

Ordinary Hope: A New Way of Changing Our Country Together



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Brought to you by UCL Policy Lab
and Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Foreword

Britain is a country full of enormous creativity and compassion, dynamism and drive. But for millions of people, it also feels like an extremely hard place to live. Battered by Brexit rows, cost-of-living crises and anxieties about the future, it is a country that is neither at ease with itself nor confident about its future.

Nonetheless, everyone who has contributed to this collection of articles, essays and interviews, believes that there are powerful sources of hope. And that is because there are people and places across the country who are already leading extraordinary transformations, laying the groundwork for what could be a compelling period of national renewal.

In this volume, and throughout all the work that underpins it, we aim to share stories of those transformations and set out what they have in common. We do so, in the belief that this might make it easier for others – including those in political power – to follow their example.

We draw attention, in particular, to three elements that all the most inspiring stories of renewal right now seem to share.

First, they foreground practical progress over grand vision. The initiatives gaining traction today start not with abstract ideology or polarising theory, but with the everyday concerns of people living their lives in communities right across the country. They draw, in other words, on the concrete, practical and pragmatic spirit of the people of Britain, and focus their attention on the day-to-day concerns that make people's lives go better or worse, from the state of local schools and hospitals to the relationships each of us have with our friends, neighbours and colleagues at work.

Second, the best examples of renewal in Britain right now reveal that we need to mobilise the talents and efforts of everyone, and every place, as an essential counter balance to the agency of the central state and to forms of corporate power. They show that, not because government action and private enterprise do not matter – of course they do – but rather because they are not enough by themselves. The power of people's places and communities matter too, and their own sense of agency, and their ability to draw in and depend on the support of others around them too. The future that is being built is being created by collaboration, as much as by state action or market innovation.





Third, each of these stories of renewal also recognise the value of human relationships, social connection, and deep empathy with others. Social, political and economic change, they show, is not just a product of clever planning, technical insights or new technological innovations. It is the result of actual human beings, in all of their difference and diversity, learning to work with each other, trust each other, believe in each other and, occasionally at least, like each other too.

Taken together, we believe, these three common elements – a belief in the tangible, not the emptily idealistic; the power of the many, not just the few; the importance of human relationships, not just planning – provide the foundations for an extraordinarily exciting future. It is a future that we have been privileged to glimpse by working with all the brilliant people who have made the Ordinary Hope project possible, including all of those who have written or contributed to the pages that follow.

Through this publication, we seek to share some of that excitement. As befits a project of this nature, we do not present our ideas by way of a blueprint or a manifesto. Nor do we present much in the way of pure scholarly evidence here – though some of us are scholars. Instead, we have aimed to create a collage. In other words, this is a collection of the best ideas presented in a diverse way to give you a sense of the immense creative energy and shared power that lies underneath them all.

We hope you enjoy them all and that, collectively, they make you more hopeful about our future.

Marc Stears and Graeme Cooke

Meet the Ordinary Hope team

Ordinary Hope is a partnership between UCL Policy Lab and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, facilitating deep relationships to support social and economic change. It is organised by leaders from academia, philanthropy, media, community campaigning and organising, politics, public service and more, to platform a politics that is grounded in ordinary people's lives - one that restores trust, hope and respect. We bring diverse experience, perspectives, expertise, and networks to this work, and are all together driven by deep commitments to tackling social and economic injustices and working collaboratively across the differences that too often divide us.

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Part One: A Public Philosophy



Ordinary Hope: a public philosophy, Marc Stears

It is rare that political speeches move me. That is probably because I used to be a speechwriter myself, so I am a bit too attentive to the tricks of the trade. But it is also because they tend not to say very much anymore, preferring to stay within the tired comfort zone of predictable political sloganeering and standard partisan rivalry. But sometimes they still do. And back in October 2022, just when the UCL Policy Lab and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation were first thinking through this collaboration, there was a moment in Sir Keir Starmer's speech to his annual party conference that made me misty eyed.

That moment came in a passage where the Labour leader talked about his own childhood and hinted at a new direction for the politics of our time. Starmer told the assembled audience that he "grew up in a pebble-dashed semi" in the 1970s, when his Dad had a blue Ford Cortina parked outside. And he went on to share how he experienced the decade of his childhood. "I remember what rising prices feel like," Starmer said. "I remember when our phone was cut off because we couldn't pay the bill. How hard it was to make ends meet". But, he continued in a more positive vein, he also remembered "the most important thing about being working class in the 1970s: hope. Not a grandiose, utopian dream kind of hope. A hope that was ordinary. Basic. Taken for granted. Because like all families, although we had our ups and downs, my parents never doubted for one second that things would get better."

In all of the various bits of conference wash-up and in the months since, this has been a largely overlooked passage in his speech. Perhaps there has been too much drama going on in politics right then to notice this small phrase of calm. But it offers a really important insight into what might be possible in our country right now. In fact, it offers a potential fundamental frame for the coming years, rising above the hurly-burly of day-to-day politics or policy anxieties. It is a potential key theme for the coming general election and its aftermath, that could give focus for all parties and for any new government. My colleagues on this project agreed with that view, and soon the idea at the heart of this passage became our central theme.

In particular, this project asks: Is there something in this idea of "ordinary hope" that can provide the foundation for a bigger argument for our country, one that might help us set our priorities? Can it help us get through the pessimism of the present day, where the choice sometimes seems to be different ways to manage decline? Does it offer a clue to what might be able to connect people of disparate views and backgrounds again and give energy to a widely shared sense of more optimistic possibility? In short, is "ordinary hope" an idea that can help us get our sense of the future back?

This publication aims to answer those questions. And in this opening essay, I want to set out how the search for answers begins by making sense of what it is that made that passage in Keir Starmer's speech so compelling.

For me, personally, it might, in part, have been because it tickled my academic interest. I have long written and researched about these themes, including in my book *Out of the Ordinary*. But most of all, I believe the speech was powerful not because of its intellectual roots but because it did what all good rhetoric has to do: it connected at a human level.

For me, Starmer's words took me right back to my own personal experiences. When I was a little kid – probably six or seven, I also lived in a pebble-dash semi, on a street called Brookside. In Dinas Powys, a commuter village, just outside Cardiff. And the speech made me recall my favourite things to do in the world back then. One of them was to go on a weekend shopping trip with my mum and dad and sister to the town of Cwmbran, about 20 minutes' drive away from our home. Now, most readers have probably never heard of Cwmbran, but back then it was, at least to my eyes, an amazing place. It was the town where two of the best biscuits in the world -- Jammy Dodgers and Wagon Wheels -- were made. It had the best shops for miles around. And it was also the town with the first fully integrated transport system in Wales, so you could arrive by bus and be dropped off right in the heart of the shopping or always get a spot in one of the biggest car parks in Europe.

Years later, Cwmbran would be celebrated in song, by the irrepressible Welsh comedy hip hop collective, Goldie Lookin' Chain. It was called Fresh Prince of Cwmbran. It is definitely worth a listen, but you get the sense of it from any small excerpt:

*Now this is a story about a standard Welsh town
With adequate facilities, come on down
They got a cinema, biscuit factory, built to plan
I want tell you all about a place I know called Cwmbran*

As the rap tells us, none of this was an accident. Cwmbran was a “new town”. It was planned and designed by Clement Attlee's government in the aftermath of World War Two, to offer new housing and new employment to the people of the South Wales Valleys whose prosperity for decades had depended on coal. In other words, it was designed to replace one source of ordinary optimism with another. And it wasn't only the transport system that was futuristic in this new town. It had a pedestrian precinct and a covered shopping mall before anywhere else in the country. It had the first McDonalds in Wales. And it had vast homeware stores, where I remember enviously gazing at the colour, remote-controlled TVs.

But more than all of that, it was not just that Cwmbran was fun. It reverberated with the rhythm of the lives of the people who shopped there. This was the tail end of what my undergraduate economics tutor, Andrew Glyn, called the “golden age” of British capitalism. As with millions of others at the time, my mum and dad were the first in their families to be

able to go to higher education in the 1960s. After college, they got secure, professional middle-class jobs, with salaries and pensions that their parents could only have dreamt of. And that allowed them to buy a semi-detached house in the suburbs. Where there were solid comprehensive schools for me and my sister. And a new architect-designed doctors' surgery down the road, complete with abstract public art on the front just to keep the neighbourhood on its toes.

None of this had been available to the previous generation. So, it was no surprise that they thought that the future would get better too. But the truth has been far more complicated.

In some ways, of course, that future has got better. The shoppers in 1970s Cwmbran, would have been amazed at the advances in science or the technology that some of you are holding in your hands right now. They wouldn't have believed that the Berlin Wall and Apartheid would have crumbled away so fast. And I like to think that they would feel proud of how rapidly social attitudes towards different ethnicity, sexuality and gender have advanced. But it is nonetheless very hard to shake the sense that there remains a gulf between the expectations of these post-war generations and the outlook that confronts millions of people in Britain today, especially when it comes to the economy.

We don't live in the “golden age” anymore. The British economy has been characterised by low growth and high inequality for decades now. Leading to a series of intensifying challenges: persistent low pay; precarious work; an inability to get on the housing ladder or find affordable homes to rent. Low-income households in the UK are poorer than their counterparts in France by almost 25%. And these problems affect far more people than just those at the lower end of the income distribution. The Resolution Foundation, whose recent publication *Ending Stagnation* has done more than anything else to capture this reality, calculates that eight million young people have never worked in an economy that has sustained rising average wages. One in four adults in the UK say they could not survive on their savings for more than a month.

The consequences of this exceptional economic insecurity are widely felt too. As another contributor to this publication, Wendy Carlin, often says, such experiences eat away at people's ambition and hold the whole country back as a result. Who is going to take a risk on the future - by setting up a business, or investing in a new skill - when they feel as vulnerable as that?

Bad as all this is, it has been made worse still by a series of enormous additional shocks. These include: the act of economic self-harm that was Brexit, the virus of populism that was Donald Trump, the actual virus that is Covid-19, Putin's horrific war in Ukraine and the on-going crisis in Gaza. And that is all before the climate crisis really takes hold. Some political economists, including Adam Tooze and Helen Thompson, argue that we are now in an age of poly- or perma- crisis. That means we are living through a series of profoundly connected and deeply damaging events that renders the return of anything like the golden age of capitalism totally impossible.

It leaves people in a state of despair. This is presumably what Keir Starmer intends when he says we have lost our sense of the future. And it is a very bad place for a country to find itself.

Losing the sense of a positive future is not just a problem in itself. It has made people furious. And has had an enormously disruptive impact on British politics. At least since the financial crisis, rage has been the indisputable emotion at the heart of our politics. And those technological advances that would have so blown the minds of our parents in the 1970s have often given the angriest the loudest voice. I bet almost everyone reading this publication has been driven by something in British politics to send an abusive quote Tweet or shout at someone in a Facebook or WhatsApp group or end up just screaming at the TV. And it just doesn't stop. Almost every Thursday evening, my X timeline is full of people insisting that no-one should ever watch the TV show Question Time; posted while sitting on their couches, watching Question Time.

In the words of UCL Policy Lab Honorary Professor, the playwright James Graham, it sometimes feels like everyone in Britain is desperately trying to reboot the computer but they can't get it to work. They keep on pressing all the buttons, and shouting, and pressing the buttons again. But it just won't reboot. Nothing happens. This technology is not so empowering after all. Sometimes people want to smash the screen.

Then, of course, take Liz Truss. Her short-lived Prime Ministership proves Graham's fundamental point. Over the summer of 2022, she tapped into the rage among ordinary members of the Conservative Party. She got elected by 60,000 of them. And then she tried to bang a few buttons, looking for the reboot. £45 billion of annual tax cuts, mainly for the rich, funded by massively increased borrowing. Truss was explicitly about defying the orthodox. And you can understand why they thought everything needed to change. But this was exactly the sort of empty, "grandiose, utopian dream" that Starmer warned against and to which he hopes to provide an antidote. Smashing the buttons doesn't work.

But even now Truss has been shuffled out, the rage continues. It morphs into a series of ever grander and ever more imaginary solutions, that they say will magically fix all of our ills. It is snake oil politics. We've seen a lot of it in recent years. There are those who think that if we stem the tide of immigration we will instantly return to the 1950s. There are the advocates of "Global Britain", the Brexiteers who think they can instantly restore prosperity if we forget about Europe and head off on to the high seas with some dash of derring-do and a bit of the Captain Jack Sparrow about them. And for Labour people, there was Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party - with as expansive a list of impossible policy promises as has ever appeared in a British election manifesto. Even here in academia, there have been endless versions of some magical reboot moonshot that will somehow make it all better.

But as the Truss experiment shows us, in the real world, we don't get to "boldly go" just by wishing to "make it so." This kind of exaggerated,

puffed-up, wishful thinking fails to address the real challenges. It is a problem not a solution. And it also exacerbates the anger. It feeds the aggressive, populist, paranoid style of politics that we have become used to: dividing the world up into true-believers and enemies-of-the-people, where the noise, ferocious emotion and willingness to set reality to one side leaves most of us feeling overwhelmed. Exhausted. Disorientated. Dizzy with the chaos of it all.

Real change does not emerge in an atmosphere like that. It needs a far calmer head. A sense of stability. Firm foundations from which we can make good judgements and plan real progress. As the American political strategist, David Axelrod, recently put it: "It is time to tap the brake."

All of this takes us back to the idea that animates this publication: "ordinary hope". Because if these grandiose dreams have no purchase, perhaps "ordinary hope" can fill the void? But then we would need to know what it means. And although he introduced the idea, I am sure Keir Starmer would acknowledge that he has not filled in the idea with much detail.

What should be clear is that it cannot just be a return to the status quo. Of course, after the collapse of Liz Truss' Premiership, politicians of all persuasions have looked for the safe, the orthodox and the apparently predictable. Reassurance has been the name of the game. In the politics of both the Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, and Shadow Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, there has been much emphasis on keeping the markets settled, if not happy. Respecting Treasury orthodoxy; making fiscal and monetary policy work in lockstep; getting debt falling again. These are the mantras of the moment.

Beyond the economy, there has also been talk of the need to stabilise other key institutions in the country. To prevent the NHS from toppling over. To preserve the BBC as the world's greatest public service broadcaster. To make sure great universities, like UCL, can continue to prosper even in difficult times.

