



The Phoenix Future Programme

SECOND WORKSHOP – PETERBOROUGH

Building a sustainable tomorrow.

The workshop process

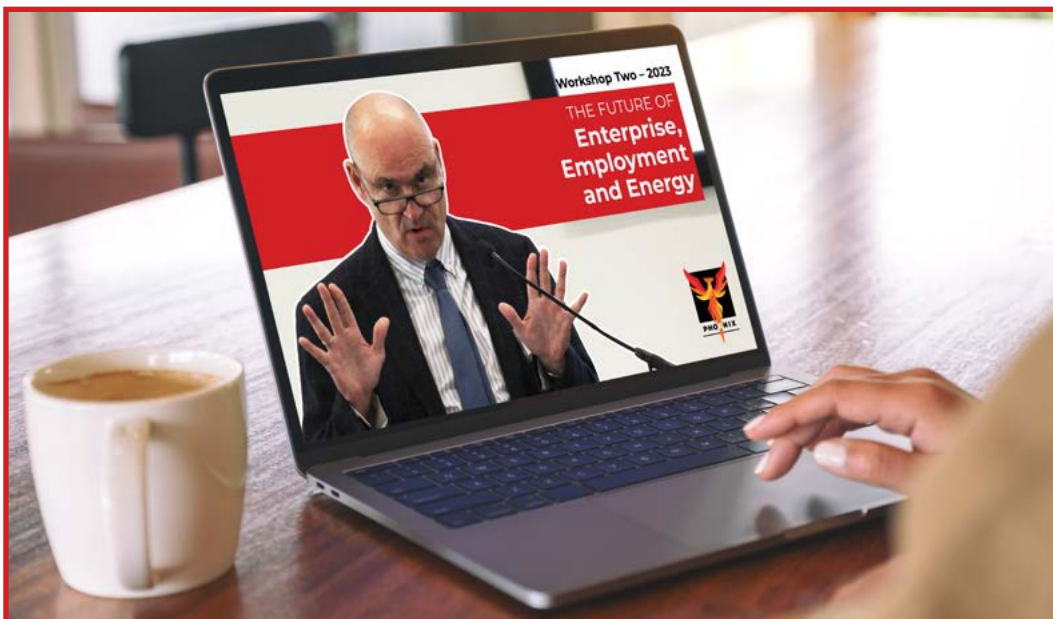
Phoenix Sustainable Investments has organised two workshops to explore different aspects of how we plan for the jobs and communities of the future.

The workshops provide a platform for collaborative discussions on the commitments, principles, and behaviours needed to meet our aspirations for sustainable development. Additionally, they aim to identify the mechanisms and policy approaches required to shape the opportunities presented by the prospective new Local Plans across Huntingdonshire and Peterborough.

The second workshop took place in Peterborough on July 19th 2023 titled **“The Future of Enterprise, Employment and Energy”**. The workshop examined themes such how we prepare people for the jobs and skills of the future, recent and future changes to work patterns, how the local planning process needs to adapt to meet ever changing community and business requirements, and how we meet future energy needs and environmental targets.

The speakers and panel members were:

- **Professor Ross Renton**, [ARU Peterborough](#)
- **Mark Woods**, [Meridian Trust](#)
- **Laura Guymer**, [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority](#)
- **Jim Plunkett-Cole**, [Smart Growth Analytics](#)
- **Jim Newton**, [Peterborough City Council](#)
- **Ceren Clulow**, [Connecting Cambridgeshire](#)
- **Eva Woods**, [Peterborough Youth MP](#)
- **Matthew Hunt**, [Royal HaskoningDHV](#)
- **Sam Luker**, [AESG](#)
- **Simon Evans**, [Phoenix Sustainable Investments](#)



 **YouTube** [View the whole Workshop on YouTube](#)

Setting the scene

Facilitator Richard Astle told the room that both Peterborough City and Huntingdonshire District Councils are in the process of planning for the future, but how can we plan when the future is so uncertain?

With objectives including achieving good growth, carbon zero and Biodiversity Net Gain targets, what does that future look like?

Professor Ross Renton, Principal of the new university ARU Peterborough, emphasised the importance of working in partnership and the role this had played in making the university a reality with the support and ambition of Peterborough City Council, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and Anglia Ruskin University. He described the university as 'one of the most exciting developments in Higher Education in the UK.'

Ross outlined the seven challenges to learning, and the approach we must take to tackle them. They included the need to ensure that education is accessible to everyone and learner centred. He said that university degrees can sometimes be too rigid to meet everyone's needs, with little choice of exactly what is studied.

Learners should be able to choose what is right for them, making sure each person's learning is relevant to them, with their needs married up with those of employers. ARU Peterborough has taken this approach to co-designing their curriculum with employers from the start to ensure the relevance of the course content and assessment.



Ross Renton

Flexibility is also key, learners should be able to dip in and out of education as they need it throughout their career. The Government's new Lifelong Loan Entitlement may support this as it enables learners to complete bitesize education at any age with the support of a new loan.

Ross also discussed how technology now influences learning, with the use of AI and extended reality bringing huge benefits to the learning experience. He stressed that while there is a place for this, you cannot completely replace people as their experience, creativity and ability to think differently cannot be replaced by technology.

