

## **DMU Community Solutions Programme (Covid-19) Consultation Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

Over the past four months, De Montfort University has been tasked with investigating how Leicester and Leicestershire can 'Build Back Better' following the Covid-19 pandemic. More than 70 researchers, 60 community groups, representatives from 40 businesses, senior council and local authority officials and a public consultation via the media have discussed six key areas of recovery: Economy, Environment, Infrastructure, Health and Humanitarian, Community and Future City. Collectively the consultations delivered more than 250 ideas, issues and interventions the participants felt needed to be addressed in order for our communities to come out of this crisis with a pathway to recover stronger. A focus group of 12 people, representative of small working groups from the key consultations, then crunched the responses into five key recommendations with suggested interventions per theme, reflecting the issues people in the consultations had felt most strongly about. This document outlines those findings and has been shared with the Leicester City Council (LCC) and members of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) as a guide to current policy making for the recovery effort for Leicester and Leicestershire. This document, which is being circulated with all participants of the 'Build Back Better' consultations, now presents the opportunity for collaboration across the suggested interventions allowing local authorities, academics, community partners and businesses to work together on the issues outlined.

### **Initial steps**

This document has been shared with Leicester City Council and representatives of the Local Resilience Forum for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to inform current thinking on policies to Build Back Better from Covid-19. Current synergies will be matched with current priority authority recovery for collaboration. Concurrently working groups across all interventions will be created between interested parties to take projects forward.

### **Opportunity to collaborate**

For those who want to help drive the 'Build Back Better' agenda forward by collaborating on the specific issues highlighted, working groups will be formed to pursue new interventions utilising expertise from researchers, businesses, local authorities, community groups and volunteers. If you wish to be part of any of the future intervention working groups, please email [mcharlton@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:mcharlton@dmu.ac.uk) indicating which area(s) you or your organisation would like to participate in.



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### The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

De Montfort University is the United Nations Academic Impact Hub for Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. The SDGs provide a framework for recovery that seek to create greener, more inclusive economies, and stronger, more resilient societies. As part of its role as a global SDG hub, DMU will promote the SDGs and use them as a guide to support the UN's calls to 'Build Back Better' and 'Leave No One Behind' from the Covid-19 pandemic. The document identifies some of the SDGs the recommendations intend to impact as a reference.

### Recommendations:

These are the final recommendations, below, broken down into five key policy recommendations per theme of Economy, Infrastructure, Health and Humanitarian, Environment, Community and Future City, underpinned by the suggested interventions that came from the public consultations.

### **ECONOMY**

#### **This theme works towards the following SDGs:**

- 4 – Quality Education
- 8 – Decent work and Economic Growth
- 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- 17 - Partnerships

#### **1) *Develop and grow the circular economy***

- Rethink the economy to make it sustainable and circular, a transformative step change in low carbon infrastructure in Leicester.
- Look at a model that buys from local companies and producers.
- Review supply chains and joint working amongst organisations who make large procurement transactions.
- Focus on a Made in Leicester (shire) campaign - with new branding and marketing to promote local manufacturing and production.
- Develop a Leicester "Etsy-style" website where independent shops can sell online and where people who want to shop local and support local traders can go. Get points for shopping in Leicester shops similar to a supermarket rewards card.
- Harness support from the business community, university and councils to develop schemes, systems and processes to help each other.



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- Re-think the 'high street' (including city centre areas) in context of continuing growth of Work from Home and the impact that is having on sections of the high street/ city centre economy.
- Seek ways to keep people in work/ supporting people proactively who are at risk of redundancy or who have lost their jobs using policy levers to keep businesses, especially SMEs, solvent and trading.

### 2) **Revitalise the textile industry**

- Take on the immediate challenge of tackling the labour exploitation issues and related endeavours to rebuild reputation of the sector for those businesses who are good employers locally.
- Support the city's textile industry to rebuild its reputation as the provider of good jobs for the city. Work with textile manufacturers to address employment challenges and share good practice.

### 3) **Harness data for 'Smart' decisions**

- Create a 'Leicester Observatory' to underpin the strategy and direction of the city/ county with accurate and interesting data. As a first action, extend the annual data DMU already collects on the top 200 local companies. The dataset comes from secondary sources but could be extended to include a survey, and/or collect the data more frequently, to look at the impact of Covid-19 and gather data for social entrepreneurship organisations (in third, private and public sector) who have suffered or flourished during Covid-19.

