

CONNECTED PLACES

TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE 66: CONNECTED PLACES SUMMIT HIGHLIGHTS - 2024

INTRODUCTION

[theme intro]

Andy Haldane:

If you read the media you'd believe that levelling up was somehow dead or dying. Whereas today, the energy, the optimism, the can do in the room was infectious and fills me personally with optimism that so much more can be done.

Cllr Susan Aitken:

So we're standing in the heart of the city of London today and a huge amount of the finance that is actually going to deliver our ambitions will come from here. So we need to get it out of here, we need to get it out of these places round about me and into the heart of cities like Glasgow or Leeds or Liverpool or Dundee, right across these islands.

INTRO:

Welcome to Connected Places; a podcast about the future of our towns and cities, and how we live and travel in them.

I'm Ivor Wells, the producer of Connected Places, which is brought to you by the Connected Places Catapult.

We're the UK's innovation accelerator for cities, transport and places.

We help to connect businesses and public sector leaders to cutting-edge research and new technologies that can spark innovation and grow new markets.

Music bed

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Greg Clark:

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Good morning. Very nice to have you here. I'm Greg Clark. I'm the chair of the Connected Places Catapult. Let me give a very warm welcome to the 600 or so people who are here in the room at 22 Bishopsgate and the 250 people who are joining us from CPC's offices in London,

Milton Keynes, Birmingham and Glasgow. You're all very, very welcome. We're delighted to have you here.

Ivor:

Well, last week was a big one for the Connected Places Catapult.

On the 20/21 March we hosted our first ever Connected Places Summit, right in the heart of the City of London.

I say it was a big one for us because even though we run multiple events throughout the year, this was the first time we've run a 2-day Summit which not only brought together all of our flagship projects under one roof – but also included a keynote programme with some of the most influential thinkers and leaders from across government, business and academia.

In total we had over 220 speakers, we had 27 exhibitors, 30 Summit partners, and 850 people joined us in person and 1000 people joined us online.

We're also very grateful to all of our partners, including of course Innovate UK, our strategic partner for the Summit, Department for Transport, and our headline partner, DNV.

We also got a lot of business done at the Summit, and we were able to make a few announcements too.

Like the renewal of the Catapult's Grant Funding Agreement with the Department for Transport.

And the Minister for Aviation, Decarbonisation and Future Transport, Anthony Browne MP was able to announce the 41 winners of the next phase of the Transport Research and Innovation Grants – a tranche of UK companies that will be trialling new solutions to improve our transport system.

And the Catapult was also very excited to announce a new partnership with the Crown Estate which will create new technology testbeds on land that's owned by the Crown Estate.

Here's their CEO, Dan Labbad.

Dan Labbad

It's been amazing being at the Connected Places Summit and I'm really excited that we're announcing our partnership with the Connected Places Catapult to be looking at the Crown Estate portfolio and how we can bring innovation to it in new ways.

Ivor:

Now, of course, in this episode, I'm not going to even try and cover all of the discussion, debates, presentations and pitches that went on at the Summit.

We had multiple tracks running on everything from the future of rail and station, port and maritime, air mobility and airports, to homes and housing, integrated infrastructure, place leadership, cyber security, connected digital twins, and investing and financing net zero infrastructure.

But in this episode we did want to give you a flavour of some of the voices we heard, and I'm pleased to say that the videos of all of our keynote speakers and panelists, are now available on the Summit website, and many of the other sessions will be available soon too.

You can also now register your interest for next year's Summit in 2025, and we'll make sure that all the links you need to access that content, and of course be kept in the loop with our future plans, are in the shownotes to this episode.

Now, in case you're new to what we do at the Catapult, we are aware of course that there's a lot of language out there in the worlds of cities, transport, technology and urban innovation that has something to do with our vision of a connected place.

And on the question of 'what is a connected place', we've given this a lot of thought, particularly in how we designed and curated the Summit.

Here's the Chair of the Catapult again, Prof. Greg Clark.

Greg kicked off the Summit by asking the audience what a connected place means to them.

Greg Clark:

Well, we've been thinking about this question as well and I want to show you what we created when we started to think, what does a connected place look like to us?

And in the top here, you can see many of the words we were just looking at, from digital twin to innovation district to net zero neighbourhood to intelligent transport systems, to interchanges, stations, ports, and indeed airports. And we think of all of these things, including smart cities, as being part of what we mean by Connected places because all of these kinds of places are connected.

