

## The Nottingham Economic Recovery Consultation (Part One )

This text is the first installment of a number of a number of parts still to come....

Nottingham City Council have produced a Nottingham Economic Recovery and Renewal Plan – the City Council plan “for revitalising the local economy in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic”.

<https://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/media/3082410/nottingham-economic-recovery-renewal-plan-overview-dec-2020.pdf>

<https://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/media/3082409/nottingham-economic-recovery-renewal-plan-full-plan-dec-2020.pdf>

They have put it out for consultation – with a survey form to fill in which can be found here:

<https://wh1.snapsurveys.com/s.asp?k=160647799138>

I do not believe that if one uses this form that one is involved in a real consultation. It is a tick box exercise that elicits how much one agrees or disagrees, supports or opposes, what the Council puts in front of us. At the end there is a text box big enough for 200 words for comments on a document that is many thousands of words long. In other words the council and its supporters appear not to want a consultation. They want an opinion poll on their views.

But who are they? Who are the people on whose ideas public money will be spent? The answer is given in some detail because the document provides the names and statuses of members of two committees (or “boards”) who are endorsing the document. These are the “Nottingham Growth Board” and “One Nottingham”.

If you spend some time looking at these people and their roles, the people *who drive* Nottingham economic development policy, the programme in the “Economic Recovery and Development” document contains no surprises. Whether it is the right policy for current economic conditions is an entirely different question. I doubt that it is.

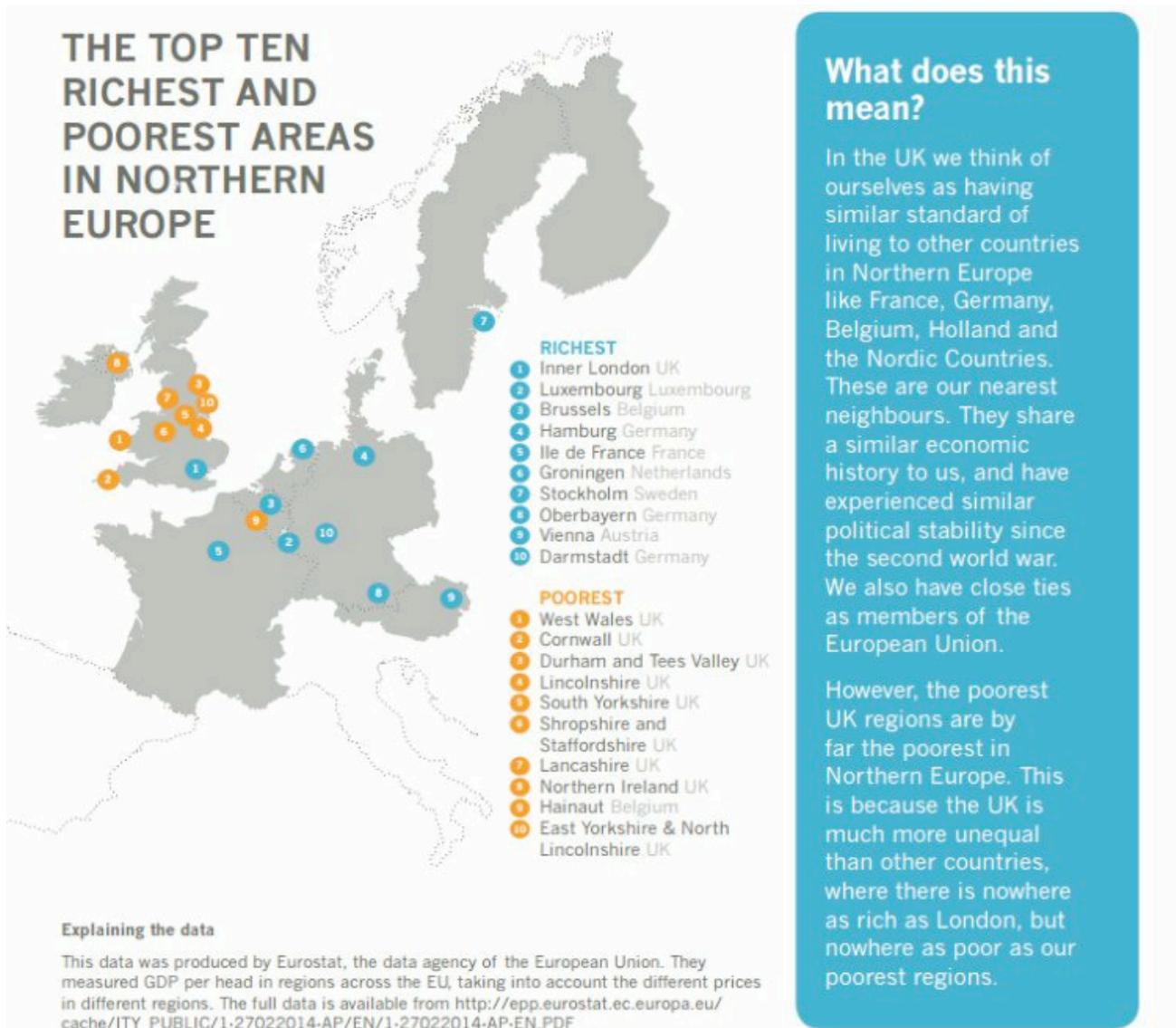
There is a saying that is sometimes attributed to the French writer Anais Nin - “We do not see things as we are, we see things as we are.” This means that the way we interpret the world as individuals depends **not** on how the world is but on who we are, our personalities, what motivates us and what we have an interest in.