### 4) **Focus on Young People, their employment and entrepreneurship**

- Recognise the need to focus on young people in terms of jobs, employability and business development and help them into employment. Training should be a priority and to recognise this issue cuts across many areas, e.g. digital divide, care, housing, mental health.
- Help young entrepreneurs and promote ways of gaining support for local business ('locally made') to build and scale their businesses.
- Develop the idea of Leicester being a major start-up and investment hub in the Midlands. Trial a small-scale creative enterprise project for young people struggling to find jobs in Leicester.
- Set up clusters of enterprise groups where young people share skills and knowledge facilitated by a business coach/coaches with different skill sets.
- Identify what experiential/learning opportunities the crisis can open up for young people as alternatives to 'normal' employment.



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- Create 'Pop-up incubators' - use retail or industrial space which will become vacant to create a workspace for teen/young/excluded entrepreneurs to develop social/business ideas.
- 5) Save our creative sector**
- Recognise how important the arts and creativity are and how they can be revived to support the economy. Save the cultural capital of the city and regrow the creative industries.
  - Explore and coordinate a schools' recovery curriculum for Leicester, that looks at rethinking cultural education in all its forms. There could be potential for Leicester to frame a national model.
  - Use a creative and cultural strategy for utilising empty shops.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

**This theme works towards the following SDGs:**

4 - Quality Education

9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities

### 1) *Identify and tackle the digital divide*

- Investigate the scale and impact of the digital divide.
- Develop a way to redistribute old computer equipment (tablets, laptops) to be repurposed for those who cannot afford their own.
- Develop services through libraries to offer digital support in using and maintaining technology, this could be a volunteer corps to capitalise on the current community mood.
- Digital Divide solutions to be local and in council wards and estates and attentive to where communities gather and go to, not just city centre.
- Map and promote free WIFI hotspots.
- Develop a 'one stop shop' for digital services somewhere in the city centre. Seek new ways for people access to equipment, decent WIFI, charging facilities, support and training for all who need it.

### 2) *Rethink how we move around the city*

- Introduce a speed limit of 20mph across all residential streets in light of transport changes that is seeing more cyclists and pedestrians.
- Introduce free bus travel before 9.30 on weekdays.



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- Make pop up cycle lanes permanent and improve provisions for cycling like secure bike parking.
- Introduce free bus journeys for school children to reduce 'school run' chaos.
- Introduce Car free days.
- Public transport needs to be reviewed to both address social distancing and the environment. Investment needed in electric and gas buses, electric bike borrowing, further increase safer cycling and walking options.
- Revise the way we use public transport – go electric, make cycling more accessible.
- Develop and create more open spaces – walkways, natural gardens and community owned.
- Encourage businesses and employers to introduce more flexible working hours to avoid rush hour traffic.
- Promote cycling to work voucher schemes towards purchasing bikes & cash bonus incentive by employers if staff walk or cycle to work. Introduce 10 new "New Walks" across the City, enjoyable green spaces – run by local community groups and reflecting local character.
- Look to make use of the blue, green and brown spaces in Leicester, the water ways, parks and undeveloped sites to form these new walkways and where necessary pedestrianise streets into 'play' streets.

### 3) *Improve the way we communicate*

- Create accessible information through harnessing community media – literature, interpretation of news and information in various languages to be made available in communities, rather than a 'one size fits all' approach and develop a community media strategy to reach people in all neighbourhoods and communities. This is required to develop the knowledge for those who are reliant on secondary sources of information such as WhatsApp messages making them vulnerable to rumours, increasing anxiety and dependency on others.
- Train organisations to have media skills and harness the opportunity presented by Leicester Community Radio which has had its Covid-19 broadcast licence extended by Ofcom.
- Develop an oral history project that collects Leicester stories in a time of coronavirus.
- Do more to value, rebrand, promote and support the voluntary sector to dispel the current image and myths of volunteering, volunteers and their services being like an act of Victorian philanthropy.



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### 4) *Link community resources together through a hub*

- Create a way to join up and share community resources and services – through community hubs bringing support, health and wellbeing, community and advice services around local people, mobile services adding to these, provide one of these hubs in the city centre.

### 5) *Harness opportunities in Community and Adult Education*

- Support adult education tutors to become community advocates, informing learning providers of local needs and developing a relevant offer of education.
- Recognise community education will have a vital role to enable recovery of wellbeing and to support mitigating the impact of lockdown.
- Offer training on growing projects so young people who are interested in doing gardening/arboriculture/community work as a career can learn new skills.
- Recognise community education will have a vital role to enable recovery of wellbeing and to support mitigating the impact of lockdown and invest in it.
- Use food bank schemes to promote learning opportunities and befriending, and train student and community befrienders to support this.
- Identify the need for an educational catch-up for young people following the pandemic.