They're connected digitally. They're connected physically. They're connected socially. And of course, they're connected through the ecosystems of the planet, of water, of air, of food, of health, and so much more. So when we call ourselves the connected places catapult, we're the catapult that's trying to accelerate innovation in all of those things.

We have a focus, of course, on, on homes and housing, on rail and stations, place leadership more broadly, air mobility and airports, integrated infrastructure, maritime and ports. And you can see the three underlying lenses that we use of climate action, of connected intelligence and of people's experience.

Erika Lewis:

As the UK's innovation accelerator for cities, transport and place leadership, our mission is clear. We connect people, places and businesses for a future of sustainable growth and prosperity.

Ivor:

Erika Lewis is the Catapult's Chief Executive.

Erika explained how sustainability is at the heart of what we do, but so too is the mandate to support the UK's businesses and innovators.

Erika Lewis:

We want to walk gently on the earth. We don't just want to talk the talk. We want to drive responsible growth. The truth is we can't just have one answer. We need to harness the many approaches that can only come from seeding and supporting new ideas.

How we manage our transport systems and the built environment in the years to come is a huge innovation challenge. 300 billion pounds is being spent every year on third party supply by third party suppliers, uh, in the UK public sector.

So if just 5 percent more of that spending was done in an innovation friendly way, it would unlock 15 billion pounds to support some of our most creative and innovative companies. And some of those I know are here with us today.

Ivor:

This question of how to create opportunities for UK business is particularly timely for us at the Catapult.

In October this year the new Public Procurement Act will come into effect. Its whole aim is to streamline and improve the way public contracting bodies, like local councils and transport authorities, buy goods and services.

And it's got a real focus on creating more opportunities for small and medium enterprises, SMEs, as well as making it easier to innovate in public procurement.

Baroness Neville-Rolfe is Minister of State in the Cabinet Office, and a member of the House of Lords.

She played a leading role in getting the new public procurement legislation through Parliament and into law.

Baroness Neville-Rolfe:

We have an enormous number of SMEs in this country, I think 5.5 million, and they have been a huge driver for innovation across my career, which has been in business and in government. And as a former businesswoman of big companies and small companies, I'm very, very keen to give more of the procurement pie to the SMEs. And indeed sort of cut red tape and other things for the SMEs.

We will have heard the prime minister earlier this week, talking about that and what we've done with the procurement act, which I think is a sort of major generational change is to put SMEs much more at the heart of public procurement by allowing the public sector to actually have a duty on all contracting authorities to think about SMEs, which they haven't done nearly enough because one of the key barriers, if you're an SME, is getting a look in at all as compared to the bigger companies.

If you bring in smaller companies that helps with innovation, also some of the processes that we're changing are more innovation friendly so that in future there's more flexible arrangements so that you can work with, you know, your contractor, if you're an SME on new ideas on research right through the chain in supply, so it's not cut off in such a bureaucratic way.

And I think perhaps even more important innovation trouble about small companies is they're often up against it with cashflow. And one of the big features of the bill is that the 30 day payment terms will apply throughout the supply chain. So you've got these various different things coming together, which to my mind are innovation friendly.

And perhaps of even more importance is more transparency. So you can go on to gov.uk, you can find out what the future programmes of procurement look like, both in government and more broadly in ALBs and in local government. So I think all these four or five things coming together are a huge opportunity for

innovation, particularly with the sort of training and communication packages that we're putting out ahead of the new act coming into operation in October.

I'm very keen on having more UK based suppliers into government, into procurement using UK skills and there'll be more opportunities to do that, particularly at the bottom end where there are certain exemptions for smaller contracts, which I think can, again, help with this innovation puzzle, which I think you and your, in the catapult are so good.

And I was actually going to give a plug for the Innovation Procurement Empowerment Center. I met its chief this morning and I think working together academics, suppliers, contractors, government departments in the way that I know catapults do so well, I think that can make quite a deal of difference.

Ivor:

The Minister mentioned the Innovation Procurement Empowerment Centre, or IPEC as we call it.

More information about how you can get involved with the work of IPEC is in the shownotes.

They also have a bunch of really helpful tools and reports which are well worth getting your hands on too.

Now, another one of our keynote speakers was Mayor Marvin Rees, the Mayor of Bristol.

Going back to what Erika was saying earlier about responsible and sustainable growth, one the biggest leadership challenges that Marvin has had to tackle while in office has been Bristol's housing crisis – and the importance of thinking about it within the context of a connected place.

Marvin Rees:

When I came in, we had about 11, 000 people on the waiting list. Today we've got 22 and that's not because we have failed to build houses.