He also discussed how societal change must be reflected in the learning offering. Young people want to feel they are making a difference, and want to see things like environmental impact considered whatever the subject they are studying.

Ross finished by encouraging the city, and the region, to be ambitious.

“We must give people the tools to supercharge their learning. We already have the ingredients for this, so I encourage you all to support the future of learning.”

Professor Ross Renton, Anglia Ruskin University

The future of learning

In the first panel discussion, Mark Woods, CEO of Meridian Trust, emphasised the importance of flexibility in designing curriculums. He described the challenge of preventing teenagers from dipping out of education due to the current traditional, rigid path of GCSEs then A-levels.

He said that education policy with regard to engaging employers takes the form of an unsatisfactory loop; some years ago specialist schools were introduced, some of which worked and some of which didn't, diplomas followed and now we have the same potential with T-levels – which have worked for some and not others. There is also too much focus on league tables and Ofsted to allow real flexibility.

Laura Guymer from the CPCA spoke about the need to ensure people have the skills needed for the region's growth sectors including agritech, digital intelligence and AI, life science and advanced manufacturing. The CPCA looks at trends and policy in defining the skills needed for the region's businesses and key sectors.

Laura also highlighted that the CPCA is focusing on ensuring the development of soft skills such as emotional intelligence, critical thinking, leadership and communications, as these cannot be replaced by technology.

The panel then discussed a question posed by a member of the audience: How do you design an education process that's future proofed and agile, for careers we can't even imagine yet? And how do we create future places for this?

Ross opened the debate: "We have to teach people how to adapt their skillsets, and ensure they have the ability to learn. It's not just about physically going to university, theory and technical skills are now coming together with some great degree apprenticeships supporting this."

Laura added: "There must be agility in the skills system. We can't predict the future with absolute certainty, so we need to ensure that the providers we work with are forward thinking. We must respond to market needs. It's no longer a case of university or? it's now technical education and...."



Laura Guymer, Mark Woods and Ross Renton

"If we teach young people to deal with failure and the inevitability of change, we are equipping them for life. Failure is a valuable learning experience."

Mark Woods, CEO of Meridian Trust

Karl Hick, Chair of Phoenix Sustainable Investments, was asked to comment: "There is a real need for people to upskill, and to find a balance between academia and technical skills. Not everyone wants to go to university."

A further question asked by an audience member was then debated: With a growing intolerance to other views, and the tendency for instant outrage, is this a threat to the future of learning?

Ross Renton commented: "Debate is healthy and we encourage different views from our students, as you can't create new ideas if you don't listen to others. However, there is a responsibility to ensure we respect each other."



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The future of work

A keynote from Smart Growth Analytics

Jim Plunkett-Cole, founder of Smart Growth Analytics, opened the session with a keynote speech on changes to working patterns and what the future might look like, based on generic trends.

Jim described how seven million people in the UK are employed in creative and knowledge based industries such as ICT, the media, higher education, automotive and artistic creation. These make up 35% of total UK employment and 48% of GVA (gross value added). Between 2004 and 2021 employment in these areas saw 86% growth, and they now drive the UK economy.

15 million people - in the UK are now professionals. Representing more than half the nation's workforce and making up 73% of our entire salary bill.

A third key change in UK employment has been the shift to working from home or hybrid working. In 1998, just one in ten people worked from home, which had increased to one in seven by 2017. The impact of lockdown during the pandemic saw the number of people working from home quadruple, which has since stabilised with around 10 million workers (of 32 million) now working predominantly from home.

This has been driven by the increasing cost of travel, disruption to public transport, increasing flexibility of employers, the desire to reduce carbon impact, the improved quality of life and more co-working spaces becoming available.



Jim Plunkett-Cole

35-40% - of people are expected to work from home by 2030

Jim went on to introduce the recent concept of 'tribrid' working; where time is shared between the office, home and co-working spaces. This mode of working allows flexibility, balance and social interaction.

The trend of hybrid/tribrid working has led to the development of 'hidden business parks'; places where a large number of residents are working from home.

Jim gave the example of Orton Brimbles in Peterborough, where 41% of residents work from home at least some of the time according to 2021 census data.

These hidden business park have implications for both commercial and residential development. Many employers are looking for alternative, sometimes scaled down, accommodation which has resulted in former office buildings now being used for residential developments. There is also an increasing requirement for co-working spaces.

Those who work from home are looking for properties with dedicated space to work, so developers should ensure new developments are home office friendly and consider including co-working space provision. This is something that new garden communities will particularly need to consider.



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The future of work

Continued...

In the subsequent panel discussion, Jim Newton from Peterborough City Council considered the impact of these changes to working practice on the local planning process. Jim said there has been a shift in the approach to planning in recent years; previously the focus had been on allocating land but now the focus is on what the local authority wants to achieve, based on the specific needs of the local area and understanding of the opportunities.

This enables the authority to provide a framework for speculative sites alongside allocated land. Flexibility is key in the process of developing a local plan, there must be innovation, a clear sense of direction, a strong leadership and vision, and investment in the planning service and those who work within it.