## HEALTH AND HUMANITARIAN

**This theme works towards the following SDGs:**

- 1 – No Poverty
- 3 – Good Health and Well Being

### 1) *Envision a city without Homelessness*

- Do more to support the city's widely-supported Homelessness Charter to gain more prominence and work with various agencies to enact its goals.
- Work collaboratively to create initiatives to reduce homelessness through employment and education opportunities for those sleeping rough.
- Find a new collaborative initiative to reduce homelessness and stop them begging for money.
- Engage with the university to help the Homelessness Charter to work with groups and communities on the various strands of its strategic thinking.
- Assist and develop the *World Habitat* European End Street Homelessness campaign project in Leicester, creating a city without street-homeless people.



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- Develop a project to make Leicester a city without street-homeless people - tackling homelessness in the city by designing cost-effective temporary and permanent accommodation (exploring new prototypes, design solutions) and working with the private rented sector.
- 2) Support carers, care homes and care workers**
- Strengthen the voice of social carers: examine ways in which the local authority can enable paid care workers' needs to be more visible and more organised.
  - Create a local network for paid carers so there is a forum for hearing their voices and offering support.
  - Create networks to build care home support - is it possible to build networks in similar ways to hospitals and GP practices e.g. GPs are organised into primary care networks, training occurs for staff.
- 3) Strengthen community health**
- Work closely with BAME young people and communities particularly on health.
  - Develop communities for people who don't have/belong to a community.
  - Do more to join up work between health, public health, the VCSE and social care to support a holistic approach to wellbeing. Services, opportunities and support need to be in communities accessible by all.
  - Explore the opportunities for increased roles for community pharmacies, building upon their response during the pandemic.
  - Introduce new post-Covid-19 healthy living campaigns and develop new city walks.
  - Support development of understanding health concerns including poor mental health in appropriate cultural context to combat confusion, increased social isolation and ill-health.
- 4) Champion Mental Health**
- Create and develop more mental health services and programmes addressing cultural perspectives and long-standing community traditions, accessible mental health information and activities – projects that support resilience, kindness connection and calm.
  - Introduce a concerted campaign to address individual and community mental health.



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- Promote physical and mental health and wellness in public buildings (including offices, schools and hospitals) by incorporation of biophilic design, including living green walls and natural materials.

### 5) *Tackle social isolation*

- Develop a campaign to support the elderly and reduce social isolation and erode stereotypical prejudice around age.
- Encourage student volunteers to work with organisations like Age UK to reduce isolation amongst the elderly.
- Find new ways to support people with sensory impairment (including the elderly) and assist them to lead a full life without the risk of loneliness, isolation, mental and physical health through creative innovations.

## ENVIRONMENT

### This project works towards the following SDGs:

- 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy
- 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities
- 13 – Climate Action

### 1) *Lead a city-wide vision on climate change*

- Put the Climate Crisis at the front and centre of all decision making. Environment should underpin all other themes in Covid-19 recovery.
- Create a city-wide conversation to create a bottom up approach to tackling climate change by changing behaviours.
- Setting a robust vision to improve Leicester's environmental impacts is key to enabling action to be taken to deliver against it – by working with both business partners and communities.
- Recognise the environment and its role in communities: Greenhouse gas emissions, air quality and biodiversity in local ecosystems, together with the energy efficiency standards of homes and buildings, which are closely connected to fuel poverty and the cost of providing affordable warmth, have a direct impact on the quality of life experienced by Leicester's citizens, both physically and mentally.

### 2) *Invest in green energy*

- Create a clean, efficient, decentralised energy system comprising local integration, recycling and sharing of wasted energy resources that can be turned into new sources of energy as a way of giving more control over



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energy generation and usage back to communities. An effective system will locally generate, recycle and reuse energy where possible, and should act as a catalyst for the creation of green businesses, jobs and skills as well as utilising existing local supply chains that can support different aspects of its operation.

### 3) **'Green' the city**

- Boost Biodiversity by creating a central hub for individuals to tap into for gaining practical advice on improving their own environment - garden, window box, yard etc.
- Create a project to make urban space more resilient and flourishing, explore the use of living green walls in the facade of buildings in the city centre of Leicester.
- Significantly increase tree planting across the city.
- Encourage wildlife-friendly practices of local businesses with financial incentives, create more ponds, boost opportunities for wildlife in all parks and open spaces and find ways to connect these.