There is obvious sense to all of this. But there is danger in the preservationist impulse too. And that's because many of the institutions to which we traditionally turn for safe harbour have not offered much hope to many of late. You can get reminders of that almost wherever you look at the moment, in everyday life, at work, in our communities, in art and in culture.

On the advice of one other contributor to this publication, Jon Stokes, I picked up a new novel recently. Natasha Brown's *Assembly*. It is a brilliant but deeply disturbing book. In the novel, the lead character and narrator is a young Black woman who travels through some of the major institutions of our country. She goes to Oxford, works in finance, depends on the health service, has friends in politics. And she experiences the most horrific, callous, lack of concern in each and every one. Her boyfriend in the novel is particularly horrible. And we are told, close to the end, that he is a political speechwriter, as I once was. The narrator wonders aloud whether he could write about the awfulness of her experiences in his speeches, to share what she has gone through with the public. It is not possible, says the horrible

speechwriter boyfriend. “There are conventions,” he explains, “familiar, palatable forms... designed to foster understanding.” “Sugar-coat the rhetoric; embed the politics within a story; make it relatable. That’s as much honesty as the world can take.”

It is clear to anyone reading Assembly – even a speechwriter – that persisting with this faith in convention is a route to disaster. The worst thing that British politicians can do in the aftermath of Truss is simply offer the country “yet more denial.” As Helen Thompson puts it, “until the politicians get real about how dysfunctional the ... economy has become, they will keep being humiliated.”

But if neither rage and exaggeration nor the false security of the status quo offer a way forward, what might “ordinary hope” actually mean? I think – as speechwriters have a tendency to do – that it has three parts.

It begins by placing the fundamentals of everyday life at the core of our politics. That is, it is about feeling no embarrassment focusing on the things that matter to all of us, in our ordinary lives, rather than on anything grand or abstract. It is about prioritising what American political strategists call “kitchen table” issues. These include the prices of the everyday goods we rely on; our experience at work, from the wages we get to our relationship with the boss; our kids’ daily experiences at school; the chances we have of getting an appointment with the GP; the security we feel in our family life; our pride in a sense of place, in our communities and neighbourhoods.

These are not “small” issues, as some politicians and academics continue, snidely, to suggest. They are what matter to people in their day to day. Far more important to most of us, than any of the grand aspirations or abstract goals that we’ve been constantly sold in our politics of late.

Second, it is also about showing how taking action on these immediate issues offers a promise for the future too. We are not talking here about the usual political gimmick of a Budget “rabbit out of the hat”, a short-term intervention to make the pain go away. Instead, each and every policy intervention should be designed to make today better but also to create the conditions for a better tomorrow too. Ordinary hope is about using policy to address the drivers of the poly-crisis at the very same time as we address the here-and-now.

Third, ordinary hope is also about showing that real action in all of these regards doesn’t just come from on high, but depends also on the power of ordinary people themselves. It means accepting that the future is not going just to be given back to us. It will have to be made anew by people of all different backgrounds, in all different places, acting consciously together. Ordinary hope is about recognising that it is those whose lives have been most challenged by the inadequacies of recent years who have a chance to play their part in turning everything around.

I am aware, of course, that this is all quite abstract in itself. So, a core purpose of this publication is to try to make it clearer and more concrete. But before I close this essay, let me share with you just one way in which

this idea might work in practice. My friend and another Ordinary Hope project colleague, Tom Baldwin, and I are publishing a book in April 2023, called England. In it, we visit seven places across the country which capture the challenges people are facing. For one chapter, we went to Blackpool, in Lancashire. As anyone who has watched Strictly Come Dancing knows, Blackpool was once a truly global centre for entertainment. It was even more exciting than Cwmbran was to the seven-year old me. You might not know that Blackpool was even one of the first places in the whole world to get electricity. And they used it to create the spectacular illuminations all down the seafront to cheer up visitors on autumn nights.

But now Blackpool is also one of the poorest places in the country. Out of 33,000 council wards across England, 8 of the 10 poorest are in Blackpool. And the consequences are intense. More than a tenth of the town’s working-age inhabitants live on disability benefits. It has the highest rates of antidepressant prescriptions – more than two per person – of anywhere in the country. And life expectancy for men is more than 25 years lower than for those who live in London’s richest boroughs. If there is anywhere that needs hope right now, it is Blackpool.

There have been endless ideas to revive the town of late. But they have usually been of the big and grandiose type. The magical reboots. Politicians have talked about super casinos; something hi-tech called “Silicon Sands”, which was said to enable doctors in New York to conduct brain surgery in Blackpool hospitals via Artificial Intelligence; a comedy culture heritage centre; Brexit – which the town backed overwhelmingly; Freeports; Levelling Up; and Investment Zones. But little has changed. Money has been spent, but largely hunting for some kind of magic, silver bullet, far removed from the actual lives of the people of the town.

So, what would ordinary hope look like for Blackpool? Well, it could start with what is most urgently needed for the people actually living there today: and that is care. Care for those who grow up and grow old there; health care, including mental health care; social care for the elderly; support care for those who live with disability; childcare. That is what will have the biggest impact on the real lives of the real people in Blackpool. But this does not just have to be about making the current situation a little bit better. Vital though that is. Investment in care could also be a real down-payment for the next generation too.

Because when we look at Blackpool through the lens of ordinary hope, we see that investment in care is also investment in our future. There are so many more prospects for Blackpool if we could just stop thinking about caring jobs as second-class jobs. And start seeing them as skilled work, deeply valued by those who need it – and all of us probably will. Effective care could also be the foundation stone of the stronger, more effective economy that we are all searching for.

The Office of Budget Responsibility reported in late 2022 that the cost of health and disability benefits are set to rise by £7.5 billion. And that people falling out of employment because of chronic ill health is one of the largest

drags on Britain's prosperity. A healthier, happier, more secure population would be a more productive and prosperous population too.

We should be learning as a country to spend sparse resources on creating decent jobs and quality services in places where they are needed, not on chasing some pie-in-the-sky. And this plan for a humbler, more practical, ordinary hope does not stop there. For care to serve this purpose, its quality will have to be transformed too. We need to make the services that people receive fit for the twenty-first century. And that is not just about money and investment. It is, in part, about harnessing the new power of technology. But most of all, the evidence is now clear that it depends most of all on releasing the energy, creativity and insight of those on the front-line. And stop trying to control everything from the centre. As brilliant reformers like Hilary Cottam and Donna Hall have shown, real reform in caring services means giving real power to those who know how to provide it: nurses; teachers; workers in care for the elderly; and those who receive it too. So, they can use their expertise to inform and transform the services they depend on.

It is the power of people themselves that will remake care, remake Blackpool and restore faith in our future.

We have lived in really difficult times for the last few years. So difficult that five years ago I flew thousands of miles away and moved to the beachside suburbs of Sydney. But I am delighted to be back, especially here at UCL, because there is now an emerging sense of possibility, a glow again on the horizon. It does not shine that bright and it will not be easy to reach. But, unlike the magic, flashy, extravagant missions of recent years it need not be a false dawn either. As we move towards it, we can use that light as we make our own path. We need to be concentrating on the immediate challenges in front of us, not disdaining them as too small to be worthy of our concern, but we need also to be taking one small, deliberate step at a time, in the right direction for the future. And realising that we will only get to that future when people's energy is more engaged, not less engaged, fewer kids are left behind and voices of the less privileged are no longer ignored.

This is what all the participants in this Ordinary Hope project think the future of our country could be about. And it means that our job is constantly to ask who and what can do the most to provide that sense of ordinary hope and help us all on the way?





Part Two: Politics and Policy



Ordinary Hope and the economy: a conversation, Nick Hanauer and Wendy Carlin

On a cold but bright Monday morning in early December 2023, economists, politicians, media commentators, and political advisors packed into the QE2 conference centre in Westminster to learn how Britain might dig itself out of a period of economic stagnation.

The Resolution Foundation's report, *Ending Stagnation: A New Economic Strategy for Britain*, set out the scale of the challenge. Attended by both the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Leader of the Opposition, the event sought to spur the assorted politicians, experts, and advisors into action.

One politician was notably missing from the audience that morning: Alastair Darling. He had sadly passed away a few days earlier, and the Resolution Foundation's Director, and Darling's colleague and friend, Torsten Bell, opened with some poignant memories of the former chancellor.

"One of the key lessons I took from working with Alastair Darling over many years is that economic policy is not some abstract game. It's not about fancy charts, although I will show you lots of those; it's not about your theories. No. Economic policy is about the bread and butter of people's lives."

Bell added, looking back on those frantic days as special advisor in the Treasury during the financial crisis;

"When Alastair was worried about the banks back in 2008, his first thought was always what happens to ordinary people who can't go into the shops and make the payment for their goods that day, for the weekly shop? He was much more interested in that than abstract discussions of fiscal rules. In fact, I can see many people in this room who were thrown out of meetings because he wanted it to stop."

And to an audience packed with wonkish statistics obsessives, Bell finished by underlining the real fundamentals of sound economic strategy.

"Ultimately, the objective of economic policy is about ordinary people's lives. Their jobs, their homes, their quality of life."

As chancellor in the most technical of crises, the fact that Darling still managed to hold on to this truth should force us today, to ask whether current economic thinking lives up to that maxim. Does it deliver for ordinary people and their lives? Their successes and their failures. As many voters express, has it drifted from their reality and hopes of their economic realities?

And if it has, what might an economic policy that once again focuses on the everyday hopes of ordinary people look like? These are the questions we discussed with two of the leading thinkers on the state of modern economics and its connection to ordinary life - Nick Hanauer and Wendy Carlin.

Nick Hanauer is a successful business leader, entrepreneur, and venture capitalist. His work today as a civic leader, driven to make social change, his ideas, captured in the phrase "middle-out economics", have shaped

President Biden's economic policy. His most recent work on economic narratives, policy and social justice resonates powerfully with the ideas of ordinary hope.

"The economy is fundamentally about what we Americans call the middle class, or in the UK you might call working class. And for the vast majority, the economy does not exist as an abstraction. For almost everyone, it exists only as their job and expenses," Hanauer says with a clarity of an economist used to making their case in the corridors of power.

Hanauer is vocal in his view on the serious political stakes at play. And the urgent need for an economic strategy that provides hope for ordinary voters. He believes that countries like the UK and the US face economic malaise and political crises without a fundamental and sustained shift in economic policy.

At the heart of Hanauer's argument is the contention that "trickle down" economic orthodoxy, which presumes that economic success is driven by those at the top, is misconceived. For Hanauer, it is that everyday people drive economic prosperity, not just benefit from it.

"Middle-out economics is a way of understanding economic cause and effect. The simplest statement of it is that a thriving middle class is the cause of both economic progress and political stability. And if that is the only rubric you use and the only heuristic you use to make economic policy, you cannot go far wrong."

Hanauer thinks Biden has made some progress in affecting people's everyday lives, and in a way that they notice, and the UK needs to catch up.

UCL Professor of Economics Wendy Carlin and the CORE project have transformed how the world teaches economics by placing the most important problems we face centre stage. Carlin is once again forging innovative thinking on the big challenges of our time as Co-Director of the Stone Centre on Inequality. "For ordinary people to take the kinds of risks that can transform their lives and those of their families, they need more security. This can produce momentum in communities and the economy."

One concrete political recommendation to flow easily from the middle-out theory of the economy has been the push for a real living wage, or, in the US, a higher minimum wage. Although the idea that working people need to thrive in order for the economy as a whole to thrive has a clear intuitive appeal, Hanauer uses the example of the minimum wage to show just how far that has been from the orthodox view in the last few decades.

"When we cooked up the idea for the \$15 (£12) minimum wage in 2012," Hanauer explains, "and I started speaking about that publicly, not one of the 9000 or so practising economists in the United States of America wrote in support of that idea."

"I got not one email, and no one published a single article in support. There was just zero support from this, from the economic institutions, you know, for that incredibly simple idea."

So Hanauer and colleagues kept pushing. With the emergence of right-wing populism and Donald Trump, there came an ever-clearer demand from progressives to construct an economic strategy grounded in the need to improve the everyday lives of working Americans.

By 2022 President Biden had signed an executive order that all federal employees must be paid at least \$15, and had begun to make "middle out" economics the core of his overall economic and political strategy.

To put it another way, Biden had made a small step towards his commitment to the idea that 'a job is about more than a paycheck'. It's about dignity'.

Hanauer believes the \$15 wage was a small but essential step towards driving economic recovery, expanding economic dignity for millions and central to reshaping a winning political narrative at the same time.

Wendy Carlin shares the excitement.

"There's now a massive accumulation of evidence demonstrating, as Nick intuitively thought, that increasing the minimum wage would not impact job creation. And in fact, may even improve the economy and increase jobs."

This is partly about moving away from what Carlin summarises as a "one-dimensional" view of the economy. Along with her co-author Samuel Bowles, Carlin has increasingly called for a more complex and nuanced understanding of how a high-income economy operates in recent years, in a way that echoes many ordinary hope themes.

"If you only think of policy as a battle between market and state. It will leave you with a very impoverished approach to economic policy," she explains.

Instead, we should be opening up a much bigger space for policies that can change lives by adding a third pole – civil society. In doing so, economics can recognize motivations of dignity, fairness and sustainability and help uncover drivers of growth and prosperity that lie beyond the confines of the restrictive state-market continuum.

"To produce better economic outcomes for people, and for people to produce better outcomes for themselves, we need to think about other dimensions of the economy, such as the whole of civil society. This is by no means a warm, fuzzy place. We are confronted there with the challenges of in-group identities, for example. Thinking in this richer way where you've got this whole space where you can think about the design of different combinations of what markets are good at, and what states are good at. Civil society and social movements can help with economic transitions. Realising that allows you to integrate a discussion about policy that is effective in delivering for ordinary people but also speaks to their lives."

This new expansive way of thinking about economic choice and agency forces us to think about economic renewal as essentially a multi-dimensional collaboration. One that includes impulses for community, learning and culture. Productivity and prosperity are unlocked when

policymakers recognize and support the human drive to take more risks - by learning new skills or moving to new opportunities. Such policies can create the conditions that enable ordinary people to become a motive force for economic prosperity.