Actually, we've built more houses than the city's built in generations. It's just the population is growing so quick. And now we have the worst affordability ratio, of any core city. And one of the worst outside London, probably with Cambridge, and it's about 10 times the average wage. Rents are out of control.

And the consequences of that you can see spilling over. So this is, I heard the phrase once about London, the economy begins to eat itself. It's a product of success. We offer a good standard of living. We got green space within the city,

you got access to the Brecon's thriving cultural sector, the new home with channel four, two world class universities, all that sort of stuff.

But now our hospitals are struggling to recruit and retain. Our schools struggle to recruit and retain. And so we begin to get that challenge. So we came in with a commitment to building homes. And again, in a room like this with a whole collection of organizations, we all agree that Bristol needs to build homes.

And so we've set about building homes. But one of the challenges in a place is, never underestimate the potential of very small politics to get in the way of very big delivery. All right. You know how it goes, right? We used to talk about NIMBYs, some in the room, but probably you would have heard BANANA - build absolutely nothing anywhere near anyone.

And I have actually just played a heavy political price for building homes I went for selection in Bristol and I didn't get selected and one of the big criticisms. He wants to build houses everywhere Yeah, I do want to build houses, but it's not I don't want to build houses.

I want to solve the housing crisis. The right kind of homes in the right places is one of the single most important determinants, the price of planet will pay for us for hosting us in our growing numbers. When you talk about treading lightly, that means living efficiently, efficient homes in places that allow for efficient transport and efficient connectivity, minimum resource use, reduction of waste, maximizing the reuse, recycling of waste within our underlying city systems.

Ivor:

Lord Peter Hendy is Chair of Network Rail. But he's also Chair of the London Legacy Development Corporation out at the Olympic Park.

Lord Peter Hendy:

I was there yesterday morning, actually. It lifts my spirits every time I go. Lynn, who's the chief executive and I were looking around the new V& A storehouse, which is everything the V& A own that isn't in a museum, which will be in part of what was the Press and TV Center for the Olympic and Paralympic Games on the Olympic Park.

And this place, they reckon the visitors dwell time and it's going to be 60 to 90 minutes. I said to Tim Reaver, the V& A, you're kidding, mate, the people are going to be in here all day. It's an extraordinary place.

Would that have been there without the connectivity of Stratford and Stratford International? Absolutely not.

Ivor:

Someone like Lord Hendy is no stranger to the challenges that Marvin mentioned earlier around a city having to live within its means - because how we think about housing is every bit a connectivity question too.

Lord Peter Hendy:

What the foundation of that place as it now stands is connectivity driven by, driven by the Jubilee line, driven by the uh, uh, high speed line at Stratford International, driven by the DLR, and now by, uh, and now by, um, by the Elizabeth line. So, and, and I know it's a very particular example, and if you, if you come from outside London, you say, oh yeah, well, London got all that as well.

But the Olympic games weren't ever gonna be in Bolton or, or Chester Lee Street or, or in Taunton. They were gonna be in London. And the connectivity that was put into deliver them has also delivered a wonderful boost in London's economy and the viscera economy not only for London, but the country and thousands of houses. So actually if we can do that there's an issue I think about the order in which you do. It would be nice to think that you could deliver the connectivity first and then Build the houses and get the jobs afterwards.

But sometimes it's the other way around, places that aren't connected don't get housing, don't get jobs, and don't contribute to our economy in the 21st century. So they're not much use.

Ivor:

One of the other big connectivity questions that was covered at the Summit, was how do we create a more sustainable, low-carbon future for our transport systems. How it getting from A-B changing.

Emma Gilthorpe is the Chief Operating Officer at Heathrow Airport, and she's also the CEO of the UK's Jet Zero Council which is bring together government and industry to decarbonise the UK's aviation sector – not just for environmental reasons, but also in response to the economic opportunity that a transition offers.

Emma Gilthorpe:

And so the great thing coming together with the jet zero council was right, we need to get the most vocal people, the most capable people. So this is the leaders in their sectors in academia joining together between the business and transport secretaries, now also department for net zero secretary, also co chairs. So this is also integrating government decision making as well, which is a big step forward.

And we set ourselves some quite simple targets to two routes, sustainable aviation fuel. And then zero emission flight, very stated because zero emission flight is a, there's a way to go on that. We need brand new airframes. Churning airframes takes decades. So, I mean, even if we had the solution for, you know, a 200 seater battery powered flight today, you wouldn't be able to churn that 20 forties.

