

## North East England Chamber of Commerce submission- Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

09/08/22

The Chamber is the largest business representative organisation in the North East representing employers located in Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and Tees Valley, and across the region's diverse and thriving business base. The Chamber supports initiatives which help to create new jobs and investment in the region.

### **Levelling Up Missions**

The North East England Chamber of Commerce is highly supportive of the Missions, which are notable as the UK's first truly holistic attempt to address economic, social, environmental and democratic concerns in concert. In so doing they are in line with the work of the global wellbeing governments of New Zealand, Iceland, Wales and others. The Missions provide a powerful framework which will enable the UK to take long-term, balanced approach to economic growth and development. The North East England Chamber of Commerce, led by our membership, advocates for more inclusive growth to address underlying intra-regional and inter-regional structural inequalities. The Missions must be enacted into binding legislation to support this work and orientate national Government and regional actors and institutions across all sectors towards more inclusive economic growth.

### **Accountability and Reporting of Levelling Up Missions**

To deliver the outcomes of the Levelling Up White Paper the Missions must be supported by an assurance and accountability framework which is clear, transparent and long-term. We therefore welcome amendments currently tabled in Public Bill Committee to create an independent body to assess the government's progress on the Levelling Up Missions. We would like to see this approach strengthened.



We agree with IPPR North's<sup>1</sup> proposal to establish an independent body outside of London with responsibility for ensuring the Levelling Up Mission are legally-binding, and with the authority and necessary powers to hold the Government to account.

Central to effectively doing this, is that we use the necessary data to measure the success of levelling up missions. The North East Economic Evidence Forum<sup>2</sup> has set out a framework of metrics which may prove useful in achieving this. For example, the government's digital connectivity mission should be measured not only in relation to the criteria that has already been established, but also in regards to digital literacy, and demographically lapsed internet usage as reported by the ONS. In this example, these extra metrics would provide a more tangible level of success relative to people's everyday lives, rather than providing people with infrastructure without the capability to utilise it.

## Devolution

We welcome the opportunity for local councils to consolidate devolution agreements within the North East, as well as developing existing initiatives. We welcome the opportunity for areas in the region with existing devolution deals to evolve these powers to deliver on economic growth.

Devolution will give areas like the North East the powers, funding and opportunities to shape interventions effectively in line with the local needs of their places, businesses and communities. Additionally, the flexibility of funding eliminates some areas of contention that the region has faced in negotiating devolution deals in the past.

## Town Centres

We are pleased to see important challenges for town centres, especially the high vacancy rates in the commercial property sector, addressed in the Levelling Up Bill. Rental auctions, in theory, provide a positive opportunity for businesses to secure well-located units which otherwise would not be financially feasible in the current market. More transparency regarding ownership of dormant commercial properties should also complement this. As rental auctions are newly defined as part of the Levelling Up Bill, the Chamber is keen to see that, in implementation, they serve the interests of local businesses and

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<sup>1</sup> [IPPR North responds to the Queen's Speech | IPPR](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.northeastlep.co.uk/the-plan/strategy-policy-evidence-and-analysis/>



communities. We also need to ensure that Local Authorities have the planning powers needed to allow for greater flexibility and variety to change the use of buildings to fit with plans for town centres.

### **Community infrastructure levy and planning changes**

The Government needs to ensure that the infrastructure levy does not disadvantage the North East due to lower land values. The region needs to have the funds to tackle deprivation and create housing to regenerate areas.

If the amount of money sought from development increases then this will place increased pressure on the North East as we have lower land values. This could lead to a slow down housebuilding particularly in areas that need regeneration and impact affordable housing numbers.

It is positive that the Government have said that local authorities should be able to set a minimum level of affordable housing. However, this logically means that some other costs would have to be reduced. We need to ensure that the levy does not have a negative impact on funding.

We welcome the proposals to enable greater flexibility to amend planning permissions once granted. This is very welcome because circumstances change rapidly on sites such as the need for higher environmental standards.