In both Hanauer and Carlin, we see not only a new economic narrative emerge but also the beginnings of an argument that can enable policymakers to rebuild the bond of respect with ordinary people that has been so ruptured, at least since the Great Financial Crisis.

“Economic narratives are incredibly consequential because they are the cognitive shortcuts that we use to define our human relationships and priorities. And economic narratives are about more than just a policymaking heuristic. They also affect culture and preferences, how people see their place in the world, and what they expect of their leaders,” Hanauer explains.

“That is why it is essential to generate these high-level political narratives that policymakers and cultures can latch onto to guide their direction in thinking.”

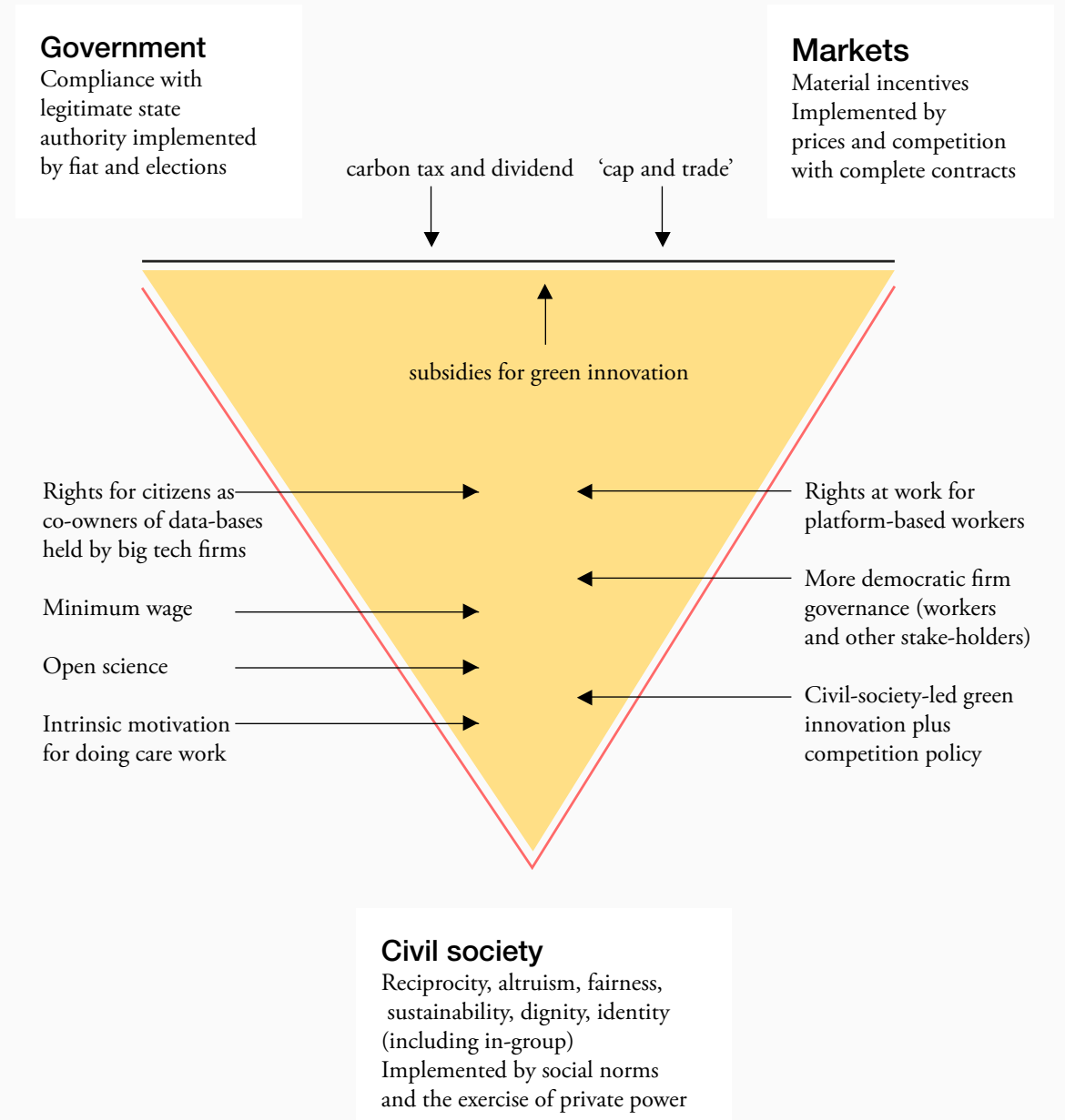
As we work to define an economy that embodies ordinary hope, this economy too must work to embody the elements present in Wendy Carlin and Nick Hanauer’s work. Where economic renewal is founded on the ability of ordinary people to flourish and grow, where workers’ aspirations and hopes are forged by the many dimensions of our economy: markets, state, civic, cultural, and more.

Or the freedom to flourish.

“When we think about freedom, we should think about it as the freedom to be all you can be right to maximise your capacity as a human, to make a contribution to the world and to your community and to your family and friends. All of which is impossible if your existence is so precarious and fragile that any move you make may send you into the abyss.”

And if, as Alastair Darling made so clear, the objective of economic policy is about ordinary people’s lives – then providing them with the tools and freedom to meet their full potential could well be a good place to start.

Motives and mechanisms: expanding the space for creative policymaking and engagement





Garden Kiosk

Bring Your Own Mug/Tea off

Coffee	4.25	4.50
Flavoured	4.50	4.75
Coconut	4.75	5.00
Hot Milk	3.75	4.00
Latte	4.50	4.75
Smoothie	4.50	4.75
Hot Chocolate	3.50	3.75
Tea	3.50	3.75

KEEP DRINKS HOT

Hot Milk	3.75
Hot Chocolate	3.50
Tea	3.50

COLD DRINKS

Soft Drink	2.50
Smoothie	4.50
Hot Milk	3.75

SPECIALS 2 for 1

Hot Milk	3.75
Hot Chocolate	3.50
Tea	3.50

CHALKBOARD

Today's Specials

- Hot Milk
- Hot Chocolate
- Tea

Lives less ordinary: why government should embrace human complexity, Paul Kissack

To make a difference

Three years ago I left the civil service, after 25 years working across multiple departments. There were many reasons for that - some personal, some professional. But perhaps my most important motivation for leaving was the same one that had brought me into the service in the first place: I wanted “to make a difference”.

Many years working in Whitehall had left me sceptical that it was the right place to have an impact on the issues I cared about most. I felt increasingly distant from, and unable to change, the social conditions affecting people’s lives. And any honest reflection on the state of the country, and the failure of economic and social policy to address so many long-term and chronic challenges, left me feeling complicit in a broader policy making malaise.

Like many civil servants interested in social policy, I spent a lot of my time in Whitehall focused on public services, and the pursuit of ‘public service reform’. This work can be deeply rewarding. Our public services are foundational to our social contract, and politicians connecting with ordinary people in their constituency will hear story after story of people’s experiences engaging, or trying to engage, with these services. But, over time, there felt to me something narrowing about the work. Partly that was about the limitations of its impact; and partly about the peculiar view it took about ordinary people’s lives.

The limitations of public service reform

Public services were only meant to be one part of the Beveridge settlement put in place after the Second World War. But over time Whitehall has developed a growing tendency to see public services and the welfare state as one and the same. “The welfare state has been reshaped as a service industry”, writes Hilary Cottam in *Radical Help*, a book which more than any other helped crystallise my anxieties as I sat at my Whitehall desk.

We should always remember that, in many cases, the success of the welfare state does not constitute public services delivering more, but in them being needed less. If 80% of health outcomes are determined by factors outside of health services, we need to focus much more on the social determinants of health. Similarly we cannot reasonably expect teachers to close educational attainment gaps if the homes in which children are growing up are so wildly different – with growing numbers living in damp, cold housing and coming to school with empty stomachs.

Too often it felt to me that we were pursuing marginal improvements in public service productivity in the face of ever growing failure demand caused by policy inadequacies elsewhere. At some point, we would need to stop kidding ourselves, that we could just ‘public service reform’ our way to better lives: instead we would need to focus much more on the structural economic and social conditions in which people actually live.

Civil servants working on public service reform invariably focus on people as isolated individual service users. They tend to take a deficit lens: assessing the ‘needs’ of those individuals, against ‘thresholds’. They often then develop an episodic response: a set of time-limited ‘evidence-based interventions’ – based on ‘what works’ to fix the problem. And generally we see the role of services as ‘delivering’ these interventions to the service users. This is welfare policy as “assess me, refer me, manage me”, in Cottam’s phrase.

Too many years working in this way and the policymaker risks being left with an impoverished view of the citizen and the rich complexity of ordinary lives. It is the social policymaker’s equivalent of the homo economicus view of the citizen which too often dominates economic policymaking.

In reality of course, people live in complex networks of social connections – centred around families and communities. Both as individuals, and through those collectives, they have a range of strengths, assets and capabilities. The challenges they face are often chronic and compounding, not one-off. This requires ongoing and relational support and connection, not episodic interventions. And people very often want to be part of resolving these challenges for themselves, focused not just on fixing problems but on thriving and actually meeting their aspirations.

Every so often in Whitehall policy conversations someone would begin to talk about these concepts. They might mention the importance of social connectedness or relationships. They might possibly mention the importance of something called family (though in the Department for Education I found people were more comfortable referring to the ‘home learning environment’), as an input into educational attainment. I even once heard someone mention a concept called ‘love’, though I never heard him do it twice...I didn’t hear of it again in policy making until I went to New Zealand, where it is written into statute.

I knew these concepts mattered. So many of the public services we were working on were clearly trying to patch up tears in the social fabric. We were building services where relationships should be. Nobody working seriously on children’s social care policy could be blind to the deeper need to nurture loving, stable relationships in secure family environments as the true bedrock of children’s wellbeing, rather than relying on a set of over-stretched public services.

These are concepts that matter for ordinary people. Despite national caricatures, most Britons don’t struggle to talk about family and relationships, loneliness and connectedness. They are meaningful, visceral, facts of life. They are what make people’s lives purposeful – or unbearable – and provide the platform for their sense of identity, security and aspiration.

And so, over time, I had a growing sense that the work of ‘public service reform’ – for all its importance – was crowding out a fuller approach to social policy that needed to be both more structural (focused on underlying economic and social conditions people live in) and more relational (focused on the networks that give people’s lives meaning and resilience).

A broader approach to social policy

Of these two challenges, the first – focusing on the underlying economic and social conditions of people’s lives – is the easier to respond to in terms of traditional central government policy know-how. Doing so is often not so much a technological policy challenge – being unsure how to make a difference – as a matter of politics or the absence of policy consensus. Many of the means of improving the economic security of families in Britain already lie in the hands of central government policy makers, with powers to improve security of income and wealth, housing and work. Indeed, central government has more and better tools and technology available today than ever before to affect the lives of millions of families for good.

A mission-oriented government with an ambition to improve economic security or reduce poverty and hardship wouldn’t struggle for policy levers to pull. An approach to rebuilding our social security system, for example, so that every family could afford the essentials would be a piece of social policy work any Whitehall civil servant would relish – and constitute the best possible investment in the social conditions of millions of British families.

The second challenge – a more relational approach to social policy – is more challenging for Whitehall. Of course, part of the answer may lie in the same policy responses to the challenge of economic security. After all, families and communities thrive in contexts of greater economic security, and perhaps there is no greater impact the Whitehall policymaker could have on family stability, relationships and connectedness than ensuring every household is able to live free from the fear of hardship.

But it is surely at least worth thinking about what it might mean to put these difficult but human concepts at the centre of policy making.

This is not what the civil service has been set up to do. It was built to run or steward large industrial-scale welfare machines. Concepts like social connectedness are left homeless in Whitehall, things best avoided. There is no ‘Relationships Unit’ in Whitehall. Ask which government department leads on ‘family policy’ or ‘social fabric’ – as some incoming Prime Ministers like to do – and watch the departmental bunfight begin.

Policymakers assemble

The good news is that there are plenty of people and groups out there who are not waiting for a cavalry to arrive from SW1. Instead they have decided they are the cavalry, cracking on with the hard and messy work of social and economic experimentation in local neighbourhoods: social and economic policymaking as an active process at a human scale.

Invariably these pioneers have a much more instinctive feel for the very concepts which feel so alien to the central state: putting questions of social connection, relationships and community at the heart of their work. At the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, for example, we are inspired by the work of a growing ecosystem of pathfinder organisations, many rooted in their

local communities, prototyping routes to achieve deep, transformative change across multiple interlocking challenges. A similar spirit can be found amongst pioneering councils, such as Wigan. It is evident too in the wider movement of those building more democratic forms of wealth ownership at a local level.

Yet it is easy to sit in SW1 and know very little about this sort of work: it is often happening a long way away, and it rarely fits into the specialism of any single government department. It is just as easy to find out about it and then treat it with scepticism and even cynicism – seeing it either as quaintly naïve and small-scale, or dangerously radical and utopian. The ability to arch a cynical eyebrow when confronted with genuine creativity was, in my experience, a common tool in the armoury of the upwardly mobile Whitehall policy professional, and not a healthy one.

A more participative approach

But at the heart of ordinary hope for me, is the realisation that we need to go further than merely joining up more traditional policymakers with pioneers. Without a doubt we need many more centres of democratic discourse and policy making. Perhaps one of the biggest but most exciting challenges in the years ahead will be to turn the political consensus for devolution into genuine change – moving beyond the often rather anaemic ‘deals’ to meaningful economic and fiscal devolution, creating more spaces for policy making at regional and local levels.

And we need this to fuel a radical widening of our concept of the community of policymakers. “In contemporary politics, ideas and policy programmes take shape in loose assemblages of sympathetic think-tanks, journalists, public intellectuals, party activists and civil society organisations” wrote two seasoned Whitehall actors, Gavin Kelly and Nick Pearce, in their paper, *Riders on the Storm*. It is hard to disagree with this, but it is hardly a source of hope.

It is not just the lack of diversity in that loose assemblage (of which I consider myself a part). It is also that almost everyone in it is – to use Polly Mackenzie’s typology – either a ‘technocrat’ or a ‘partisan’, or both. And that means that, by definition, we are not ‘ordinary people’: most people simply do not think or identify in that way. Nor do we necessarily aspire to be ordinary: instead, we set ourselves up as policy heroes, seeking to identify the ‘correct’ answers – ideologically or technically – to complex questions to bestow on a grateful populace. This is, after all, how we try to “make a difference”.