And that's not a problem. That's not a long, long haul flight. So we had to bring sustainable aviation fuel rapidly up the agenda. The great thing is the technologies there for first generation fuels. We're working very, very hard on synthetic fuel production at the moment. Again, chemistry is really well understood.

But in terms of getting the production plants up and running and fundamentally our issue on sustainable aviation fuel isn't a technology issue, it's a supply and demand issue because at the moment the extent it exists, it's higher price about three times the price of normal J.

And so government's been very progressive in introducing a mandate. So 10 percent by 2030 sustainable aviation fuel obligation that has signalled to the market very strongly that we need to start producing and the next bit is, how do we bridge between the price of kerosene and the price of now and to be synthetic fuels in particular so that we can encourage the market to produce and then to take up.

So I think actually It's been a pretty successful route to really clarifying our objectives, getting everybody on the same page. When I started, there was a lot of argument, you know, oh, we need this, we need this, we need this. And the first six months was really saying, guys, we're never going to get government or ourselves to do anything unless we all agree what the pathway is. But it was born out of a deep concern that there was a risk. We were going to lose the sector if we didn't really push forward.

Ivor:

So just coming back to that theme of connectivity.

There's the question of how we connect our cities and neighbourhoods, and the example that Marvin gave earlier about house building, and what Lord Hendy had to say about transport connectivity.

And of course the climate imperative throughout all of this, and the decarbonising challenge that Emma just touched on.

But what about the people connections in all of this. How do we create places and spaces that are safe and healthy and good for human flourishing.

Lucy Musgrave is the founder of the urban design practice Publica, and she had some challenging points to make about how we think about inclusion and collaboration in city-making.

Lucy Musgrave:

We've created a world that is unaffordable, has an epidemic of urban loneliness, with record levels of distrust of both the public and the private sector, an exclusion for the very talent that we urgently need. This impacts educational attainment, career prospects, housing options, wealth and life expectancy.

We have built inequality and bias into the built environment. Basically, what we are building and what we need is getting further apart. You know the statistics. In the UK, 45 percent of people report experiencing loneliness. Over 50 percent of black children are growing up in poverty. Only rich households in England, in the top 10 percent of income bracket, can afford an average home with less than five years of income. For the low income families, it's 19 years.

Over 20 percent of the UK's adult population has a disability, but we've built a city for a working age, able bodied population. Life expectancy is a massive 18 to 19 years differential depending if you live in the least or the most deprived areas. You all know this.

We don't need urban developments as island sites in glass and steel where we ignore or exclude others. And if we jump to a technocratic top down approach to urban change, we can carry an extraordinarily high risk of building in bias and discrimination.

If a new buzzword social value in our industry or ESG and others is virus frictionless spreadsheets, we will continue to ignore the two way exchange of real issues, lived experiences and holistic equitable ideas and solutions. Or if the ubiquitous term placemaking can't produce meaning or recognize that urban neighbourhoods, communities and urban change are more complex and interesting than a branding exercise, we'll continue to miss the obvious. Existing material, spatial, social, cultural, economic, economic opportunities of the actual place in our industry.

In recent years, a more ambitious approach is being formed in place leadership to include multiple perspectives and the realities of a place, a radical rethinking of the city.

Ivor:

Lucy went on to give some fascinating examples of what's being done across the UK, including work on creating safer public spaces for women, girls and gender diverse people, as well as reimagining connected places at night – how should a city operate and be experienced at night?

Her talk is well worth a listen in its entirety.

But I want to come onto a final point about connectivity.

The question of how to better connect our cities and regions to each other.

This is really important because the UK is grappling with some profound spatial inequalities when you look at the economic map.

The Government has set a big ambition to level up the UK, and a big part of that is unlocking opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurialism right across the country.

And how we innovate in our cities and transport systems is at the heart of that.

Andy Haldane:

If you read the media you'd believe that levelling up was somehow dead or dying. Whereas today, the energy, the optimism, the can do in the room was infectious and gives me personally with optimism that so much more can be done.

Ivor:

Andy Haldane is one of the UK's leading thinkers on levelling up, and what it means for our cities and regions.

Andy is CEO of the Royal Society of Arts and Chair of the Government's Levelling Up Advisory Panel.

Andy Haldane:

My take away from today, is just how important the devolution agenda is. And if we are to make progress in lifting and levelling up places, if we are to fundamentally shift the lived experience of people in the poorest parts of the UK, we need to put power back in their hands, to put power back in the hands of local businesses, local governments, and local communities.

They know best. They deserve to be masters of their own destiny, and therefore a wholesale shift towards much more muscular devolution is essential for making that happen.

