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Bristol Festival of the Future City

Sarah Tromans, 25 November 2015 — creative, design, digital economy, energy, events, transport, urban living

Last week, at [Bristol Festival of the Future City](#), we launched our [Future Cities Demonstrator report](#) and invited a panel of Urban Living experts across the UK to discuss the benefits and disadvantages of city demonstrators.



Temple Quay bridge by night, Bristol, UK

Advantages and disadvantages of city demonstrators

We started off with the facts. Cities are engines for innovation and growth. People in cities tend to be more productive, wealthier, better educated, and more likely to start a new business than those in small towns and rural areas. Cities also make better use of resources. But with populations rising, how do we plan, design and manage cities that can cope with things like pressures on resources and increased waste, while meeting carbon and climate goals?

Mike Pitts, Head of Urban Living and Built Environment at Innovate UK kicked off the discussion by telling us that the Future Cities Demonstrator competition £50,000 feasibility studies were a successful initiative:

- There was £107 million additional private and public investment for Belfast, Bristol, London, Peterborough and Milton Keynes to make parts of their studies a reality
- Also, at least three-quarters of the local authorities have taken forward some aspects of their bids by the end of 2013
- New and ongoing partnerships between authorities and with local businesses and universities have continued

The feasibility study had value even without funding

We asked the panel of experts to analyse these findings. Why, and how, did cities implement their feasibility study plans without winning Innovate UK funding? We learned that the prize of £24m was large enough to entice cities to bring together in collaboration local authority departments (that previously worked in silos) and local businesses.

The act of writing the feasibility study provided a consortium with space to think, and once the plan was written up everyone involved saw the benefits of the projects. Those cities that didn't win the competition used their feasibility studies as business cases to secure alternative funding from Europe and the private sector.

Wider discussions about Future Cities



Glasgow Clyde Arc Bridge

We discussed the role of government in pushing forward the UK's future cities agenda. The [Future Cities Catapult](#) said that we need to be cleverer about taking future cities services abroad. We need to ensure that UK cities become the poster children for livable cities, and help UK businesses to become the world's primary providers of services to cities.

We discussed the role of companies in ensuring that UK cities are great places to live, work and play. Peterborough gave a great example of how once they sat down with water, electric and gas companies in their city, and explained the benefits to them of sharing their data, they all agreed to do it.

How do businesses better serve cities?

We challenged our panel to answer the question, 'how do businesses better service cities?' Lee Omar said that every city has its own challenges, there's no one size fits all. The way forward is to work with creative local SMEs and place design principles at the heart of future cities. Peterborough said companies need to move towards providing innovative services rather than products. Steve Bowyer felt we needed to start thinking of future cities as a combination of services and interactions.

The role of citizens within cities

The two most interesting questions from the audience were about the role of citizens in cities. Where do people stand in the rise of future cities? All of our panel members said very definitively, 'at the very centre'.

There are no cities without citizens.

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