But this ‘heroic’ approach to policy making could hardly be described as bearing fruit when it comes to the myriad chronic challenges we are facing today. Which, as Polly compellingly sets out, is why we need a much more humble, post-heroic approach, centred on greater participative policy making, finding new ways to put ordinary people in the driving seat.

Not only would such an approach present an opportunity to bring new insights or forge more lasting consensus on complex areas of policy where there might not be a ‘correct’ answer, but the very process of this work would itself be a source of restoring democratic trust and developing societal resilience and community capacity to resolve problems. This new approach gives me hope.

Imagination and hope

There is one thing that seems to unite many government policymakers with citizens across Britain, when confronted with our biggest social and economic challenges – a sense of fatalism. We are at risk of living in Robert Unger’s “dictatorship of no alternatives” where all creative ideas are dismissed as either too small to make a difference, or too radical to be achievable. It is why the local pioneers working in small pockets to skewer fatalism, offering glimmers of hope, can feel so distinct from the mainstream of policy.

In some respects we’ve been here before. I have written elsewhere comparing the moment we are in today with the period 100 years ago, when we felt our way to a new social settlement. Such periods – as old assumptions lose ground and new challenges are faced – are times of worry and fear. But they can also be times of renewed energy and hope, opportunities to lead with a spirit of enquiry and openness – a humility about not knowing what the future holds, but a determination to shape it anew.

The architects of that previous settlement were varied and diverse – national and local, analysts and campaigners, pioneers and policymakers, extraordinary people and ordinary folk. They puzzled their way forward, fuelled by imagination and a sense of belief in their ability to address the great social challenges they faced. As Geoff Mulgan reminds us: “it is only through working on the world, pushing, prodding and testing its plasticity, that we begin to discover which worlds are possible”.

That is again the task before us today. I feel hopeful. I believe the next 25 years of social policy making in Britain are going to be much more adventurous, creative, and more human, than the last 25. They need to be. The scale of the challenge demands that of us.





A hope that comes from difference, a conversation, Luke Tryl

In the UK and across the democratic world, it's felt that the challenges we face, whether political, economic, or social, have been intensified by a growing sense of polarisation. A feeling that we can't find common ground anymore. That the differences between us are too great to ground ordinary hope.

But what if the complexity of our differences is what we have in common? What if respect for those differences, born of diverse experiences and lives, can be the foundations on which we build a better, more hopeful politics?

It certainly feels possible when you speak to Luke Tryl and work with the team at More in Common.

"You could say clarity and consistency in political thinking is a fairly elite way of thinking. Most people aren't like that. Most people are inconsistent." Tryl says when we sit down with him at More in Common HQ.

"That inconsistency is good. It's healthy. We should embrace that nuance. And I wish more politicians would try to think that way."

This attempt to think beyond the usual clichéd dividing lines and look at broader trends to explore the ideas that could help heal our politics was on show in *The Respect Agenda*, published as part of the Ordinary Hope project in October 2023.

That report set out how there is a shared feeling of a deep dissatisfaction with the way our democracy functions, that we need to reset our politics and rebuild faith in our institutions by prioritising issues closer to people's everyday needs.

But Tryl is quick to point out that establishing an everyday hope that is built on respect for the contribution of ordinary people. It is not about returning to some imagined past.

"I think there's a danger that sometimes people assume we're being quite atavistic with this stuff and assume that it's all about turning back the clock and some parochial vision of the 1950s. It's not; there are new ways of building a politics of respect that recognises how communities have evolved. I think *The Respect Agenda* really shows this: politicians should ask the question 'How do we empower those actors who have trust and also who know their communities best to have more of a say?'"

This modern take on the very old human desire for belonging and shared acceptance embodies the approach that the Ordinary Hope and More in Common team take in their work.

Embracing contradictions

Launched in the wake of the Brexit referendum in 2016, More in Common was built on the idea that, in the words of the tragically murdered MP, Jo Cox, ‘there is more that unites than divides us’. Although the research side of More In Common is now separated from the Jo Cox Foundation, these core values remain for Luke and the team.

“Our mission from the beginning has always been about how we tackle polarisation and help to build cohesion, recognising that very often the root of polarisation or hyper-partisanship is a deep feeling of fracturing and alienation.”

This has been felt in the UK via a series of political earthquakes, but as Tryl points out, the UK is not alone. In democracies around the world, divisions have grown out of a lack of understanding of the pain and neglect communities feel.

That they feel disrespected by the very institutions that are set up to serve them is, Tryl says, a critical risk to stable politics.

“Polarisation is the product of a much bigger problem. I think what we identified very early on at More in Common is that really what you were seeing were societies struggling with how to manage and navigate change. And in doing that badly or not bringing people with them, that was the driver of polarisation.”

Tryl says a politics that acknowledges ordinary people’s concerns, where politicians level with the public and respect differences, is waiting to be born in the UK. Yet Tryl believes the ability to bring people together around shared values and institutions may well be one of the UK’s strengths.

“When it comes to polarisation, the UK is very different to the US. I can sit in a focus group in the US, and someone tells us what they think about guns, and I can tell you what they think about abortion, what they think about climate, what they think about immigration. The UK is very lucky. We don’t have those stacked identities.”

Tryl goes back to one of the many focus groups he’s run in the so-called “red wall”, those parts of the country associated with a working-class switch to Boris Johnson (and Brexit).

“There was a guy who was furious about small boats and channel crossings. But when it came to footballers taking a knee, he said, ‘Yeah, of course, you know, you should do that in solidarity with your teammates facing discrimination’. These contradictions offer us a way to build bridges.”

And yet, for British politicians and those in Westminster, it can seem like the UK is starkly divided over cultural differences. Luke and the team at More in Common have shown that this is far from the truth. In fact, we agree and disagree in equal measure and with different people.

And there is a beautiful power in those differences when handled by a politics of respect and compassion.

A reformed Westminster

But what might a reformed, respectful, more hopeful politics look like? Luke thinks politicians need to recognise just how little conventional politics is trusted right now and to also look to those institutions the public trusts to help rebuild political trust.

“How can they empower the people and institutions so that the public really trust them? For example, the NHS is right up there for trust.”

That does not mean the NHS is immune from criticism or reform. But the public values a space where they can unite across differences in service of what we might call the common good. It’s seen as a British value, but it’s also a bond of sacrifice for a shared mission built on a long-standing relationship.

“The people we respect and trust are people we have human relationships with. So, it is the local community. “

This also requires a mindset that supports those deep relationships, that values their contribution. And doesn’t leave them to fend for themselves. A government that believes and builds on the deep respect and hope that British people see in one another.

The most powerful thing a politician can do is to trust and give away power. But does it place too much burden on the citizen, tired from years of division?

“It’s not about abdicating responsibility. People don’t want that; people and politicians should do their job right. They don’t want to spend every day at a citizen’s assembly.”

And Tryl is clear about the need to develop a politics of mutual respect – a two-way street.

“What voters do want is for those in positions of power to think, okay, how can we play a more collaborative role? It’s almost like shared ownership. How can we have shared ownership of the public domain, public space. These are the kinds things that would genuinely build trust and feelings of respect because they’re inextricably tied to agency.”

Conclusions

This new way of doing politics, seen in The Respect Agenda and found across the voices of the Ordinary Hope team, is where Tryl finds hope.

“We hear time and time again in focus groups that people see hope reflected in their everyday lives. People want a politics which respects and understands that.”

It’s a lesson Tryl hopes we can take from the United States . Hope in both its highs and lows.

“You can have the Obama style kind of hope and change stuff, which is great for rhetoric but ultimately tends to lead to disappointment. Or you can have Trump’s ‘American carnage’ inauguration theme, which is just deeply depressing and yes, probably plays into where the public mood is, but further divides us. Or you can have what people actually want: a sort of pragmatic hope.”

“It is one that recognises what we’re good at and what we’re doing well, and I think we should talk about that more. But it is also about levelling with the public, talking about what the challenges are.”

Plenty of challenges need tackling, but a more honest, respectful politics can begin to tackle them and once again provide hope. A hope not based on egos or lofty plans but on the ordinary hopes of people in communities across Britain.

If there is anything we can take from Luke and More in Common’s work, it is that our differences are not what divides us; they are just aspects of who we are. A politics that respects them could well reform Britain and provide hope in the ordinary and every day.





Part Three: Relational Renewal



Finding hope in the everyday, James Baggaley

The comedian and writer Caroline Aherne once said that you can find all the comedy you'll ever need amongst the canned goods and detergent of the local supermarket. Her writing not only represented the lives of ordinary people - their triumphs and disasters - it respected them.

In her most famous show, *The Royle Family*, Aherne tells the story of everyday life with a family living in an everyday house in an unnamed suburb. Aherne's characters give voice to the lives of the working-class people with whom she grew up.

In the show's 2012 Christmas Special *Queen of Sheba*, the family rallies around - as their much-loved Nana is cared for. Placed in an NHS bed in the living room; life continues as Nana enters her final months. In one memorable scene, as Denise does Nana's nails, the frail matriarch makes Denise promise that her funeral will be full of laughter.

Like millions of other families, when the time came for my own grandparents' funerals, a celebration of life was at the centre. We shared the greatest hits in the pub afterwards, amongst the discounted beer and cellophane-wrapped sandwiches. Looking back on their lives. Memories of friends, wedding anniversaries and trips to the seaside. Long summer BBQs that rolled late into the night.

Like the Royles, the seemingly small moments provided the release valve when times were tough—these moments provided the stepping stones to brighter days. And now their memory was a thread connecting us back to them and one another.

Thousands of ordinary everyday moments which had provided the fuel for extraordinary lives.

And yet today, it can feel like many cannot access these moments: a trip to the seaside, a chance for a small treat or a pair of football boots. Moreover, the seemingly ordinary aspects of our public services are failing to meet basic needs and often leave people without a sense of dignity.

And just as Aherne understood that by telling the stories of ordinary people, you could unlock something far more powerful than a laugh, so too should our politicians understand that a politics that gives voice to ordinary people can unlock more than just a vote.

That in fact a politics in service of the everyday could provide a genuine chance of renewal.

You hear this need for change when you speak with Ordinary Hope project members, the journalist, Anoosh Chakelian and campaigner and founder of *Camerados*, Maff Potts.

'Ultimately, we're talking about people. And people have feelings, so it shouldn't surprise you if they currently don't feel particularly trusted, valued, thanked, noticed, listened to, supported by national or local politics,' Maff says.

This will not come as a surprise to local councillors or MPs. Speaking to voters week in and week out, MPs hear the frustration of communities who feel let down by a politics which has sought to project someone else's visions of the future, or what's more, a future which is never realised.

It's a sense of cynicism that has spread. Overcoming it will be key to any party not only winning an election but also sustaining a programme of renewal in unstable times. Having spent the last decade speaking to voters and community leaders in marginal seats across the country, Anoosh has heard first hand this yearning for a sense of voice and change.

'I think there's a real sense of cynicism about whether things will happen because I think people have been promised a lot and that just hasn't been delivered.'

The Ordinary Hope team captures this frustration so often when we visit places across the UK for the photo and interview series 'Citizen Portraits'. A mood we have once again captured with images from Wolverhampton and Hastings.

And yet alongside this frustration you also hear and witness something else—a belief in one another and the power to change the places around them.

Speaking to people for Citizen Portraits, you don't hear of a nation defeated; it's more a nation worn down by false promises. And even after these false dawns, ordinary people are willing to serve the community around them. In the end, they haven't given up on each other.

A big part of this is about creating a politics and public service interested in their lives and hopes for the future. In this sense, the everyday and ordinary once again play a vital role in rebuilding a sense of trust between a people and its politics.

Keir Starmer recently spoke of the need for a politics that 'treads light on people's lives'. To many, it made sense. As we heard in an earlier interview with Luke Tryl, people are tired of politics forcing its way into their lives, seeking division while people want peace. Yet there is a second element - people want politics to place power and trust with those they respect.

In doing so, politics can begin rebuilding the bonds of trust that have been severely damaged.

In recent polling conducted for UCL Policy Lab by More in Common, we saw that respect and trust exists for local charities and national organisations that serve the common good, including the National Trust. A genuinely powerful and restorative act would be a politics which loudly places itself at the service of those working to tackle the challenges facing communities. This is both a rhetorical device but also a policy framework.

In a sense, this new way of working can be seen as a mission to respect and value both experience and ideas.

Much has been made of the last five years of the turmoil in British politics. The scale of our challenges, the endlessly unstable and fractious politics. The horse race of political leadership and court intrigue. Not to mention the emergence of a booming new industry of social media stars and podcast hosts - made famous through the rise of a kind of political soap opera.

Too often, our politics fails to recognise the power of ordinary and everyday action. It's perceived as neither big enough in scale nor pure in ideological leanings. But in forcing out the ordinary and everyday from our politics, we weaken our ability to overcome the challenges we face.

And yet Britain has done it before. Time and time again, it has found renewal in the everyday ideas and experiences of ordinary people. In their book *England: Seven Myths That Changed a Country*, Ordinary Hope members, Tom Baldwin and Marc Stears, explore the incredible power of the everyday ideas that have fueled renewal.

We're reminded of Paul McCartney's quote: "The fact is, being ordinary is very important to me. I see it in millions of other people. There's an appreciation of common sense. It's really quite rational, my ordinariness. It's not contrived at all. It is actually my answer to the question, what is the best way to be? I think ordinary."

Our political life has too often ignored this way of thinking. When the everyday ideas of the communities are allowed to breathe and grow, it creates an ordinary hope, a messy beauty – which has produced some of our most significant institutions and ideals from the BBC to the NHS, from sports clubs to unique brands.

And this isn't some attempt to reflect a time now gone. In our current culture and economy, we see the imprint of this long tradition. Sam Fender singing to a packed-out St James' Park about growing up amongst the terrace housing of North Shields, his saxophonist playing the simple note of a Local Hero into the summer night. Or Stormzy, with his mix of grime and gospel bleeding into the experiences of growing up skint amongst the tower blocks of south London.

