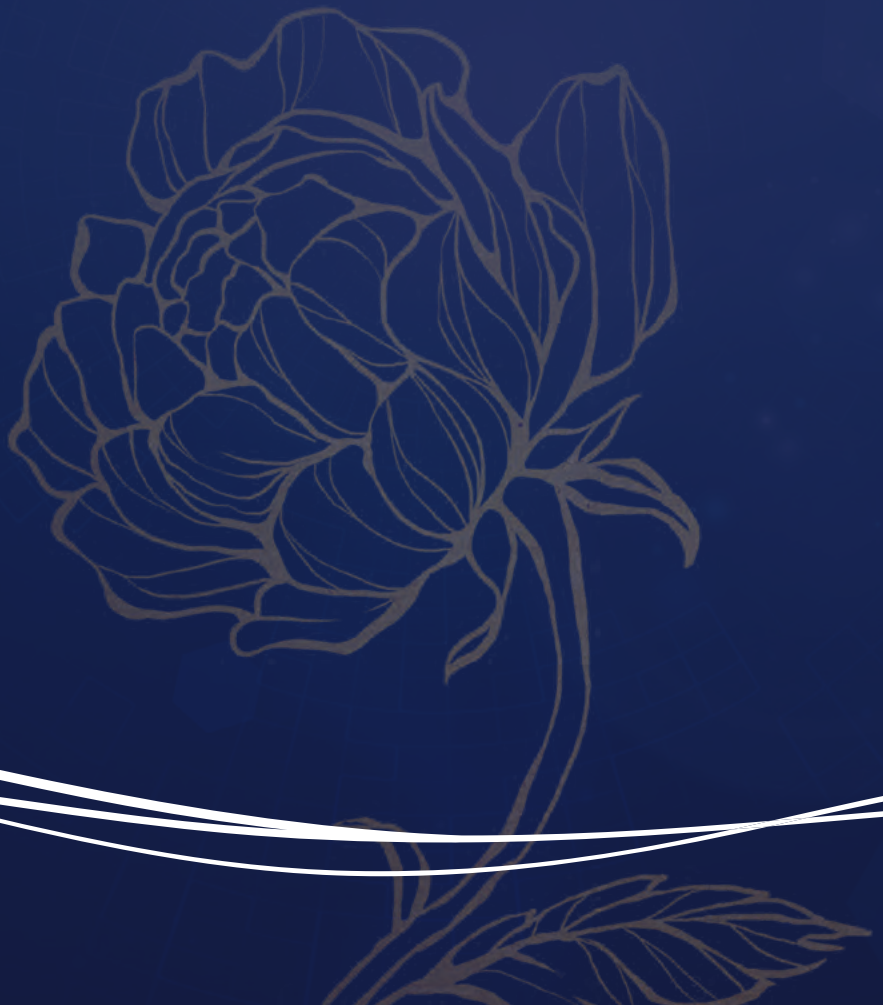




# BACK IN PLACE: RENEWING OURSELVES AND OUR PLACES POST-PANDEMIC

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# Preface

**When thinking about the future of place one will use various tools, it can be assumed. We will use our imagination, most obviously, to open up possibilities - to imagine what might be. This is one kind of tool. Along with this, we will refer to our experiences as another that can help us ensure our imaginings are realistic.**

Taken together, though, these particular tools - the ones of imagination and the ones of experience - can seem to fight one another. Our imagined possibilities can end up being constrained by what has been. Past realities can come to govern what our hopes for the future might be. Surely this is not a good way of thinking about the future. So let us look at 'future thinking' in a different way.

If tools are used for it, then perhaps the above is an example of tools used badly - or of tools used in the wrong combination. As we think about place and its role in the future, obviously we want to choose the right tools - ones that work together, ones that let us get to grips with the problems we have at hand, and not ones that limit what might be. In this preface, we offer some thoughts on this.

We want to do so by suggesting how we might respond to the substance of the keynotes reported later on in this White Paper. What tools do they suggest?





**Let us start by saying that the keynote speakers were asked to share matters they think are important for understanding and shaping the future of place.**

Each came to the event with very different concerns and experiences to share. The future visions that each led us to think about were all different, too. Prior to the event, we discussed with each speaker what they were going to talk about, and began to frame how their keynotes could be understood as variants of futures thinking.

For example, one keynote is on the topic of place and teaching in schools. Let us consider what is likely to matter when thinking about the future from this concern.