Youth MP for Peterborough, Eva Woods, discussed young people's attitudes to changes in working patterns. Eva feels that young people are very open to new ways of working.

“Being in the office is invaluable to young people, not just the mentorship and opportunity to shadow, but because it helps their employer see their potential and invest in them.”

Eva Woods, Youth MP for Peterborough

Instead, many view the workplace as a 'scary place where you have to prove yourself' rather than seeing the opportunities and benefits which can be reaped in that environment. Eva added that success for many young people in Peterborough means leaving the city, but she would like this to change, for young people to see their future here.

Jim Plunkett-Cole supported Eva's point that young people need the benefit of social interaction in a workplace as well as the flexibility of working from home.

Ceren Clulow of Connecting Cambridgeshire emphasised the importance of connectivity to changing working practices. With a future based on connectivity and digitalisation, there is a need to understand what connectivity people need, which seems to change every day. Connecting Cambridgeshire works with the county council to support improvements to digital connectivity across Cambridgeshire for homes and businesses. The ability to work from home is dependent on the right infrastructure being in place. Providing 5G is now essential, to have a positive impact on the economy.



Eva Woods, Jim Newton and Ceren Clulow

Jim Newton then considered the question of whether local authorities now need to plan for less office space. He said: "Ambitious places like Peterborough understand that nothing happens if your local authority is not innovative, as they are responsible for bringing developers and investors on board."

Many local authorities lean towards large warehousing provision as this is quick and easy to build, attract high business rates, and generate mass employment. These have a place in the economy but as part of a balance, with the need to plan in flexibility.

Jim was then asked by a member of the audience whether he felt the 'local plan process was broken as it doesn't come across as visionary'. His response: "Peterborough is much more focused on what we want to achieve from our local plan, its outcomes, than just allocating land. We want to grow the economy, increase the flexibility of opportunities and give young people something to stay for like a night-time economy."

The future of energy

Richard Astle opened the session by posing the question.

Are we on the verge of a breakdown in energy infrastructure?



Simon Evans

Simon Evans from Phoenix Sustainable Investments warned that we have to be careful to avoid negative stories about energy, and cited two recent reports that showed a positive outlook for the future. The first, from the Rocky Mountain Institute, found that we are on track for achieving net zero targets, with solar battery costs having fallen and the number of offshore windfarms increased. Fossil fuel use is expected to be in freefall by the end of the decade.

31 countries are already getting 50% or more of their energy from renewable sources

Simon added that the technology we need to achieve net zero already exists, albeit on a small scale. There is now a need to increase employment in the renewables sector and scale up the use of early technologies.

Dr Matthew Hunt from Royal HaskoningDHV echoed this optimism. The energy challenge has put a huge demand both at work and at home, as we rely on huge data centres using huge amounts of energy to facilitate our needs. Around 85% of the world's energy use comes from fossil fuels, but there is becoming a shift to renewables.

“We need to match the desire to tackle climate change with the desire to be part of the solution. We need to move away from centralised energy and look at how we deliver decentralised solutions.”

Dr Matthew Hunt from Royal HaskoningDHV



Sam Luker and Matthew Hunt

Sam Luker from AESG was also positive about the future but said that a lot of work still needs to be done on energy storage to balance out the supply of renewables and increase in demand. This will require collaboration and upskilling. He added that the decarbonisation of electricity is already a UK success story, with an increase in consciousness to reduce energy use and carbon footprint.

So how do we power new communities? Simon feels that this requires innovation in planning, strong management of energy on site, and flexibility. Nuclear fusion technology already exists, with more investment now needed in solar technology. Green hydrogen is a good option for heating homes but we need to displace 'dirty' hydrogen too.

He added that more attention needs to be paid to retrofitting more existing homes; “We know how to do it but we don't know how to finance it. We should be focusing on this equally, if not more than newbuilds.”

Matt echoed the importance of retrofitting. “We use retrofit to ensure communities and biodiversity thrive. That's where we need to focus our energy.”

Closing

Themes for success

The final session of this workshop involved the whole room. It was agreed that eight themes formed the basis for success:

- Citizenship
- Care
- Community
- Centralisation
- Capacity
- Collaboration
- Choice
- Compassion

People need to be invested in the place they live, and there is a need for collaboration between the public and private sectors to make the city's vision a reality.

Karl Hick, Chair of Phoenix Sustainable Investments, summarised his approach to the challenges discussed. "I've been developing communities in this area for a long time, but recently I have sold most of my housing interests to focus on what I am passionate about; renewables, jobs and energy parks. I'm looking at how different sectors can contribute towards creating the communities of the future.



"We need to improve skills in the renewables sector to deliver what is needed. I'm passionate about education but also developing practical and technical skills.



Karl Hick

"Flexibility of plans is important. The people making the decisions must be brave enough to make the right ones, even if they are unpopular.

"We must all work together to find solutions for these challenges. Collaboration is everything. There is a great opportunity in this area with new technologies, I'm hopeful this will help keep young people here as we need to keep skills locally."

Karl Hick, Chairman of Phoenix Sustainable Investments



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