And it's not just culture where we see the power of the everyday appear. We see it in the many social enterprises and organisations that have risen to meet their communities' needs. Whether it's Maff Potts' Camerados, with their "public living rooms" on the streets of towns and cities across Britain, or the work of Hastings Common, which Anoosh Chakelian has reported on, these ideas and enterprises are made innovative and effective by the fact they directly connect and represent those they seek to serve.

While politics has busied itself with court intrigue and a singular vision, a parallel world beyond Westminster continues to work to overcome the day-to-day challenges communities and institutions face from innovative ways of cutting waiting lists in the NHS to new relational approaches to adult social care.

And for every failure to build grandiose projects, there have been a thousand start-ups and community-led enterprises. A politics focused on the everyday might try to ask - what would a state that serves these organisations and ideals look like?

The everyday is a transformative place. It is where we fall in love, where we laugh and cry. It's where we share our toughest challenges and highest achievements, and it's where politics can reconnect with its future again.





Buy your own town: self-renovating neighbourhoods, Anoosh Chakelian

What do you do when the state withdraws and the market breaks? This is the question for so many places left with inadequate housing supply, poor council provision and straining social cohesion, which I report on in my job as Britain Editor of the *New Statesman*. Nowhere is this more evident than in Hastings, a pretty but poor seaside town on the Sussex coast.

I visited on a dazzlingly bright day in Autumn 2023. Seagulls perched like giant box-fresh trainers on electricity lines and the surf bubbled along the historic harbour of fishing boats and towering tar-black net huts.

Hastings has been hit by a perfect storm of housing crises. From 2022 to 2023, rent in the borough rose by 11.7% – more than double the average UK rise. The typical rent for a one-bed flat there is £805 a month, in a town where the median full-time salary is £25,536 (well below the national average). House prices have doubled there in ten years, one of the biggest spikes in England.

Londoners and Brightoners have piled in, attracted by the relatively cheaper housing, beautiful surroundings and greater freedoms the pandemic provided for remote working. This has pushed prices up, as have nearly 1,000 Airbnbs clustered in the town centre. A similar number of people live in temporary accommodation, rooms provided by the council when you end up homeless. Temporary accommodation cost Hastings Borough Council £5.6 million in 2023 (up from £730,000 in 2019) – nearly half its annual budget. The council leader has even called for a Homes for Ukraine-style scheme to house locals in people's spare rooms.

Struggling under an austerity-shredded council and stuck in the pressure cooker of an inflated housing market, a grassroots group called Hasting Commons is trying to do things differently. Part social enterprise, part community land trust, since 2014 it has bought up and renovated eight “derelict and difficult” buildings in the town centre – plus a network of caves and a Victorian alleyway carved out of a cliffside – for public good. Grants and loans from hundreds of organisations, including Historic England and the National Lottery, fund the scheme.

On a tour around its buildings, I got to nose around one of 12 cosy flats at affordable rents (£609.89 on average per month) that have been retrofitted into a nine-storey Sixties ex-office block called Rock House. Twelve more are on the way, in two sun-flooded spacious floors of the town's former printing presses for the Hastings and St Leonard's Observer: a handsome 1920s building left disused by a string of faceless owners since 1985. There was also a shared working space with similarly accessible rents (one freelance digital worker I met pays £105 a month), a cross-fit gym and boardroom – and work had begun on a rooftop bar and public roof garden.

Another Hastings Commons building down the road housed a public living room: a warm snug of fairy lights, toys, guitars, sofas and plenty of tea and biscuits where anyone could drop in and sit for a rest and a chat, with no payment required. A sweet old Victorian cottage hosted two artists' studios, a hireable classroom space, common room, kitchenette and toilet. When I dropped in, I was greeted enthusiastically in French by a conversation class

that rents the classroom weekly. There are youth clubs and tech workshops. Community barbecues are held in the old Victorian alleyway.

This may all sound rather idealistic – and it is true that these kinds of projects are rare. But they are not impossible, and underline the resilience and creativity of locals making decisions for their own neighbourhoods. Not-for-profit grassroots landlords and community builders are similarly buying up forgotten spaces in other areas, including a row of terraces in Toxteth, Liverpool, and an old high street and theatre in Plymouth. There is now a network of 354 community land trusts around the country.

“There is an alternative: our concept of self-renovating neighbourhoods, doing it ourselves from the bottom up,” said Jess Steele, Hastings Commons’ founder. Her advice for those who want to do similar locally is to find small grants to develop your organisation, then take on temporary leases for “meanwhile spaces” in small empty shops and buildings in an area where you would like to put roots down, and build up from there. But it’s not risk-free. After all, Steele herself re-mortgaged her house and put £80,000 of her own money into Hastings Commons to get it off the ground.

Polling suggests the majority of the British public feel they can make a difference if they get involved in their local area, and are willing to work together with others on something to improve their neighbourhood. However, the same survey shows a feeling of powerlessness when it comes to national decision-making.

Steele reflected this dichotomy. She expressed exasperation at the council cuts imposed since 2010, which are having profound effects on local provision and the public realm. She also criticised the centrally-run system of councils bidding for Whitehall-allocated pots of funding, like the Levelling Up and Towns funds. “You have to turn austerity back in some way in order to level up, and you don’t do that by dumping £20m and setting the rules on how it’s spent.”

The main parties are under pressure from some local government and community-minded think tanks to commit to a Community Power Act, which would mean a new governance structure at a local level – giving communities a right to control spaces, services and spending decisions (all measures that would make projects like Hastings Commons easier to pull off).

While Steele backed this legislation, she emphasised that a “mindset change” is what is most needed. “It’s about recognition that there is this alternative, there is this approach – open decision-makers eyes to that, whether it’s politicians national or local,” she said. “We need politicians to see it. They don’t even have to understand the detail. They just have to see it first.”

Perhaps in the end it won’t be a single piece of legislation or policy that delivers this change, but a new approach - a commitment to a new way of ‘doing’ government, which places collaboration and the ordinary hope of community at its core. Only then can the battle for Hastings I witnessed become a national story.





safe spaces for young people (10-15 yr olds)



* vinyl prints for people



ghost hunting
Go Charles?

sound tech

What are you interested in?

performance



Robotics

connecting with people + places

understanding & Making Vlogs

3d scanning

Podcast

Employability Skills

DIY SERVER HOSTING

community engagement

AR

AI

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skills share

mark as many as you like (or add more)

electronics

Dj-ing

Drones

Gaming

Maker space

photography

Projection mapping

GRAPHIC DESIGN



Mobilising national support to build our future, Emily Bolton

“A place that gives us a choice. Honest opportunities, fulfilling jobs, pathways to stay, and to thrive here. A reachable ambition of security, stability, a place where people want to raise families, a place where residents don’t live in fear”, where “people spend quality time outdoors, socialising, and children explore and learn in nature”, and “older and younger generations build meaningful relationships.” Grimsby Resident

Imagine if we felt confident, not scared, about the future. Imagine if we all pitched in to make our hometowns thrive. Imagine if we were respected for our contribution and backed to get on with it. Imagine if the hometowns we love experienced growth which was about more than the money. Imagine if our neighbourhoods were buzzing with people and with nature. Imagine if we were proud of the legacy we were leaving for our grandchildren and knew we had played a part in creating it.

We believe it is possible.

The Ordinary Hope project shines a light on the potential that exists in communities across the UK and proposes a new approach to social policy that is rooted in respect, relationships and a rebalancing of power to people and communities who understand the issues and are already rolling up their sleeves to fix them.

This belief is at the heart of Our Future’s work. We think it is time to look at things differently, change the patterns of the past and write a new story - one in which the future benefits all of us and where we can all thrive in the hometowns we love. To do this we need to be realistic about what it takes to deliver change.

This short essay – an extract from a longer piece available on the Ordinary Hope webpage – sets out how.

The UK is on the cusp of a green transition which should generate huge wealth and opportunity. However, as a country we have not tended to manage economic transitions well. Previous transitions have created some winners but too many losers. There are parts of this country that are still suffering from the loss of industries in the 1980s. This isn’t just about the loss of jobs but also about the loss of friendships, identity, hope and power. This loss is shown in every marker of quality of life. We are a country where your health, education and even mortality are too often determined by where you live. Traditional approaches have repeatedly failed to address the systemic challenges that the de-industrialised communities face.

We know that an alternative is possible, though, because we see it starting to happen. Over the past two years, the organisation I lead, Our Future, has been building a collaboration in Grimsby to test a new approach to build a thriving future while also developing a model that can support this transformation in other places. In Grimsby, citizens are mobilising around the football club to build a positive future through community-led housing,



the green economy and citizen-led change. For example, our friends at East Marsh United have brought together residents in their neighbourhood who want change. They have now bought ten homes to lay the foundations of their future, reclaim power back from absentee landlords and ensure that residents have safe, healthy homes where they can thrive. There is a drive for this to grow. In October, Our Future brought together 70 people from across the town and country who want to seed and scale community led housing in their neighbourhoods. These leaders were from every sector, keen to participate in and contribute to making this positive change reality.

At the heart of the Our Future approach are five principles which drive a very different way of working:

Principle 1:

Rooted in place and tethered by loved citizens' institutions –change needs to start in an area and ensure that the arc towards the future is rooted in the history and identity of a place. A successful approach needs to celebrate the place, its history and the promise of its future.

Principle 2:

Build trust and social connections - Trust and relationships are the lifeblood of long term change. We use relationships as our first design and operating principle.

Principle 3:

Rebalance power and back citizens to have a central role - rebalance power to ensure that citizens are central to the long-term transformation of the places they love.

Principle 4:

Harness Economic Trends for Social Benefit - To create good growth we need to exploit the interconnectivity between industrial strategy and social policy to ensure economic change delivers a social dividend in the places we belong to.

Principle 5:

Reimagine the role of money in catalysing long term social transformation - See money as a tool not a master. Understand the problem, the opportunity and the right answer - then work out how different sorts of money can participate in delivering it.

Of course, this desire to unlock the potential of communities is not a new one. For decades politicians have talked about backing communities to drive change. In recent memory, we have had David Cameron's Big Society and Labour's New Deal for Communities. Back in 1975 the government's Urban Aid programme was criticised for not taking the "opportunity for real power-sharing and giving responsibility and hope to those without either, the Government insisted on making the operation as bureaucratic and as one-sided as possible."

The part that has continued to confound policymakers is how operationally to deliver the change. We need to know how to create the lightning rod to channel the community energy and our collective desire to participate. To get there we need to do things differently, to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

Yes, greater financial investment is needed, but this is just one ingredient in the alchemy of change. The missing ingredient has been a different approach and the infrastructure to support it. Our Future argues that previous approaches have been too agnostic about the process, beyond rules about governance, value for money and financial management. They have cared about where money is allocated and what it is spent on but not on who leads, decides, owns and how this work is done.

Embedding and sustaining success requires a more thoughtful process. It takes longer and involves moving at the pace of the community; it is not about fitting a pre-agreed schedule drawn up by the Treasury, or even by a Local Authority. Real citizen collaboration needs patience, curiosity, love and courage, as well as cash. It needs an openness to move in directions that cannot be foreseen at the outset and cannot be determined from afar.

This lack of centralised control feels scary and is essential if we are going to "crowd in" collective participation, unlock innovation across our country and make public money go further.

On top of this, we need models that can work across the country.

The change underway in Grimsby is important but we will have failed if it ends there. Too often in social policy we have beautiful, one-off projects that have not scaled their impact. Speaking to people from deindustrialised communities around the country we hear of similar issues and a desire to build a national collective with resources to make change. A friend in Lancashire commented that "The story of Grimsby is the story of Burnley, is the story of Preston, is the story of Wrexham".

That means we need a national response that has the right leadership, ethos and infrastructure to support place-driven change.

This national response needs to operate based on the five principles and practically bring together social and financial capital in the places we belong with a national support to connect local and national energy. These themes resonate with the insights of other Ordinary Hope participants:

1) Citizens' institutions for the future

The heart of this work lies in finding a new way of working, coming together and participating. This needs to grow out of the places we belong to and be enshrined for the long term. That's why we say we need Citizens' Institutions for the Future, which create and foster a local ecosystem to support the transformation of places.

Our Future believes that building these institutions out of existing, loved civic infrastructure accelerates the work. Football clubs, or rugby clubs, already play a distinctive role bringing together people from every walk of life, with a shared love of their hometown and a sense of common cause. A football club provides a natural continuity between the history of a town and its future. At the football, we are all equal, we take off our "work hat" and our status and embrace shared experience. For many, the relationship with their football club is the longest relationship in their life.

Together, institutions like these can create a new ecosystem, complete with: a citizen-led vision for the future; a network of citizens who trust and support each other, believe in the future of the town and are willing to roll up their sleeves to make it happen; a wider network of support and expertise; clear routes to participate in the change underway; ongoing communication to show that change is possible and happening; and a place for national actors – policy makers, social investors, national grant funders – to connect into and support the transformation underway in a place and have honest conversations about what is and isn't working.

2) A locally-led endowment of the future

Alongside the Citizens' Institution, each area needs to be supported with money that can harness opportunities, multiply impact and demonstrate that a positive future is possible.

Our Future believes that an Endowment for the Future in each deindustrialised town would be catalytic. This citizen-led, 10-year funding pot could harness a range of financing vehicles to drive change. This fund should be a starting point to get a flywheel of change moving. If used well, it could seed new partnerships and models between citizens, business and government. It could enable new approaches, demonstrating that "different is possible", build a track record and "crowd in" other public, private and philanthropic money.

In Grimsby, we have worked with citizens from every sector to understand the demand, opportunities and barriers and how money could unlock change. The next step for us is to unlock the long-term funding the town needs. We believe a £30 million 10-year endowment could support a host of initiatives including funding to enable community led housing to scale across the region and to grow within neighbourhoods; grant and equity funding to support the development of the green economy in a way that benefits current and future residents of the town, a real collaboration

between green economy businesses, public sector leaders, legal specialists, communities and financial experts to design a new model that delivers social and financial returns and could provide ongoing funding for the wider work; grant funding to back inspired community leaders who are already driving long term change in their areas and to support neighbourhoods through community plans, which would be participative processes to reimagine and build the future. This is about backing the community groups in our neighbourhoods and ensuring they have the resources they need to drive change.