## Where

Where we teach our children will obviously be important in the future. The quality of the buildings we use for this teaching will be important too; we will want our kids to learn inside buildings that are efficient, practical, ecologically sensitive.

Doubtless we will want these buildings to be elegant as well (even if this is not something we can expect of the kids!). Surely no-one would doubt this. But surely, too, the future of place in education is not just about where the teaching is done or how charming the buildings used. It is also about what is taught.

## Place

Place itself could be a topic for learning. How kids around Morecambe Bay understand and live with the bay could be an important element in learning. They could be taught to see the bay not just as an everyday and hence therefore 'boring' backdrop to the schooling, but as a location that they might learn to see in provocative, exciting and transforming ways.

They might start to see the bay in terms of wonder - as something to be excited about and proud of. And in having seen it this way, so that wonder may come to energise their nascent scientific imagination, too. How kids relate to the bay can be intrinsic to what they learn.



To achieve such a shift, though, requires a change in the categories used to see and understand the bay. If we are noting that where we teach will matter, and we are saying that what we teach will matter, now we want to suggest that what we teach might be enabled by leveraging different ways of understanding. This is, in large part, a question of language. Language is a tool in its own right, and as with any tool, needs care in use.



Often, when Morecambe Bay is described, terms such as muddy and bleak are used, and these, as well as other synonyms, express how the bay can be categorised in everyday language as a moody place, as a setting that combines grey cloudscapes, murky salt waters and blustery winds in ways that can be lyrical but also baleful.

Sometimes, again in everyday discourse, the bay's natural features are ignored completely and only its social and economic features mentioned. It is not the mud and grey skies but the dilapidated buildings that are noted, their taintiness explained as a consequence of the decline of Morecambe as a 'seaside' town (and indeed other towns around the bay). Following in this logic, those who are born in these towns are expected to talk about them as somewhere to leave, not to stay. Of course, these are somewhat exaggerated views and, besides, there are many other views which are more generous, even though they may be less commonly heard. We are not wanting to say these views are the most important or the most influential.

We are not offering science here. Nevertheless, what we can see is that there can be a moral cargo in the ways the bay is described and accounted for. Language is enabling an evaluative way of seeing and understanding. It is not just in these ways that language works. Consider how we have just illustrated our arguments with a distinction between the bay as natural phenomena and a human one. Is it right to separate the two? Surely the bay is the product of thousands of years of human intervention, and surely, too, the human settlements hereabouts have been shaped by an equally long 'intervention'. The natural and the social are wed. Yet we talk about these as distinct, as different from another as can be. The point is that, in our everyday language, the categories we use in relation to place, terms such 'natural' and 'human', may shape and constrain how place is understood. Ways of being with the bay are, in various ways, fabricated in the language used to describe its natural features and its human ones, to account for all of it, its daily fluxes, its seasonal rhythms, its social and natural ones.



# Where is This Taking us?

To remind ourselves - we started these remarks with observations about tools for future thinking. Now we are saying that the words we use, the ways we describe the world in everyday language, are tools of their own. If this is the case, we are wanting to suggest that perhaps we need to be aware of how they work if we are going to use them in our own future planning.

Doubtless some may think that a fretting about language and its terms sounds all too academic. Nothing substantive can derive from an event where some academics (viz, the authors of this preface) say that everything comes down to words. And, yes, academics do believe that words matter. For them (and hence for us), of course, words are vital tools. It is the academic's trade to worry about them. But the point is that the categories that words express can shape our perceptions deeply. And they can do so without us realising quite how consequential that can be. Over the years, that words shape perception has fired many academic debates and controversies. Before the first world war, Franz Boas and colleagues suggested that language might reflect social need and this led them to explore the lexical richness with which Eskimos described snow. They found a whole lexicon, many more than those found in 'temperate cultures'.



This, in turn, led to the Sapir-Whorf thesis, the idea that words shape our mental machinery. In this view, Eskimos see snow differently from others<sup>1</sup>. Today this view has been replaced by the idea that the relationship between language and understanding is best understood in terms of how language - any language - is a question of use. It is through use that understanding emerges. Use reflects not how the world 'is' but how the world comes to matter to people using language. In this view, one can learn to see the types of snow that Eskimos do if one also learns why it matters to them. Through understanding why, so one comes to see in ways that are relevant to the human practices in question.