Looking at the composition of **Nottingham Growth Board** and **One Nottingham** it seems as if the insight by Anais Nin is a good analogy for what lobby groups think is the kind of public sector support needed to achieve “economic development” and “growth”. *What will help their own organisation or interest group is what will help economic development.*

The analysis in the document is implicit. You can assume from the programme in the document about what the Growth Board and One Nottingham thinks that Nottingham “needs to grow”. On this is based what public money will be spent. The programme matches almost perfectly which interest groups have secured a place on the Nottingham Growth Board and the One Nottingham committee, particularly the former.

What a pity then that it is extremely unlikely that Nottingham’s economy will grow in the future and that what it needs for the bulk of its citizens, and indeed for many of the groups represented on these committees, is a strategy to cope with economic contraction.

This is not solely because of problems unique to Nottingham. All the way round the UK there has been stagnation and decline – except in a few places, mostly where there are elite universities and in Nottingham there are two. Gradually though decline that has left large parts of the country behind and, brought forward by the covid 19 crisis, it has spread to this city too. This is a map from before the covid crisis. Nottingham was not on it then...



This is also because we have reached the limits to economic growth and further attempts at growth will be counterproductive. Much current growth is parasitical, the result of disaster capitalism. Sure there will always be some who gain as others lose – for example those who thrive on the debt of others as it becomes more difficult to pay taxes, the rent and the bills. Fintech has a dark side to it – if people in Nottingham get jobs from it then it is partly because others are struggling and desperate.

Then there are the ecological trends that drive the economy over destructive tipping points like climate change, biodiversity collapse and so on. Growth is faltering too because there is a lack of the reserves of minerals and energy that would be needed to scale up what can be started at a small scale but not carried through to completion.

<https://www.minersoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/3ICM-Michaux.pdf>

In fact at this time there is a real possibility that there will be an oil production crisis next year starting in the USA. Oil geologists like Art Berman have pointed to the way that fall in demand for oil because of covid has brought forward an oil shock. Not nearly as many wells are being drilled and this is likely to produce a supply shock next year. ( I will cover these points in a later installment of this consultation commentary )

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/arthurberman/2020/09/05/are-we-on-the-cusp-of-a-global-energy-crisis/?sh=6b835dba5019>

This means that the policies to be found in this document are totally inappropriate because “the strategy” is simply a lumping together of what each of the groups represented wants to do, on the assumption that the economic growth process will resume and some public sector money will be available for them. Take away this assumption and the whole strategy could turn out to be a massive waste of scarce public resources. (Which I will argue in later installments of this commentary )

### **The composition of the Committees matches the composition of the Programme**

The **Nottingham Growth Board** is 20 people. 6 are senior officials in Nottingham and Notts local authorities. Three are Senior Councillors at Nottingham City Council. There are the two Vice Chancellors from the Two Universities and the Chief Executive of Nottingham College. 3 are senior managers from businesses – one from a real estate developer which operates through partnerships - Igloo Regenerations who is chair of the Growth Board. Another rep is from Experian which operates in Financial related Technologies and one is from Boots and another from BioCity.