3) A national partner to bridge national and local

The centre of gravity of this work is the places we belong to and the hometowns that we love. However, a national partner would bring additional support to embed a new way of working, spark new partnerships and ensure that the money lands well and achieves impact. This would sit alongside, not above, local citizens' institutions. The national body's role would be to support citizens to establish anchor institutions in their towns, embed the five principles and would also support places to be propositional – convening unlikely actors to bring their expertise alongside citizens to reimagine how funding can galvanise long term change in place. It would also build learning and community across areas, generate evidence to inform policy and investment and connect places into national networks and resources.

It is time for a new future and a new approach. We need to stop colouring between the lines given to us by previous generations and reimagine what is possible. Our Future works with inspired people up and down this country who are rolling up their sleeves and getting on with building the future without asking for government's permission. What would happen if government saw its role not as a gate keeper but as an enabler and backer? Think of the energy and transformational change that would unleash. Imagine the Britain we could build together and the future we could hand to the next generation.



Leadership and collaboration in practice, Yasmin Ibison with Nigel Ball, Jon Stokes and Ian Taylor

At the heart of the Ordinary Hope project sits the message that to tackle injustices and inequality in the UK and restore hope to everyday life, deep collaboration across experience and expertise and combining strengths across sectors will be fundamental. We have seen how, despite being in a time of multi-layered crises, there are extraordinary transformations taking place today that people and places achieve simply by working across difference and valuing empathy, trust and human connection. Yasmin Ibison sat down with Ordinary Hope core group members Jon Stokes and Nigel Ball about to discuss this idea, including what cross-sector collaboration really means in practice for leaders. They were joined by Ian Taylor, co-author with Ball on their publication *Cross-sector collaboration: Insights from a leaders' Playbook*. The following is an extract from a longer interview, published on the Ordinary Hope webpage.

Yasmin Ibison

One of the main arguments from the Ordinary Hope project centres on the need for collaboration between mainstream politics and community groups to enact change in the lives of ordinary people. How do you all think the landscape for collaborative leadership and collaborative partnerships has changed in recent years?

Jon Stokes

Traditional concepts of leadership, which are hierarchical and power-based, no longer suit the current environments that we work in. You can't simply control or direct people; you must shape the context in which people operate. Instead of focusing on the individual virtues of the leader, the focus should be on the leader's capacity to shape and influence the ecosystem within and beyond the organisation. As part of my Oxford University research paper 'From Ego to Eco' we interviewed lots of leaders and two big themes emerged: today's leaders told us they are still accountable, but they are not in charge in the old way. They lack control.

Yasmin Ibison

So, leaders are confronted by radical uncertainty and complex and chaotic environments. Does that speak to how you think about the landscape of cross-sector collaboration, Nigel and Ian?

Nigel Ball

For me, it is framed around complex problems, wicked issues. The field of challenges we need to tackle societally is so broad and so complicated that it is foolish to think that any single institution can do it alone. In some ways it is the government's job to tackle these sorts of problems, but government doesn't have all the answers. They can't do it alone. So, civil society equally has a really important role to play. But they can't do it single handedly either. We have got these complex problems which demand cross-sector collaboration, and to do that requires some hard tools - different kinds of contracts and different kinds of regulation.



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Ian Taylor

In addition, leaders are in an information rich environment; they can access so much information, but they don't always have the capacity to deeply understand it. Sometimes accessing the knowledge from certain information requires you to engage different perspectives and work with different actors. That is different from the previous era of information scarcity, where leaders were forced into environments of command and control, because they didn't have as much information on what was going on.

Yasmin Ibison

Your work touches on the need to lead and learn in the open, a kind of "test and adapt" model but I imagine this can be difficult for collaborative leaders and partners. How do you navigate power dynamics, the need to build trust and learn in the open?

Nigel Ball

Conflict is inevitable in collaborations; it is something you have to expect from the start, plan for, and actively manage and navigate throughout. This conflict can't be resolved, it must be managed, which is quite a hard thing for people to understand because we are used to fixing conflict.

Ian Taylor

We also talk about the necessity to face how difficult cross-sector collaboration is. I think that's one of the barriers that leaders need to confront. If you don't have conflict, you don't really have genuine collaboration, and so you need to embrace it. When I worked in industry, I was used to forging a consensus; bringing people into a room and just getting everyone to agree. That approach often involved power dynamics that suffocated the expression of different perspectives and views, which is fundamentally opposite to collaboration.

Jon Stokes

On that power point, it is helpful to distinguish power over, from power with, power to, and even power within. And all those kinds of power play out everywhere in the world. Yet power is a word which generally has a bad press, but we need power to do anything. In terms of the capabilities that collaborative leaders need, we identified five: shape the conversation, cultivate collective intelligence, shape the context - nudge the context might be even more realistic - co-create the structures and pluralise participation. There's no rocket science in that; but it is rocket science to do them well. I must have worked intensively with over 500 leaders in my career and, out of those 500, there are probably 10 who might be good at all these things.

Nigel Ball

Was there a pattern, Jon, in those 10 people?

Jon Stokes

I think a big bucket term would be emotional intelligence. You've got to be able to read other people and you also need to be able to read yourself. But the combination of these factors is unusual in one person; there are good empathisers, but they don't tend to be good drivers of other people. The management guru Jim Collins talked about fierce humility. Leaders with

fierce humility have a strong sense of themselves, but they don't need to impose it on others. They also have a fierceness and ambition. Those things also don't typically go together. You've got people who are humble, but they may not be fierce enough to get things done. And you've got fierce people who have got big egos, which is the sort of classic combination.

Nigel Ball

One of the areas that we spent time thinking about was the ethical dimensions to all of this - because you can collaborate to negative ends. So, what's the additional ingredient that brings the ethical dimension in? Ian landed on this concept of wisdom, that goes back to Aristotle. So, it's not just the skills of fierce humility or emotional intelligence but it's something else as well. I think very closely linked to the concept of trust is the idea of reciprocity. If you want to build trust, you need to build a sequence of escalating, positively reciprocated actions. That's the kind of practical route to building trust. We talk a bit about quick wins - looking for that low hanging fruit, doing some easy stuff, even if it seems a bit trivial or unambitious as a way of starting to build trust.

Jon Stokes

It's also useful for any group to have a check in somewhere in an important meeting, possibly at the start, where they ask, 'How is everybody doing?' because people will come with all sorts of emotional states. Then again in the middle, 'Are we making progress? What are our criteria?' And at the end, 'What went well? What went less well? What can we learn from it?' Yet, there is tremendous resistance to that - people will say 'Do we really need to do this? We're clever, we don't need to bother with that airy fairy stuff! We haven't got time.' But if you're going to trust, you have to be vulnerable. And that's painful, especially with people you've never met before.

Nigel Ball

On intimacy, instinctively, most people are good at it. Most people have friends. Most people understand that in their workplace they get more done if people like them. This is something that people understand and do intuitively. And yet, somehow, I think they struggle to put it to the service of collaboration. It can feel airy fairy to people sometimes, but it really shouldn't because it draws on a lot of natural skills and capabilities.

Jon Stokes

A way to start is to ask how far people are doing these things already? People are most likely doing these things already and, in that sense, it's building on existing knowledge.

Nigel Ball

Yeah, totally. It gives people a language to talk about and describe what they're doing. When we've shown some of this material to some people who are working in collaborations, it resonated with them. They were doing it, but they just didn't have the language or the frameworks to describe what it is that they were doing because it's not embedded enough yet.





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Part Four: How We Can Change



Ordinary Hope: a theory of change, Chrisann Jarrett

Leading campaigner Chrisann Jarrett, the co-founder of We Belong, is one of the UK's most inspiring social changemakers. Here, she reflects on the ways in which change can best be achieved, drawing on the ideas at the core of ordinary hope.

Social justice charities in the UK are in an incredibly difficult position, often intervening when state driven policies have gone wrong, leaving individuals, families and communities disenfranchised. As the first port of call, charities are, however, also in an enviably rich position to highlight the realities of systemic failures and gaps in provision. Within their databases and front-line services is a repository of relationships they have developed with communities all upheld by values of empathy, respect and trust. If the government really wants to seek the truth, they will know where to find it.

However, the opportunities to present hard truths and find solutions are few, and seldom move the conversation forward for social change advocates. When the opportunities do arise, they are time bound and woven with a strict agenda. There is also a high evidential burden resting on the shoulders of those advocating to change the status quo, proving beyond all reasonable doubt that existing policies are problematic. It's almost as if it is the third sector who are on trial.

As a result, the relationship between government and civil society is often one which is combative or unauthentic, with government defending the intentions of policy priorities and charities alarmed by the number of blindspots and unwillingness to make changes. But this need not be the case. For us to mend the social contract and drive transformative change in society for the benefit of all, there must be a questioning of the conditions of the relationship between those in power and the citizenry not limited to marking an 'X' on a ballot paper. A progressive theory of change requires a long-term commitment to deep relational work between stakeholders built on mutual respect of expertise, shared values and upheld by convenings that enable communities to listen, be heard, shape debates, and improve policies in the UK, so that no one is left behind.

A case study - We Belong

We Belong is a migrant youth-led charity driving a relational approach to advocacy and continuous working for systems change within the UK immigration sector.

2024 will mark the two-year anniversary of We Belong's success in changing Home Office policies, removing the ten year legislative barriers allowing over 300,000 young migrants, who arrived in the UK as children, to secure permanent residence in the country they call home.

In 2022, when this landmark change was achieved, it was labeled by lawyers, funders and the sector as 'the biggest success story in the immigration sector in 10-15 years', filling the sector with hope for successive immigration justice. Most importantly, when evaluating this win,

the young activists who worked on this campaign for over five years could confidently detail how they could get institutions to work for them.

At the core of this success was what we call the “blueprint”, which had four fundamental aspects. Those are:

- Strengthening the contact and relationship between Members of Parliament and their constituents.
- Creating formal and informal opportunities for charities to advise, develop and shape policies.
- Retaining a seat at the table for those with lived experience of injustice.
- Maintaining a genuine commitment to inclusive collaborative working, respecting differences and upholding values of trust, equality, justice and a willingness to innovate.

When We Belong was established, we worked with our community of over a 1,000 young people to create a theory of change based on lived experience participation, storytelling and community organising. A core element of this theory of change was the creation of open dialogue between young migrants and parliamentarians. Wherever possible, we would create opportunities or work with like-minded organisations acting as a conduit so that young people, members of parliament and civil servants could converse.

Between 2015 and 2018, we worked through the traditional roundtable setup before we decided to do things differently. One of these roundtable consortiums in the immigration sector would take place every quarter for an hour, and on average, 20 charity representatives could have an audience with three Home Office Civil Servants. Around the board room table sat multiple organisations, disciples of varied causes demanding for Home Office fees to be reduced, looked after children and refugees to be protected, all prepared with references to international charters and clauses to relevant legislations and guidance. Three civil servants sat at the head of the table and each quarter they too came prepared with a briefing which was impeccably adhered to.

The fault of both sides was that we were steadfast in our pre-prepared views of what was most important. We both said a lot of things but neither of us actually listened to each other. The impact was years of built-up resentment and an inability to convince policymakers to consider any reform, due to a lack of ministerial direction. More dangerous was the fact that less than 10% of the stakeholders present had lived experience of the issues they were advocating for. We risked that the data presented, and lives it represented, could easily be reduced to statistics. Such dynamics did not inspire emotion or action.

In 2017, at We Belong’s strategy away day, a core group member said, ‘you cannot ask something of someone when you have no relationship with them’. This statement soon became the very foundation upon which we



built our advocacy model. Over the next year, our main focus was to meet as many parliamentarians as possible because one of the delightful things about our parliamentary democracy is that there is a de facto automatic relationship between a constituent and their MP which must be honoured throughout the MP's tenure. Hundreds of letters were written by young migrants across the country to their MPs asking them to meet and provide support for a shorter, more affordable route to citizenship for child arrivals.

These young people had a dual identity, one learned and one lived. They were educated on the intricacies of the policies and due to their proximity, they could explain their practical experience and interactions with the broken immigration system, which left them forfeiting university places, facing homelessness and mental health challenges. Their individual stories were a puzzle piece that connected them to the years of data we had collated on the hostile environment policies.

In 2019, after a year of attending meetings with their MPs, securing debates and writing briefings in parliament on the issue, there was now cross-party support for change with MPs urging the then Immigration Minister Rt. Hon Caroline Nokes MP to meet with members of We Belong. Many MPs posted on social media posing with a cup of tea in their hands brandishing our #CuppawithCaroline campaign. The meeting was secured, and in preparation we roleplayed all the possible outcomes, our responses some strict and some improvised. We all agreed that the greatest win from this meeting was to secure another. Finally, we asked a colleague to bake a cake. At the start of the meeting, we handed the Minister a homemade lemon drizzle cake paying homage to our social media campaign- a British staple appropriate for afternoon tea.

The meeting was held in a cold House of Commons committee room. This gesture was not to be understated, it was incredibly disarming and in traditional advocacy terms it sounded bizarre, but we wanted to go against the grain and show that the meeting was the start of our working relationship. This marked a change in the tides for our cause and spearheaded the landmark legislative change we ushered in years later.

Over the past 10 years within the social justice sphere there has been an expectation amongst all charities to reevaluate the way they work with those who have direct experience of the issues they are advocating to change. This desire to include those with lived experience has been driven both from the top down, by trusts and foundations financing the field, and from the bottom-up revival amongst service users who are no longer comfortable with the lack of contact and access to systems that impact their lives.

Local communities once used to delegating to those in official positions, whether it be their local councillors or MPs, or charities who they rely on for support, have come to realise that there should be 'nothing about us, without us'. It could be argued that the structural power redistribution within the charitable sector and the steep decline in complete delegation is a microcosm for what could be hopeful about the future expectations of politics and the revival of the relationship between communities and those who represent them. There is a hopeful provocation to be involved and create together.



Ordinary Hope: a psychological perspective, Jon Stokes

The Czech writer, resistance leader who was imprisoned by the authorities, and ultimately the country's first democratically elected President, Václav Havel, knew a lot about hope, and how to sustain it.

Crucially, he said, hope is not the same thing as optimism. Optimism is an expectation, or a belief, and it doesn't, by itself, require us to do very much. Hope, on the other hand, is an ongoing practice, and it can emerge from effort. Reflecting on Havel's lessons, the Irish poet Seamus Heaney put it like this: "Hope is not optimism, which expects things to turn out well, but something rooted in the conviction that it is well worth working for."