This is the view of Wittgenstein, of course. Language is a tool set itself, available for picking up and using (in wrong ways and right!) but intrinsically about human affairs. Human language is not then a perfect medium for tasks that aspire to be beyond human affairs, like scientific knowledge. This doesn't mean such knowledge is unattainable, but it does mean we need to be aware of the constraints of our language.

Today, though the Sapir-Whorf thesis is dismissed, the potential importance of categories used in everyday language is still seen as crucial even if the consensus is on how these categories are social rather than cognitive. One of the most notorious books of the Nineteen Sixties was Claude Levi-Strauss's *La Pensée Sauvage* (1961, originally translated as 'Savage Mind')<sup>2</sup>. Levi-Strauss was arguing that everyday, 'culturally embedded' categories are profound (and universal) in ways that are different to scientific ones, and it is largely through these that a great deal of practical and moral wisdom intrinsic to our cultures has developed. In this view, we need to understand how those historic categories were derived if we want to make a good connection to the scientific ones we are allowing our modern understandings to be shaped by.

1. Franz Boas, Edward William Nelson, Lucien M. Turner: *Eskimomarchen* Erstdruck: Berlin, Axel Juncker Verlag, (1921). This thesis was not actually put forward by Sapir or Whorf, but by one of their students, Harry Hoiijer. Nevertheless, the term has stuck and is used to label all sorts of linguistic determinism.

2. A new translation (with a new title, has revived interest in the debates that book inaugurated: 'Wild Thought, A New Translation of "La Pensée Sauvage"', J. Melhman & J. Leavitt (trans), University of Chicago Press, (2021).



His view was that we ought to leverage both the age-old culturally created ways of understanding with the newly formed ones of science. All this seems a long way from the Midland Hotel in Morecambe Bay where the event this White Paper documents took place. But as the attendees looked out of the magnificent celebration of Nineteen Thirties' engineering and architecture that is the Midland Hotel and towards a landscape that has entailed 'natural architectures' to evolve, so it was important they did not stop themselves seeing two separate phenomena, the one cultural, the other natural.

They needed to see, instead, their intimate connection. But what is that intimate connection? Is it to be seen on the surface, or somehow deeper, beyond initial views?

Each day, the tide sweeps into the bay, cleaning and renewing the waters and the sands as it does so, sluicing off the residues from the period in-between. Each day, too, thousands of people living beside the bay wash their faces and bathe their limbs with a tide of hot water and soap, hoping thereby to renew themselves for the day ahead.

For them, to wash daily is almost a moral imperative. Is the tempo of their washing like nature's tide, and if so, is there a connection between human affairs and natural ones?

Is the moon somehow connected to patterns of human cleanliness? It is the moon after all that is the energy source that creates the tides. This is very much the kind of link that Levi-Strauss would have found interesting. It is to do with the hidden links that show themselves in the surface of things, in this case, the surfaces of the bay and the surfaces of human body.

But surely the kind of connection we want to see between nature and people and so our futures thinking should be more than skin deep. When we make place a topic of our teaching, our research and our discussions with others, don't we want to enable ways of seeing that go under (or beyond) what can be seen at first sight? If our task is to imagine a different future where place is better understood and leveraged, then don't we need to see place beneath its surface? Isn't there something more to place than what we see at first glance?



# Overview of the event

**It was with these thoughts in mind that the Back in Place colloquium was undertaken. Its task was to bring together diverse parties from around Morecambe Bay and nationally to consider what place has meant to their professional life hitherto, and what is its role now, post pandemic.**

Has its role evolved? Have the restrictions on place affected how it is used now? Have these restrictions encouraged us to see place beyond its surface, beyond the obvious fact that it matters? We know that; but how, and can we leverage how it matters to make our use of place better?

The two-day event was structured around a set of keynotes, each of which were followed by breakout sessions that sought to refine the lessons and take-aways from the keynotes. As remarked already, each of the presenters had a different relationship to the topic of place, and, similarly, a different concern with futures thinking, but these differences made their keynotes all the more informative.

The first looks at the problem of space from the view of technology, and computers especially. Here the concern is what might be interaction with technology: though the digital is often described as allowing anywhere access, in practice, this access nearly always involves handling machines. What would our relationship with computers be if our interaction did not demand closeness with that technology, sometimes even the touching of it? The second keynote opens up a quite different topic: one already noted, on the role of place in learning at school. This keynote draws attention to how the 'thing' that is learnt in schools is often treated as entirely free from place, it being a kind of disembodied knowledge.