### 4) **Develop grass-roots environmental projects**

- Increase recycling project activities in communities for people to get involved in.
- Foster entrepreneurial opportunities for skills development related to any recycling / upcycling work e.g. of clothing - for all ages, e.g. via after-school clubs for kids, to morning clubs for jobless mums and dads (e.g. sewing skills).
- Turn allotments into community growing projects for sustainable local food sources. Have a system where anyone can be involved and the volunteers share the food they grow or donate it to local food provision projects.

### 5) **Learn from the Covid-19 pandemic**

- Create a public survey on environment: What is the relationship between public and the environment in Leicester?
- Produce a brief review of some of the impacts (positive/negative/mixed) of Covid-19 on key environmental issues in Leicester, and potential opportunities to maintain positive impacts, and mitigate negative changes.
- Investigate what can be learned from changes in transport choices during lockdown and how transport ideas should be taken forward (e.g. an electric bike scheme).
- Identify ways to maintain the current improvements in air quality.



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### COMMUNITY

This theme works towards the following SDGs:

1 – No Poverty

16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

#### 1) Develop 'one-stop' Community Hubs

- Focus on developing Community Hubs for each ward - key, place-based community organisations will take the lead in administrating and managing pop-up community hubs. These will be multi-agency hubs supported by local organisations and stakeholders that will provide a one-stop-shop for health, employment, food, social, youth, community safety and adult education.

#### 2) Understand the importance of the voluntary sector

- Review and evaluate community organising – to see how volunteer groups, local businesses, council interact. How does this look in different parts of Leicester? If a pandemic happens again, what changes could be made or what could we do differently?
- Help every community to have a strength and assets map, completed locally and including what the community value, their connections into the places that matter to them, where they work, shop and spend leisure time.
- Undertake research across current community support delivery, in particular, looking at outcomes, value for money, social return on investment and the economy of volunteering and community development linked to health and wellbeing.
- Develop a city-wide volunteering database and 'buy out' network from work.

#### 3) Promote Social Justice in communities

- Investigate how restorative justice approaches can be implemented throughout different sectors in order to improve and repair relationships. Introduce Ward 'Youth Juries' to engage young people in justice and decision making.
- Work with communities to investigate and tackle Covid-19-led hate crimes.
- Recognise and address systemic and institutional racism.
- Understand the impact of recent events, like the Black Lives Matter movement, on community cohesion.
- Disabled children and families have felt abandoned during lockdown with loss of services and care – recognise this and find ways to develop support.



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- Do more to recognise and promote the Equality Act as an instruction and a guide for social change.
- 4) Create more activities/spaces for young people**
- Give young people a place to go to, such as youth clubs, sports clubs etc, where they can have fun, take part in community projects, get confidential advice and learn life skills.
  - Create more localised events to take children to, which are safe and fun.
  - Reinstate the library bus and comedy festival bus for estates
  - Create community-volunteer led projects that are unique to each community, to work together with wider communities on a common goal.
- 5) Reduce poverty**
- Investigate accessible banking – create a fair finance task group amid concerns credit unions are not fit for purpose.
  - Evaluate changes in the benefits system, including experiences of signing onto universal credit. Impact of interactions with benefits system on claimants.
  - Look at how Pro Bono legal work can support communities and engage law students from both universities in delivering it. An explosion of need is expected in coming months, including advice on court processes.
  - In a similar model, use student volunteers to help vulnerable with form filling and benefits claims.

## FUTURE CITY

This theme works towards the following SDGs:

1 – No Poverty

11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities

**1) Engage public in planning a vision for Leicester**

- Create a Citizens' Panel and ask them to take a perspective of what a Citizens of Leicester 2025/ or 2030 should be and have.

**2) Envision a city without homeless people**

- Create a plan to tackle homelessness in the city by designing cost-effective temporary and permanent accommodation (exploring prototypes and design solutions).

**3) Repurpose the public realm**



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- Create click and collect services in buildings/hubs.
- Consider new shopping hours.
- Pop-up/new uses for empty shops.
- Outdoor seating.
- New public/city walks.
- Redesign of public buildings, education spaces.

#### **4) Find different ways to refinance recovery**

- Introduce a Leicester\_Covid-19 bond to raise funds to rebuild the post-pandemic city.

### **Be part of the future intervention working groups**

If you wish to be part of any of the future intervention working groups or have any questions, please email [mcharlton@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:mcharlton@dmu.ac.uk) indicating which area(s) you would like to participate in.