What I think both were getting at is that hope is not a thing but an action. It is an activity between a person and their environment. It may derive from ideals, but to be sustained, it must result in effective action. This distinguishes realistic from unrealistic hope. Unrealistic hope, what Havel is calling optimism, is simply wishful thinking, a passive state in which somehow what is longed for will somehow magically come about. Simply hoping that utopia will come about achieves very little, and often ends in cynicism; hope has to be turned into action.

The American psychologist Charles Snyder formulated it this way: hope is a positive motivational state resulting from a three-stage process.

First, you need a clear picture of what it is you want to achieve, specified in terms of measurable concrete goals.

Secondly you need a realistic pathway or set of actions towards those goals, and how you will deal with obstacles.

And finally, a belief in your own capacity to implement the pathway to achieve your goals, and to sustain self-belief and motivation.

Realistic hope arises out of action, not simply optimism. It is about means for achieving desired ends, rather than focusing on only those ends in themselves, that is simply optimism. To be effective hope has to face obstacles, not wish they were not there.

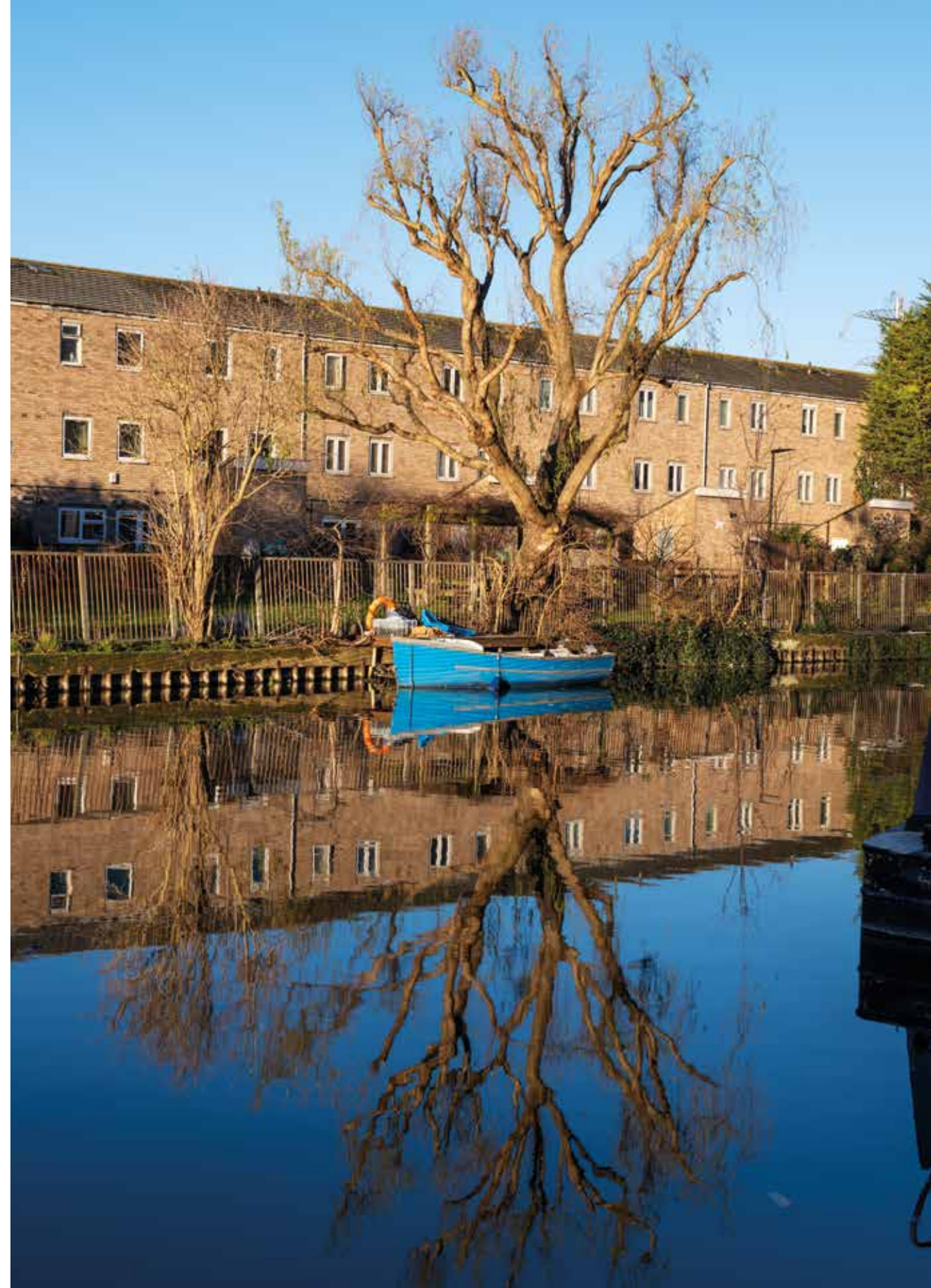
The philosopher Patrick Shade goes a step further, we need not just particular hopes, but habits of hope that enable us to remain committed. Chief among these, he argues, are habits of persistence, of exploring for necessary resources, and of courage. These are habits which generate hopefulness that can be developed, and in which we can become skilful. The starting point is to take stock of the habits we already have, asking which structures of our own thinking, feeling and behaviour reinforce and make the pursuit of hope possible and fruitful. We also need to attend to the negative forces that either compete for or drain our energies. Fear, in particular, is a potent enemy of hope, it depletes our energy and also poisons our horizons of meaning, and can lead to despair.

Generally these habits are better sustained together with others rather than solitarily. Realistic hope is social, not purely personal. Realistic hope must be grounded in real conditions in order to be productive of new and better ones.

Politics deals in ideals. But turning those ideals into effective action requires the active participation of those who want the change to come about, not just political action but ordinary forms of action in our everyday lives. A part of us wishes that somehow politicians will magically bring about these changes that we want, and politicians have an investment in this too. They frequently see themselves as saviours riding to the assistance of an oppressed group. This is part of their motivation for becoming politicians. But as others have argued in this publication, this model doesn't work. Politicians simply don't have the powers, and possibly never did have, although this was an illusion that everyone wanted to believe in. These times call for different skills – building collaboration, the skill of bringing people together, and inspiring realistic hope. Politicians as facilitators rather than heroes, as leaders of communities rather than optimistic wizards. Realistic hope is harder work than wishful thinking, which actually requires no work at all. If our country is to solve some of the problems it faces we need a new model of politics, this publication and the accounts of promoting ordinary hope and developing agency, is an effort towards this.

The Chinese writer Lin Yutang put it like this:

*Hope is like a road in the country;
there was never a road,
but when many people walk in it,
the road comes into existence.*





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Ordinary Hope and the coming general election: a discussion,

Claire Ainsley,
Tom Baldwin,
Anoosh Chakelian,
Graeme Cooke
and James Purnell

“Ordinary hope”, “respect”, “service” and “security”. These words and phrases are cropping up in political speeches more and more as Britain comes closer to a general election.

The framing of a politics in this way emerges both as a critique of recent poor conduct in politics – dodgy contracts, hypocrisy as in the partygate scandal, sleaze – but also as a tool to reach out, especially to those voters who identify as working-class and have felt neglected by the political process, at least since the financial crisis.

This framing is not unique to Britain. It was at the heart of Olaf Scholz’s surprisingly successful election campaign in Germany and appears regularly too in the rhetoric of Australia’s Antony Albanese and Joe Biden in the United States. All have run unflashy political campaigns, centring the arguments not on utopian aspiration and grand designs, but on the concerns of everyday communities, the dignity of work and the need to repair the divide between a remote political class and the people they rely on for electoral support.

To work out how far this idea has to go from simply a buzzword in speeches to a concrete philosophy of politics and government, I spoke to Claire Ainsley (of the Progressive Policy Institute and former Director of Policy for Keir Starmer), Graeme Cooke, (Director of Insight and Policy at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation), and James Purnell, (Vice-chancellor of the University of the Arts London and a former cabinet minister) and Tom Baldwin, (Author and Political Strategist).

Whether the idea of ordinary hope, and its core idea of respect for everyday concerns, can take hold in elite politics may well be key to answering the question of if Britain can renew itself in the face of such daunting challenges.

Anoosh Chakelian, Britain Editor of the New Statesman



Anoosh Chakelian: I want to discuss this emerging theme of ordinary hope and respect for working people within politics. We saw it in Keir Starmer's speech at the Labour Party conference, but it is also being used in the US and Joe Biden's campaign, Scholz and Albanese as well. The question for us today is do we see this respect agenda taking hold in elite politics here in the UK?

Claire Ainsley: The origins of respect first come to the fore with Scholz and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). He was giving voice to a division and fracture that has been happening for a long time, more than two decades - with the financial crisis, the rise of right-wing populism and, in our country, the Brexit vote and this sense of a division. Respect as an organising principle has been given much more prominence, but I don't think we've seen yet just what respect could be as a politics or programme. But I think it may be a vehicle for bridging some of our divides. It has the potential to be quite profound.

Graeme Cooke: I think we need to break it down a little bit. That's certainly what we've been doing at UCL and JRF with Ordinary Hope:

I think you can think about respect at a narrative framing level, a substance level and a method level. The first of those is the one we've seen the most often, and certainly in political speeches, as Marc Stears' essay makes clear. That message is that the success of a country is built from the ordinary everyday acts of citizens, not just from the government on the one hand, or the rich and powerful on the other, which is the traditional left-right answer. This is connected

to a desire for politics to speak to and respond to everyday bread and butter concerns rather than abstractions and aggregate measures. I think the question now is what would it look like to push through to policy content on the one hand and a method of governing on the other?

I think on the policy content, it is about attending to distributional material questions, but also how people are treated, how people feel and people's sense of control over their lives, as well as material concerns.

And then on method, the key question is: how do you try and achieve change? How do you govern? There is this notion at the core of ordinary hope that government cannot do it on its own. To succeed, it's got to be about collaboration. It's got to be a partnership. And it's also about how you try and achieve change, you have to take the autonomy and power and control of individuals really seriously.

James Purnell: It is interesting hearing the word respect because it takes me straight back to Hazel Blears. There was a respect agenda under New Labour but it was policy-specific. It was anti-social behaviour, it was about looking after public spaces. Respect, in that way, is fundamentally a retail offer. And that means day to day lives and practical concerns. The interesting question is, you know, in the two-party system. Is about building a coalition which includes the working class and the middle class. The respect agenda is a way to bridge worlds. From council estates, to new builds - people want to feel they are being respected.

Anoosh Chakelian: And for me as a journalist, if I went to my editor and pitched a piece on the respect agenda, what they would want to see would be 'show, not tell'. You know, what does it actually mean? So very tangible examples would be the type of thing that would actually be useful for both the media, but also for those people who need to tell stories in order to at least demonstrate a particular sort of political shift. How important is it, do you think, for politicians to put some meat on the bones of the respect agenda, or is it enough for them to talk about, you know, how they are trying to reconnect?

Claire Ainsley: I think we're using it in the sense we think this might have the potential to be a unifying theme. James has highlighted that that potential is only realised if you make it clear who is being respected, who's being disrespected, and what you are going to do about it. There is the power in using respect in lots of different ways. For example, I think you can look at it from a point of view of respecting workers rights and people's voice at work. And actually Labour has plenty of detail already on what that might look like in the employment rights context. They've said less on this so far, but the potential to think about how you respect viewpoint difference. It's a major problem on parts of the left progressive side, and more broadly, that we do not have a politics that respects difference of opinion. And that's partly what happened in the post-referendum aftermath, there were a lot of people who felt they hadn't been respected and hadn't been heard, who then were told that they were wrong to have voted the way that they did, and so on. So I think there's potential there for

Labour to articulate this.

Anoosh Chakelian: How much is the agenda still at play in Germany and the US? Has the respect agenda been built on by progressives in Germany and the US?

Claire Ainsley: There are policies that illustrate respect, like Scholz' campaign pledge to increase the minimum wage. A big part of the agenda in Germany and the US was about speaking to non-graduate voters. But there are also contradictions. If you look at what Biden has just done in cancelling £127 billion worth of college debt - would not a full respect agenda instead say that we are going to invest in apprenticeships, learning on the job, the sorts of things that speak to non-college voters? So I think there's a risk in a way that we perhaps package up what centre-left leaders are doing under the boundary of respect. And that isn't necessarily the story they're actually telling to the electorate.

Anoosh Chakelian: And Graeme, what about manifestos and policy? How might respect feature in your advice to political parties from an ordinary hope perspective?

Graeme Cooke: I think there are ways in which respect can deal with some blind spots. Too often politicians want big single ideas, grand visions, which may have their place, but there's also an intention to the kind of the everyday and ordinary. You need to have that in your political toolbox. There's a perfectly honourable case for politics, political solutions which make people's lives better, but not necessarily transform everything. I think where you're then trying to design your answer on, say, housing

or employment. The obsession with housing policy is always about aggregate numbers, eg. why is 300,000 better than 350,000? I'm not sure that's the right policy answer. What most people care about is how we are getting more people into decent, secure forms of housing. A politics of respect that takes seriously what the vast majority of people desire seems reasonable to me: you don't have to go down a financialised, speculative, risky economic strategy which promotes house price growth at the exclusion of all else but instead focus on how do you help more people to own their own home in a sustainable way, or a decent, secure home to people who do rent?

Anoosh Chakelian: But don't we need to be more detailed on this agenda in terms of policy before the next election?

Tom Baldwin: I think it is important that people begin to focus on just how practical and experimental policy needs to become. The media is not good at talking about this. If you talk about repairing policy on immigration, for example, it is actually about how you best process asylum applications fast and treat the people who do that and who are in the system with respect as you do. That's far more effective than the Rwanda scheme but it is not going to get any headlines. And so do we need lots of detailed policies? Or do you instead need a commitment to keep trying? And if one thing doesn't work, try another. Somebody once said to me that, the thing about Starmer is that most politicians define themselves as radical, but necessarily tempered by pragmatism. But Starmer is pragmatic, if necessary, tempered

by radicalism. So I think he would do the straightforward thing first and if that doesn't work, you'll try something else. And that's why politics as usual does not quite understand him. He sort of emerges in a position of having achieved something without the usual soap opera of, you know, rise and fall, and can he do it? He just does it. That's a crucial form of respect.