If there is such a thing, can it be taught in ways that allows all to benefit equally? Or does it presuppose that learning is simply a process of gathering information, and that young minds are merely places to fill? Is an alternative view to see learning as an active process, one where the skills taught are related to use and re-use? And if so, does the place in which this learning occurs (the school) need to nurture this kind of learning?

The third keynote takes a very different perspective altogether: it examines salt marshes. Such marshes surround Morecambe Bay as they do other parts of the UK coastline. Understanding these requires looking beneath their surface, at the role they play in the flux between land and sea. Here we learn that salt marshes are machineries of sorts, processing and transforming; but like all machineries they can go wrong, with toxins fouling their nutrient sources. These toxins derive from human practices, both agricultural ones and those to do with townscapes. People may not live on the marshes, but what they do ends up being processed by marshes. What the keynote underlines is that ecologies like salt marshes are not simple systems. Their complexity is the source of their wonder and their vulnerability.



The fourth returns us to learning but of a different kind and connected to a very different place: shops and stores rather than schools. Here we are introduced to how a company of stores reacted to the impact of covid, and how its processes were able to do so since a concern for learning on the job meant that staff felt better able to respond to the changing circumstances.

These circumstances made place all the more important: where staff worked shaped what they need to be expert in, and a sense of community and shared commitment with other staff was itself articulated in terms of place: by meeting at work. The fifth returns us to futures thinking and how this can be applied in local contexts – in this case a nearby market town (Kendal). We learn that regional development plans are often very high level and fail to allow details and particularities to shine through and be important in how future places might be. As a result, attempts to renew and alter townscapes into something more communal and more ecologically sensitive fail, as the details and particulars that are key to giving places identity and ‘human and ecological shape’ get lost. The last keynote seeks to inspire aspiration when futures thinking, and avoid a fear of change. Making different futures is not about busting the present nor neglecting its particularities, but a case of recognizing the power and the capacity of the local.

Our spaces and places are too often designed with mediocre ambitions, and as a result make many communities feel as if the future is not to be made, only accepted. But this need not be the case. We can reason our way to better ways of living – if we allow our ambitions to see what needs to be done.

These summaries only sketch the keynotes, of course. Accordingly, in what follows, we present in more detail what each argues and offer, in the attendant tables presented alongside, pertinent insights that the breakout sessions that followed each keynote also produced. One final note: the text is derived from notes taken by the rapporteurs at the event, not the speakers themselves.





# Day One

**The first keynote was by Dr Jen Pearson and Anna Carter, both of Swansea University. Their concern was with something that is taken for granted when we use technology, computer technology especially.**

We assume – designers, engineers and users alike – that we get intimate with technology. This sounds bizarre and is not a word that the speakers themselves used. But this was the gist of their argument: we touch our phones when we interact with them; we touch the screens on our tablets to navigate; we think nothing of handling the keyboards at Cashpoints to ensure that money is released to us. Touching machines is ubiquitous. In this sense we are intimate with them. Our intimacy expresses a nearness. We would not be that near strangers, we only allow our partners to be so familiar. Covid forced us to see this closeness in new light. The restrictions imposed during the pandemic forced us to be apart, or at least apart from our families. Nearness and hence touch were viewed as something to be prohibited between people in public places, between strangers. Our casual and hitherto unnoticed intimacy with machines would act as a ‘vector of infection’, to coin a phrase from our erstwhile Prime Minister, Boris Johnson.

Presenting findings from their projects<sup>3</sup>, Jen and Anna reported how organisations and users adapted their practices and their technologies. Some technologies were abandoned altogether while others, such as those with speech or gesture interaction modalities, became more commonly used. Improvised use of sanitizers and constant cleaning also solved the riddle of how to avoid the contagion of touch with technology. What the research did show, nevertheless, was how essential touching technology is, even when it is ‘digital’.

Anna then shared a paradoxically opposite piece of research: a system that allowed users to see the future through holding and hence touching a digital binocular. Through this viewing machine, if one can put it that way, users could see (or were shown) how the local site looked in the past and how it might come to look in the future, depending on different development choices.

It was intended as a way of getting members of the public to engage with planning the future of place. But the project<sup>4</sup> had to be run at the time of covid restrictions so Anna devised ways of controlling the viewing machinery that avoided some kinds of touch while allowing others. If, for most binoculars, holding by hands is required, in this case, a method was devised of controlling through the touch of elbows - the interaction that emerged as the proxy for handshakes during covid. Of course, this interaction mode needed to be altered for the size of the user – children, for example, are smaller and hence their elbows do not reach as high as adults; similar concerns applied for wheelchair users. Interestingly, over 10,000 interactions with the system were recorded, suggesting that people were still willing to touch machines, as long as the manner of that touch expressed some difference from the manners before covid. Hence manners that do not entail hands and fingers, but arms and elbows.