So, we're looking forward to an election this year, and off the back of that, I hope that can provide a sterile injection to places right across the UK, and that will rely on the strength of our anchor institutions. That includes businesses, that includes local government, and crucially, it includes the people.

Our network of catapults right across the UK. They are the centrepiece of innovation and the centrepiece therefore of growth in the clusters of brilliant sectoral expertise we have across the UK.

I think for the success of any place, any town, any city, any region, you need to join the dots. That means business and transport and health and education and skills. So the role of the Connected Places Catapult is to bring those moving parts together with a joined up story in place.

It's only by joining the dots the potential of our cities and regions will be unlocked. And the Connected Places Catapult is the means, is the glue through which that happens.

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Ivor:

For Cllr Susan Aitken, who leads Glasgow City Council, this personal for someone from a city like Glasgow which has had a difficult history, but is also a powerful example of renewal.

Cllr Susan Aitken:

Glasgow can often feel like, I think we epitomise the challenge in many ways of a place that is recovering from a legacy of abuse that was done to it, which disconnected it and disconnected the people within it. And we're doing a huge amount of work to address that, but we know that we have to make sure that that work is connected if we are going to genuinely achieve what we want for our communities. But even more importantly, that we connect with other organisations and other sectors to do that, because I'm not going to be able to do it on my own, and the council that I lead is not going to be able to do it on our own.

So we're standing in the heart of the city of London today and a huge amount of the finance that is actually going to deliver our ambitions, and deliver the objectives that I think, increasingly, public and private sectors are collectively signed up to will come from here. And so we need to get it out of here, we need to get it out of these places round about me and into the heart of cities like Glasgow or Leeds or Liverpool or Dundee, right across these islands.

That is something that has notoriously not happened in the past. It feels to me now like there is a collective will among many people and the Connected Places Catapult is a convening power to bring people together and to drive the momentum and making it actually happen.

Ivor:

Susan is right of course, there's a growing collective will around the vision of a connected place, and the buzz and energy at the Summit really demonstrated that.

And it's not just a conversation that resonates with people here in the UK. This is global.

I want to give the last word in this episode to, Gabriella Gomez Mont has worked with cities all over the world – so she knows a thing or two about innovating in complex urban systems.

She's now based in London as a visiting professor at UCL, but she was the first Chief Creative Officer for Mexico City - one of the biggest and most complex megacities on the planet.

Gabriella Gomez-Mont:

So I actually think that one of the best ways to actually articulate society around the common goal is to have missions that are compelling and juicy and really speak in a polyphonic fashion to the many people that need to be involved to actually get somewhere.

The types of visions for example for cities, you know, we call the visions for a megalopolis It's also interesting if in and of themselves they can break through silos because let's say one of my teams when I was still in Mexico City government was the pedestrian city team and we articulated a whole ecosystem around pedestrian City

So the interesting thing is who owns the pedestrian agenda for a city. Is it the transportation department? Is it public space? Is it urban planning? Well, it's actually a bit of everything. So this actually is also an excuse in an interesting fashion to have government articulate within in a different form, and then also to start finding out and figuring out who could be the potential allies.

So for example, in terms of pedestrian, um, because as you probably know, this is the leading cause of death of children and adolescents the world over, especially in cities, is actually traffic incidents. And so one of the things that we found is that, for example, the insurance agency, the third largest insurance agency of Mexico, had three times more data than the Mexico City government.

So what does it then actually mean to start scaffolding collaborative spaces, architecture for collective life? What does it mean that Data trust can be built that actually it's not only the government in and of itself, um, articulating within, but also finding what the connective tissue to articulate without also entails.

So all this to say, I think that there's nothing that is more self-propelling that allows for a city on a mission to, uh, acquire life of its own, if you will, than to have, be able to have something that truly speaks to the heart of what many people around the table could actually look for in terms of collective visions for collective life.

[STING]

Ivor:

Well, that's all we have time for in this episode. As I said at the start, you can see the full videos of all all of the contributors who featured in this episode on the Summit website, and more content will be made available soon.

Also, please do register if you haven't already done so for updates on next year's Summit, and if you attended this year's one we'd love to hear your feedback too and you'll have received an email about that already.

Don't forget you can subscribe to the Connected Places Podcast on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you get your podcasts. If you'd like to find out more about the Connected Places Catapult, visit our website at cp.catapult.org.uk.

Theme Music on this episode is by Phill Ward Music

This is Connected Places.

I'm Ivor Wells.

Thanks for listening.