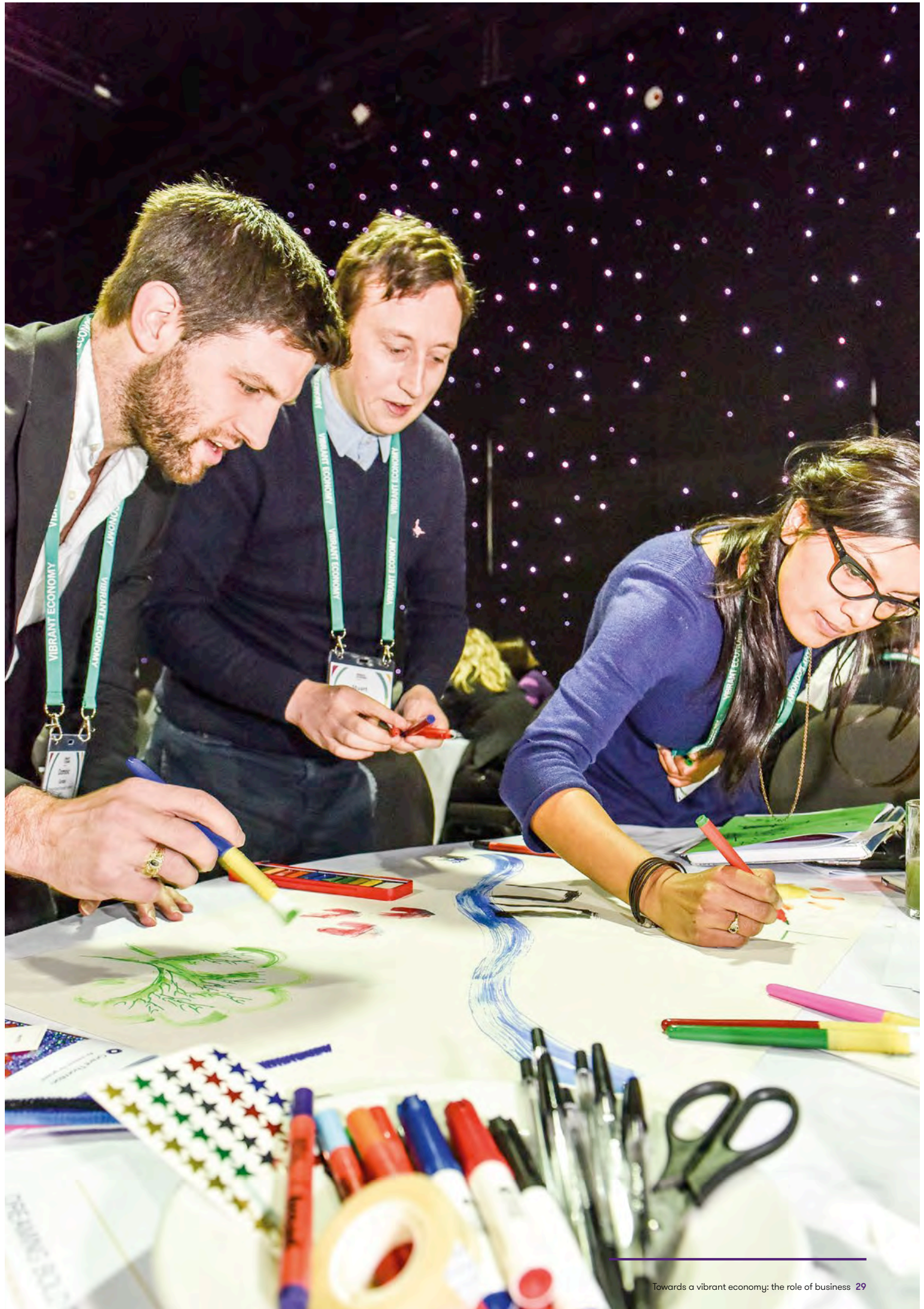
<b>Vibrant economy</b>	An economy where growth is sustainable, prosperity more widely shared and people and communities can realise their potential.
<b>Appreciative inquiry</b>	This is a methodology which builds on strengths rather than weaknesses to create breakthroughs and growth.
<b>Live Labs</b>	<p>Workshops with up to 300 participants from across the public, private and third sectors, in which we collectively share ideas and resources to try and tackle a number of local challenges. Live Labs use the appreciative inquiry technique.</p> <p>Our process has been inspired, in part, by the work of GreenCityBlueLake, an initiative in Cleveland, Ohio. It embarked on a mission to make Cleveland a leading sustainable, healthy city and did so by bringing people together to participate in community initiatives, conducting pilot projects, by communicating the best ideas and advocating publicly for change.</p>
<b>Faces of a vibrant economy</b>	The Faces of a vibrant economy are leaders that we recognise for their vision in shaping a more innovative and purposeful business environment. They are drawn from industries, sectors and organisations of all sizes around the country and are nominated and judged against three criteria: growth, innovation and purpose.
<b>The Vibrant Economy Commission</b>	Grant Thornton's vibrant economy programme is supported by the Vibrant Economy Commission. This is a diverse group of some of the UK's most progressive individuals from business, the public and not-for-profit sectors. They are united by a passion for collaborative approaches to shaping a vibrant economy. The commissioners have been sharing their experience as well as their perspectives to help us develop Grant Thornton's ideas, actions and connections. They also support and challenge us as a firm to live our purpose.
<b>Vibrant economy inquiries</b>	Thematic inquiries focus on specific topics and allow us to convene experts and stakeholders to debate a series of pertinent questions. So far we have explored the future of fintech, the future of work and London housing.
<b>The Vibrant Economy Index</b>	This is a new way to measure the vibrancy of our nation: our Vibrant Economy Index considers different local authority areas of England using the following indicators: dynamism and opportunity; inclusion and equality; health, wellbeing and happiness; resilience and sustainability and community, trust and belonging. We have found that a high level of prosperity does not – on its own – create vibrant economies.

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To find out more about our vibrant economy programme:  
[www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/about-us/what-we-stand-for/](http://www.grantthornton.co.uk/en/about-us/what-we-stand-for/)

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