Whether this equates to an optimum way of reducing covid spread through the ‘vector of machines’ is perhaps a separate question and is certainly not the topic of the research. That is, how do we reconfigure our relationship with machines when we can no longer touch them with the ease and confidence that we had before covid? This leads to further questions to do with new technologies such as AI. In the case of autonomous cars, for example, will drivers no longer touch anything at all?

3. Rethinking Public Space technology in a Post COVID-19 Era

4. Designing and Embedding a Tangible Public Interface

The second keynote was given by Dr Alison Wilkinson and Mrs Linda Pye and addressed the role of place in schools. Alison, a former headteacher, is Strategic Lead of the South Lakes Federation, which has responsibility for developing curricular, Linda is Headteacher at Ryelands Primary School in Lancaster. Their keynote outlined the aspirations and challenges of a place-based curriculum which addressed – or delivered - social mobility. There are various approaches to curriculum design for such mobility, one being the ‘rescue’ model and another the ‘rising tide’. The rescue model is designed to enable poor but clever kids to be educated in ways that enables them to leave their communities. With educational success they can join the elite elsewhere.

The rising tide model is designed to create conditions for whole communities to prosper together. Here the goal is not to valorize one form of education, but to balance different types - professional, technical and vocational learning. In this view, schools need to be part of a healthy ecosystem of support not just for school children but for the communities of which they are a part. Currently, the curricula of most schools is neither of these.

The curricula, Alison and Linda explained, is knowledge-based. This focuses on a restrained curriculum, a set of knowledge, a cargo kids need to learn and ‘know’. It undervalues technical and vocational learning where the forms of knowing can be different – where skills of the mind go along with skills of the hand. The knowledge-based view has a number of attendant features. Because the knowledge is preset its teaching and assessment can entail ‘high stakes accountability’ – failure is easy to see, success easy to reward. This in turn discourages teaching staff from thinking differently. The goal is comparable outcomes, where one third will fail.

This approach to learning suppresses social mobility as it does not support or enable all children, only those suited to knowledge-based curricula. Alison and Linda reported on how they are helping develop alternative didactic forms. Alison gave the example of the Studio School in Kirkby Lonsdale (a school for 14–19-year olds) that focuses on different achievements and not just the knowledge-based one. It includes, for example, countryside skills.

Online experiences informing better physical learning spaces	Views on returning to in-person learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• students learned self-resilience working online, we need to incorporate that into the physical learning environment</li> <li>• technology is a tool to use in place - complements hands-on learning and hands-on skills eg Citizen science projects, directional microphones picking up sounds otherwise unnoticed</li> <li>• asynchronous learning: with covid students had to learn by themselves; asynchronous and synchronous learning complement each other</li> <li>• online learning has brought about a flexibility to learning eg learn at one’s own pace, own location with online resources to support learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• initial concerns about whether in-person still needed, but now have the ability to apply the best approach to the specific needs of student</li> <li>• online experience of students taking breaks/reducing learning into bite-size chunks has been incorporated into in-person teaching</li> <li>• learning in place can embed the knowledge deeper</li> <li>• tech can help to see things differently, prompt other senses, be turned into data</li> </ul>



Fitting these alternatives into curricula is not easy however, as there is a need to ensure that they fit across schools and communities – what is good for Kirkby Lonsdale needs to be good for schools in Barrow in Furness, say. Schools also need to encourage a particular culture – one where children learn resilience through success and failure. A school needs to be calm, safe, but not always quiet. Sometimes loudness expresses what a classroom is about – a moment of exuberance after hard work, for example. A school needs to be seen as offering much more than education – if by that is meant ‘knowledge’. It should itself be a ‘community’, one that ‘nurtures’ and is ‘inclusive’. In being this in itself a school can also be an anchor for local community too.

When visiting a school, parents should get a sense of place, a feel for a place, for an ethos of that school. Linda explained that ‘place-based learning’ is an alternative route to educational success, helping create what she called ‘sticky learning’ – where children do indeed know more, but what it is they know enables them to act with the knowledge more effectively in the future. In a sense, with place-based learning, more is remembered but the test is that what is remembered is ‘know-how’, not merely ‘stuff’ - facts and figures, dates and events. The keynote ended with both presenters explaining that the ‘Morecambe Bay Curriculum’ is based on the rising tide model and is seeking to give agency to the children.