James Purnell: My colleague at UAL, Polly Mackenzie, writes about what she calls 'humble' policy making: which can take you into participative democracy which is, I think, important to this discussion. But I also think in government, having a clear set of approaches, which could mean ordinary hope and respect, is incredibly important. In politics, you need to be able to take decisions based on a set of consistent understanding of what you're trying to do and say. Under New Labour there were a set of frameworks for thinking about how to govern. One of those things was choice and competition. And that might be different this time. It might be respect and so in that way it is important to flesh out the method.

Graeme Cooke: Yes, and ordinary hope and respect speak to both content and method. What you do and how you do it. Obviously respect can be a contested term and one of its strengths is its breadth. We talked a bit about the kind of policy direction it could produce. But I do think a view that government doesn't always know best, the central state doesn't necessarily have the answer to every problem, that you need to think outside of Westminster. It provides a focus on collaboration and partnership. I do think that is a

strength of ordinary hope, the sense that it can speak to how you deliver. And this is where we can see how it could be a tool for mission-led government. A sense of what you are trying to do, and what you are doing to achieve it. If you can have a concept that can sort of bring those two things together, that is a real strength.

Anoosh Chakelian: And do we think this kind of agenda is a bit of a hostage to fortune? We've had so many government failings, the Post Office, Grenfell or contaminated blood to name but a few. And there is a general feeling of disillusionment, not just against the current government, but the machinery of the state. Is there a risk that ordinary hope isn't able to overcome these structural challenges?

James Purnell: Ideas are always hostages to fortune, aren't they? Otherwise you would say nothing. New Labour used to talk about 'We believe in what works'. And there was a reason for that, because, again, it was about being prepared to use methods which previously Labour had been against, and it was about signifying not being captured by producer interests. I think they're an interesting comparison with respect and the Big Society. Which was an interesting set of ideas. There were lots of people on the left who had also been working on community organising. And Steve Hilton was clever in grabbing that agenda and making it quite a big thing for the Conservative Party. But then it was difficult to carry that through in a world where there was the financial crisis, and austerity became a more dominant theme. And so it was a hostage to fortune

in the sense that when you got into government, things can change, but it did guide a whole bunch of interesting things that they did, and potentially respect could do that as well.

Tom Baldwin: And even if respect and ordinary hope are not fully clear yet, I do think their opposite – the politics of disrespect – is apparent. And I think you can date that back way before Partygate, and the current government. You can date it back to Brexit debates, to austerity, and even back to some of the modernisation and globalisation under New Labour. I think you can probably date it back to Margaret Thatcher - to the sleaze at the end of the Major years. It's a deep, deep in-ground thing and it's not fixed by just talking. It's fixed by doing something. There's no magic bullet. Magic bullet politics is one of the things that's damaged our politics most, because people have been promised that Brexit would transform their lives. Or austerity would change everything. And it's made things worse. So it's lots of little things. It's often lots of boring things. Because respecting someone isn't necessarily exciting, it's actually quite dull. It's quite hard. Whether this idea succeeds, well we'll see. But certainly I think this agenda is the right way.





About the Ordinary Hope team



Tom Baldwin

Tom is a journalist and writer. As a former Assistant Editor of The Times, he worked in both Westminster and Washington. Between 2011 and 2015, he was the Labour Party's Director of Communications. He later ran strategy and communications for the People's Vote campaign. Tom is the author of several books including, *Ctrl Alt Delete How Politics and the Media Crashed Our Democracy*. His latest book is a biography of Keir Starmer, out now. His new book, *England: Seven Myths That Changed a Country – and How to Set Them Straight* is co-written with Marc Stears and is due out from Bloomsbury in April 2024.

James Baggaley

James leads communications and engagement for the UCL Policy Lab. Prior to that, James has worked on communications and strategy for a range of issues including housing, climate change, global health and social justice. James previously led a team at King's College London focused on global health and international development, this included major collaborative projects on COVID-19 and pandemic response internationally. Before that, James worked at Amnesty International on domestic and international Human Rights campaigns. James is passionate about the Lab's ability to bring together experience and ideas to help deliver lasting change.

Nigel Ball

Nigel is an entrepreneurial leader -he is currently Director of the new Social Purpose Lab at University of the Arts London. Prior to this, Nigel was the inaugural Executive Director of the Government Outcomes Lab at Oxford University, where he led a team that uncovered cutting-edge research insights into cross-sector partnerships, and worked with public, private and social sector leaders to improve collaboration practices. In former roles he was part of the founding leadership team of West London Zone for Children and Young People, the Head of Innovation at Teach First, and supported social entrepreneurship in East Africa.

Emily Bolton

Emily Bolton founded and leads Our Future, an organisation and approach that unlocks the potential and power of leaders in deindustrialised communities to build a flourishing future.

Emily has a long record in social innovation in the UK and US. She has founded or co-founded several organisations and partnerships that have created lasting widespread change. This includes setting up the first Social Impact Bond in Peterborough Prison and The Drive Project which has catalysed a national response to perpetrators of domestic abuse. She has a deep understanding of the strategic, financial and operational requirements of delivering change both on the ground and systemically.

Anoosh Chakelian

Anoosh is Britain Editor of the *New Statesman*, where she covers policy, politics and social affairs, and interviews high-profile figures. She is host of the award-winning New Statesman Podcast and co-presents the Westminster Reimagined podcast series with Armando Iannucci. She appears regularly on national media as a commentator on current affairs. Radio appearances include BBC Radio 4's Start the Week, Broadcasting House, The Media Show, Woman's Hour, World At One, PM, The Week in Westminster, The World Tonight and Westminster Hour. TV appearances include BBC News, Sky News, ITV, Al Jazeera and BBC Two's Politics Live.

Graeme Cooke

Graeme leads the evidence, economics, and policy teams at JRF to achieve a deeper understanding of the causes and nature of poverty across the UK and develop bold, creative, and credible policy solutions. Previously Graeme was Director of Inclusive Growth at the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, where he had responsibility for regeneration, housing, planning, economic development, employment, energy, and environment. His other roles include Head of Strategy at the London Borough of Islington, Director of Research at the Institute for Public Policy Research and Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Chris Curtis

Chris is the Head of Political Polling at Opinium, having previously worked in YouGov's political team. He works on Opinium's UK wide polling series for the *Observer*, as well as conducting regular research for *Sky News* and *The Sun*. He is a regular commentator on the polls and politics, having written for *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The New Statesman* on these subjects.

Piali Das Gupta

Piali is Strategy Director, London's Future at London Councils, helping boroughs to deliver their Shared Ambitions on issues. Prior to that, she held senior roles at a number of councils, including London Borough of Newham, Surrey County Council and Birmingham City Council. She has also led policy teams and campaigns at the Local Government and Solace. Piali got her professional start with the Government of Canada, where she led the team that developed the country's national homelessness strategy. In her free time, she loves to indulge in travel, photography, art exhibitions and theatre.

James Graham

James is an award-winning playwright and Honorary Professor of Practice at the UCL Policy Lab. His most recent work, *Dear England*, transferred from a sell-out run at the National Theatre to the West End. Previous work includes the HBO and Channel 4 drama *Brexit* starring Benedict Cumberbatch. Other theatre work transferring includes *This House* and *Privacy* in 2016. *The Vote* was broadcast live on the U.K. election night in 2015 and nominated for a BAFTA. James' screenwriting includes the political drama, *Coalition* (Channel 4) winner of the Royal Television Society award for Best Single Drama. His first feature film *X+Y* was selected at the Toronto International Film Festival 2014.

Yasmin Ibison

Yasmin is a Senior Policy Adviser at JRF. She leads on the commissioning of thinkers and practitioners with original ideas exploring deeper cross-cutting issues related to poverty. Previously, Yasmin worked at Black Thrive Lambeth managing the employment workstream, which sought to improve employment outcomes for Black people with long-term health conditions in Lambeth, South London. She also previously ran her own social enterprise which worked with young Londoners to widen access to arts and cultural spaces.

Alisha Iyer

Alisha is Policy and Projects Manager for the UCL Policy Lab. She develops Ordinary Hope and manages other Lab projects that foster a collaborative ecosystem for social change. She previously worked in policy and strategy roles across the civil service, leading on increasing the socioeconomic diversity of the cultural, sport and tech sectors in DCMS, developing higher technical skills policy at DfE and delivering environmental quality policy at Defra. Prior to that, she co-founded a community based organisation, which supports the women and youth in a refugee community in Southwest Uganda, winning the Alastair Ramsay Award for International Social Responsibility.

Chrisann Jarrett

Chrisann is the CEO of We Belong and member of the UCL Policy Lab's Advisory Council. The UK's first national migrant youth-led organisation, We Belong believes in Lived Experience Activism, and builds on the success of the Let Us Learn project, founded by Chrisann in 2014. Chrisann is one of Britain's most successful campaigners for social change, having led sustained national campaigns impacting over 330,000 children and young people. After graduating in Law from LSE, she was a Policy Advisor to the Deputy Mayor of London on Social Integration and since 2021 has been an independent consultant for Trusts and Foundations working to advance systems change and youth-led activism in the UK.

Paul Kissack

Paul is the Group Chief Executive of Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) and Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRHT). Paul was previously a Director General in the UK Government working on the national response to the COVID-19 crisis. He has held Director General roles at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Education. He was Deputy Chief Executive for Policy and Organisational Strategy at the Ministry for Children in New Zealand. Paul has also held senior roles at HM Treasury, the Cabinet Office, and a local authority. He has worked throughout his career on economic and social policy issues and public service reform.

Lindsey Macmillan

Lindsey is the Founding Director of the Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities, based in UCL, creating new research to inform evidence-led education policy and wider practice to equalise opportunities across the life course. She is also a Research Fellow at the IFS, and a Visiting Professor at the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion at LSE. Lindsey is an elected member of the Scottish Economic Society Council, and Co-Editor of Education Economics. Her research considers the role of early skills, education, and labour market experience in the transmission of incomes and work across generations.

Maff Potts

Maff went from being homeless to running the biggest homeless provider in the country in 7 years. In that time he also turned the Millennium Dome into a homeless shelter, re-wrote the UK Government's policy for homeless centres and oversaw the building of £170 million worth of homeless projects. Having also been a CEO of charities and housing associations, he now believes that real social change comes through social movements. Maff set up Camerados, which helps communities open public living rooms - be it in a hospital, library, prison, football stadium, etc. - where people having tough times can look out for each other.

James Purnell

James is President and Vice-Chancellor at University of the Arts. James arrived at UAL from the BBC where he served as Director of Strategy and Digital. In 1997, James became Special Adviser on the Knowledge Economy to Tony Blair after he became Prime Minister. He was elected MP for Stalybridge and Hyde, before becoming Secretary of State for Culture and then for Work and Pensions. In 2009, James commissioned the McMaster Review, which reset the debate around access and excellence in culture. James has also served on the boards of the National Theatre, the Young Vic and the BFI.

Marc Stears

Marc is an academic, political strategist, speechwriter and executive educator, and is the inaugural Director of the UCL Policy Lab and Pro-Provost of Policy Engagement at UCL. Marc has previously been Director of the Sydney Policy Lab at the University of Sydney, CEO of the New Economics Foundation, Professor of political theory at the University of Oxford and chief speechwriter to the UK Labour Party. He is the author of several books, including *Out of the Ordinary* published by Harvard University Press in 2021. Along with his co-author Tom Baldwin, his new book, entitled *England: Seven Myths That Changed a Country – and How to Set Them Straight* is due out from Bloomsbury in April 2024

Jon Stokes

Jon is a director of the leadership advisory firm Stokes & Jolly. He is a Chartered Clinical Psychologist and accredited Executive Coach & Supervisor, a Clinical Associate of the British Psychoanalytical Society, and a former Senior Fellow at Said Business School. Jon has worked as a leadership advisor for over 30 years across many sectors in both the UK and abroad. Recent publications include *From Ego to Eco: Leadership for the 4th Industrial Revolution* (Said Business School, 2020) and, with Jan Hall, *Changing Gear: Creating the Life You Want After a Full-On Career* (Headline Home, 2021).

Xiaowei Xu

Xiaowei is Senior Research Economist at the IFS. She joined the IFS in 2018 and works in the income, work and welfare sector. Her research focuses on inequalities in labour market outcomes and health. Before joining the IFS, she worked at McKinsey, the Gates Foundation and in economic consulting. Xiaowei is a regular commentator on recent economic developments in all fields of media. She regularly publishes in high-profile academic outlets and her work featured in the recent IFS Deaton Review of Inequality



About the UCL Policy Lab

The UCL Policy Lab brings together extraordinary expertise and everyday experience, connecting researchers and the broader community with the tools and resources required to bring about real social and policy change.

Launched in 2022, as a new initiative of UCL's Departments of Economics and Political Science, the UCL Policy Lab builds on UCL's near 200 year history of creating new opportunities for people, whatever their backgrounds, and generating new ideas to shape the world.

Today, the Lab's work connects people across the UK and further afield with those developing new policy ideas and possibilities. In its first two years, it has been proud to bring together some of the most famous decision-makers in the country with some of the most celebrated scholars and those who have direct, lived experiences of issues on the front line.

The Lab is dedicated always to building new connections across competing political traditions. It enables people to find agreement where possible and encourages us all to disagree well where we cannot. Our researchers put issues on the table that otherwise might not be there and always stand ready to help policymakers of all kinds as they grapple with the problems facing us all.

It is for all of these reasons that the vision at the core of Ordinary Hope and the Lab's partnership with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation are reflections of the Lab's core values.

About the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Our mission is to inspire action and change to solve UK poverty.

JRF is an independent social change organisation working to solve UK poverty.

Through research, policy, collaboration and practical solutions, we aim to inspire action and change that will create a prosperous UK without poverty.

We are working with private, public and voluntary sectors, and people with lived experience of poverty, to build on the recommendations in our comprehensive strategy – We can solve poverty in the UK – and loosen poverty's grip on people who are struggling to get by.

To find out more about our work and events programme, sign up for our newsletter.

We are also very keen to hear from you, about ideas and collaborations.



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