### Ideas for using physical place to teach global realities

- digital puts a box around people and has the potential to ‘flatten’ the diversity: you can learn more about them in a deeper way by visiting physically
- not all places/countries have the same tech capabilities and we run the risk of ignoring countries where it may be difficult to connect technologically





**In the evening, the third keynote drew the participants attention to where they were – beside Morecambe Bay. Dr Angus Garbutt, Senior Ecologist, UK Centre of Ecology & Hydrology, sought to go beneath the surface of the bay, to uncover and explore its salt marshes.**

These surround it and are at once natural and human phenomena, but often ignored, seen only in passing as eyes look further afield, at the mountains or sunset in the distance. Angus explained that salt marshes are characterised by high energy at their front, where they contact the full force of the sea, and low energy at the rear, where they abut the land. This is to focus only on the scale of energy that the marshes handle, though, and disregards the ecological or social and human richness that results at different points on a marsh. Salt marshes form the transition zone between land and sea; they are dynamic, constantly altering and shifting, reforming and renewing and, as they do so, changing the ways estuaries, like those that flow into Morecambe Bay, function. As a result, salt marshes also change the ways that local people function.

Crucial to their understanding is that they are impacted by the areas that surround them - whether it be agricultural, industrial, or green and mountainous (like Morecambe Bay). They act as a repository for what comes to them – the minerals and wastes, the fertile and the sterile, the good and the bad. But in balance, and because of their location, they are most often extremely fertile. For example, they offer healthy ground for grazing. Meat from animals that are allowed on them is highly desirable.

Over the years there have been many attempts to alter the bay. In the 1960-70s the first ecological impact assessments were made to see what would happen if a barrage were put in place across the bay.

This research led to the understanding we now have of what salt marshes do. It also highlighted a separate issue: how they are seen as 'cultural phenomena'. In literature, salt marshes were (and are) often seen as dangerous, mysterious spaces on the margins of land and sea. Accordingly, people who lived there were on the margins of society, marginalised communities. They were if you like, liminal spaces. Think of the opening pages of Dickens's *Great Expectations*. He was not alone in evoking marshes as unique human places. Joseph Conrad, Arthur Ransom and Peter Scott are some of many others who suggested that these are places where extraordinary things happen. Latterly, and partly as a result of scientific understandings suffusing the public mind and hence the landscapes of literary imagination, salt marshes have become transformed into places of inspiration and light, wellbeing and cognitive restorations. Indeed, for some they are now perceived as miracle spaces.

Angus finished with the observations that salt marshes are all these things: both places of renewal and places of decay, of social dislocation and human harmony. On a stormy day, the wind can bite the foolish ambler, on a sunny day they are blissful with the sights they afford and the smells they raise. Salt marshes are about contrasts.





“EACH DAY, THE TIDE SWEEPS INTO THE BAY, CLEANING AND RENEWING THE WATERS AND THE SANDS AS IT DOES SO.”



# Day Two

The keynote commencing the second day was by Edwin Booth, Chairman & CEO at E.H. Booth & Co Ltd, the well-known store in the Northwest. Edwin talked about the changing organization of Booths, the role of place in this and, most importantly, the centrality of staff. Changes before the pandemic enabled his company to respond to the pandemic and other societal issues such as Brexit, broken supply chains and, more recently, rampant inflation.

More particularly, a cash flow crisis before the pandemic, in 2017, instigated a major shakeup within the company's boards (there being a 'Family Board' and an 'Operating' one, for example). The company began to focus on prioritising staff learning. Each member of staff was given a 'Purpose on a Page' document which included the company business plan and its 'ethos' (or credo): this emphasized 'people, product, place'. Training 'academies' were set up to give skills to staff responsible for specialist areas such as butchery for the meat counter. This, in turn, led to staff working in those areas beginning to generate new ideas about service and product. The hope was that everyone owned the 'risk' - moving away from a 'that's not my job' manner and coming instead to feel a greater ownership of their place in the company's practices.

The result of these changes meant that when the pandemic crisis hit in 2020, the company was agile enough to respond to the situation but able to keep its ethos of 'people first' to ensure that staff could work safely and creatively, keeping innovation moving even as lockdown was imposed. Just as this applied to staff, it applied to customers too - perspex screens and covered queueing systems in the stores were designed for both. At the same time, there was no furlough – all staff were redeployed whatever their role. Remote working or office working was adjusted to suit the mental health of staff and hybrid working style became part of the company's operating procedures.

It soon became clear, once these practices bedded in, that online meetings work well for smaller numbers. Indeed, 82% of staff believed they were more productive when working remotely, 84% believed they were still able to engage effectively with their teams. But it also became clear this was not the same for new staff – here new ways of integrating needed to be devised, ones that emphasized place more.

This in turn led to new ways of encouraging remote and office staff to meet up informally - such as Happy Thursdays wine and cheese gatherings. Digital communications were leveraged, and the increase use of these during the pandemic has persisted since. Weekly videos and online newsletters have continued at the request of the staff. The long and short of it is that Edwin believed that his company has managed to enhance itself despite the pandemic and other concerns, making its staff feel more central to the company's success, allowing the places they work in to more effectively express the company's ethos.





<b>Impact of physical places and their activities on communities eg buying and selling</b>	<b>If all shopping becomes online - what are the risks?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how staff are utilised impacts the feeling of the place eg greeters vs security guards</li> <li>• the role of retail in place is all about the local and the particular</li> <li>• examples of change of use such as petrol stations becoming a new social hub as people have to stay longer to enable cars to charge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• compartmentalisation; taking away the things that communities need, reducing opportunities for cross-fertilisation of ideas and social exchange</li> <li>• frictionless shopping, removes barriers to consumption; what is the morality of over-consumption?</li> <li>• removes connection between consumers and producers</li> </ul>
<b>How can traditional practices inform online communities and interactions?</b>	<b>Have shops and services changed because of the COVID-era?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• digital can keep the stories of products; the ethics/life of a fashion garment</li> <li>• loss of the local, places to mingle, bring back the personal touch in transactions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• technologies have connected communities; helping each other out. eg WhatsApp ordering group on a local street with deliveries done by the milkman</li> <li>• physical places haven't changed that much, maybe the change is within us</li> </ul>

The next keynote was by Mark Cropper, Chairman at James Cropper plc. Mark reported on insights generated while he acted as Chairman at Kendal Futures. His concern was to explain how important thinking holistically is when trying to make a better future for Kendal. Mark explained that when he took on this role, the community felt tired; its parts disconnected, the streets and houses seemed like a series of cul-de-sacs (and indeed many streets were just that). As a consequence in some areas, like Burneside, no one walked about; indeed, there was no sense of place evoked in the design of that district. People lived there, but there was no sense of community.

The parish council, Kendal council and the Kendal Futures group, joined together to create a vision of a healthy community that wanted to transform Kendal. They came to the view that central to doing so would be reintroducing the local and particular. This was not so easy to do, as prior action plans for the Kendal area as a whole had tended towards the abstract without any reference to the particular (such as the Kendal Economic Growth Action Plan 2015-2025). Besides this, the agencies that deal with local renewal, council departments, regional authorities and businesses, all tend to work in silos – focusing on their own projects and their own businesses and this meant that a 'systems view' on how local matters integrated with each other and with larger regional and national processes were neglected.

To counteract this, Mark explained how Kendal Futures went looking for input from all sections of the community. They also adopted an inside-out planning model, seeking to change the inner town rather than building on the outskirts and leaving the old centre to decay. As they did so, they realised they were developing a blueprint for better ways of shaping area development elsewhere. They learnt too that there are a number of constraints that affect the delivery of the particular and the local. For example, digitization makes the control and supply of many services a lot easier but can also take money (revenue) away from the local.

The digital is often a pretext for platform capitalism, with major players succeeding but having no interest in the local. Their control resides in, for example Palo Alto, not Kendal. In addition to this, local authorities use framework agreements to work together and doing so limits improvised solutions that might be creative.

Such agreements also encourage a uniformity of solution. The use of out-of-town consultants does the same. In any case, finding a balance between local and national needs is not easy when 'NIMBYism' is an understandable reaction local communities have to change brought about by, for example, second homes owners and holiday lets businesses.

Mark explained that one way forward despite these difficulties is to maximize the potential of existing resources for all – for residents, visitors and investing 'outsiders'. For example, Burnside Community Energy set up solar panels on the roof of the paper factory and the money gained from selling that energy to the factory is now being ploughed back into the local school. Nevertheless, one needs to be sensitive to overly ambitious attempts to change, with step wise approaches more likely to succeed. Renewing places should be done calmly.

How might we make physical places better?	How might we make digital places better?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bringing retail and community hubs back into place (creating interactions)</li> <li>• place plays a big part in wellbeing; build some calm spaces as life gets faster (build in 'purpose' and 'pace' – to add to Edwin's 3 Ps: people, product, place)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creating an emotional connection; online gaming has provided a new space people to connect</li> <li>• it's often said that people need to be put central to the digital, but it's less often said that people need to be made central to the real</li> </ul>
How might we make blended places better?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the pandemic forced us to do, now take a step back and design what we want</li> <li>• audio is important; can be more immersive than video</li> <li>• consider places holistically and create places in balance for commercial revenue, for calm, and for socialising</li> </ul>	

“ THE DIGITAL IS OFTEN A PRETEXT FOR PLATFORM CAPITALISM, WITH MAJOR PLAYERS SUCCEEDING BUT HAVING NO INTEREST IN THE LOCAL.”





The last keynote was given by Sir Tim Smit, Co-founder of Eden Project. His concern was prophetic thinking - on how to get communities to excite themselves about what might be. One needs to begin by assuring people not to be scared of the future nor of possible changes that are radical in their consequences. Just because there is a tendency to 're-write' our human histories as if they evolved as part of a slow, general evolution without radical moments of change, this should not encourage the view that shocks that occur due to, or are generated by, change are never welcome or beneficial. Tim warned that the judgement of 'what good looks like' often ends up identifying the mediocre, as this is easier to agree to.

The mediocrity that results is used to justify the decision and cost expended after the event so that mediocrity itself becomes the measure of success. Individuals or communities who wanted more radical change get called idealistic or naïve. This should no longer be the case, Tim argued. He went on to make some predictions about where he thought the world would be in 17 years, based on the ideas and themes that he has been part of, or has seen developing. First, and echoing the prior keynote, he suggested that power generated at the local level would become increasingly common: every town will be energy independent. Based on his experience with geothermal heating and solar power at the Eden Project, and the fact that the national grid set up is flawed in some ways, this shift to the local is very likely, he argued. Likewise, different kinds of food will begin to be produced at the local level. Mixed agriculture will lead to a diversity of produce, using greenhouses made from recycled plastics with a light penetration that is much better than glass. 'Heritage' or 'heirloom' vegetables that survive in soils with no fossil fuels or nitrates will be produced in greater volume and also made available locally.

If this produce is 'soft', then hard products will also be made locally. 3D printers will be used locally, with supply chains becoming more local too, creating a greater connection between where things come from, how they are made.

An 'internet of animals' will emerge which will deliver insights deriving from the senses of every living thing. For example, goats on Mount Etna seem to sense when an eruption is due up to 6 hours before human technology can register signs of an eruption. Hence, sensors on these goats might be able to leverage this animal intelligence. This example also led Sir Tim to suggest that we can change education to identify gaps so that we focus on what we don't know, not what we do know. In his view, there is a need to encourage breadth rather than a narrowing down, an ability to solve not to merely know. In this, he echoed the keynote about education.

Sir Tim ended by saying that a future vision can be achieved by starting at the end goal and working backwards to find out what we need to do to get to where we want to be. In his view, the world is about systems – systems of food production and use, systems of ecological interdependence, systems of balance between animals and so on. A terrible conceit, he explained, is the idea that the point of evolution is to end up with us. For we are only a part of the system – or rather part of many interdependent systems. There is no 'us'. We need to nurture the systems we are part of and use our own ingenuities and our own human systems - markets for example – to make those systems work in harmony, as a system.

Thus Tim brought us back to salt marshes and the systems they are part of, to the systems of learning that are human products and yet which need to produce individuals who can reason about all systems. But to succeed, we need to wonder, we need to imagine, we need to see our interconnection in systems not as a burden that makes change impossible, but the source of opportunity. We can touch the future if we allow ourselves to see with open eyes, but we can do more than touch the surface. We can get inside, making it real through knowing how it works.

“ BUT TO SUCCEED, WE NEED TO WONDER, WE NEED TO IMAGINE, WE NEED TO SEE OUR INTERCONNECTION IN SYSTEMS NOT AS A BURDEN THAT MAKES CHANGE IMPOSSIBLE, BUT THE SOURCE OF OPPORTUNITY. ”





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