Then there are a number of support, advocacy and development agencies for businesses. One is from the Nottingham City Centre Business Alliance – city centre advocates who have set up common projects. The Nottingham Project is a business alliance based on cultural focused businesses. Marketing Nottingham is another organisation of this type which seeks to attract inward investment and suchlike. The Nottingham Castle Trust is self explanatory as is the Creative Quarter company. D2N2 is a Local Enterprise Partnership that styles itself as a “growth multiplier”. The Haydn Green Institute is a University of Nottingham promotion of young entrepreneurs and “innovation” while Bglobal is an organisation that takes the concept of “wealth creation” and claims that it is related to the glory of God (rather than to energy use, most of which in our economy is carbon based and in a late stage of depletion – both of which spell serious problems ahead - <https://ourfiniteworld.com/2020/11/09/energy-is-the-economy-shrinkage-in-energy-supply-leads-to-conflict/> )

**One Nottingham** is a different kind of committee – again with representation from politicians, officials and the universities but with as many as 5 representatives from the Youth Council and then others representing local faith communities, the police, organisations focused on transport including canals, the Women’s Centre, Equal Opportunities for BME communities, The Clinical Commissioning Group and Geldards Solicitors.

When you look at the Growth Board and One Nottingham as a collection of vested interests that has put out this policy document is it any wonder that its policy can be summarised as what the different interest groups want + a gesture to climate change and unemployed people?

Take a look at the programme: First there is “creativity and culture”; then “reshaping the city” (aka real estate redevelopment); digital enterprise with a particular reference to financial technology (think “Experian”, maybe Capital One and maybe HMRC too – the intersection of digitalisation and the debt and tax economy ); “entrepreneurship and innovation” are jobs for the graduates of the two universities and particularly for the graduates coming out of their business schools.

Also a policy to reskill and upskill with careers advice for all those people who need help to get into work – who will get jobs in the new growth sectors....***if these materialise*** - an issue that I will discuss in another instalment of my commentary on this plan...

Admittedly there is also a **focus on climate policy. However it is noteworthy that there is no specialist group at all to “represent” the climate issue.... Or to check that the programme as laid down is “for real”. OK maybe XR didn’t want to be drawn in and compromised.**

Whatever the reason, the problem is that so often so many of the policies which claim to address climate emissions turn out to be illusory – and this has been the case for decades.

For example, domestic energy saving schemes, which is one of the proposals of the move towards a carbon neutral Nottingham, are only carbon reducing if the money saved by households is not spent on other things that require carbon emissions to supply them – eg you save money because of city council insulation and fly to Spain paid for by the money saved, and emissions happen through aviation instead of emissions that arise through heating your home. These are known in the literature of energy economics as “rebound effects”.

Or a digitalisation programme, which is another proposal in this policy document, can be expected to have a massive carbon footprint and have huge destructive effects on biodiversity; for example the effects of electromog on bees and other insects – issues that I will examine and provide evidence for in other instalments of this commentary.

Ignoring such complications is par for the course in the field of ecological economics and is why 30 years of greenwash rhetoric about “sustainability” has not achieved much.

As the economy has growth so has depletion and ecological damage. There are now many peer reviewed studies that show it cannot be otherwise. In any case a [recent literature review](#) of 99 peer reviewed studies shows that attempts to decouple growth from resource use and pollution has failed and will continue to do so. Renewables and the arrangements to buffer the intermittency of renewable energy are expensive. Paradoxically current visions of an electrified economy would require lots more fossil fuels and energy minerals that are in severely short supply. A renewables based economy is only viable if the economy is a lot smaller. We will need to [manage degrowth](#) to the extent possible and economists must help this process or accept that they are not involved in science but members of, and advocates for, a suicide cult. <https://eeb.org/library/decoupling-debunked/>

<https://www.feasta.org/2018/01/28/the-real-lesson-of-the-energiewende-is-that-the-german-economy-uses-too-much-energy-to-be-sustainable-and-needs-to-degrow/>

This means that there are a number of ecological economic needs for a change in the structure of the Nottingham economy which will have to happen – above all relocalisation of economic relationships, particularly in food production. I will explore these too in a later instalment of this consultation on this document. Suffice it to say here that this means other kinds of economic development priorities that are nowhere to be found in this document.

Fortunately there are businesses in Nottingham....and among artists and “cultural creatives” too...who do understand these issues and have been innovating links between local farmers and local consumers. This has training and employment implications – especially given the likely extreme disruption that a no deal Brexit is likely to make to food imports in the near future.

Nor must all jobs be new – because older people retire. Ideally the younger people who take over have had adequate training that enables them to take over seamlessly but this is by no means obvious in some trades like farming and market gardening. It is particularly important because there needs to be a revolution in agriculture, a revolution that puts carbon back into the soil. This both for reasons of soil fertility and also for reasons of carbon sequestration as a part of climate policy. Innovation of this type needs proper training and the right skills and motivation. This is what is needed to make Nottingham carbon neutral for real – and there is nothing about it mentioned at all in the document. It is especially important in that a circulate economy in agriculture requires the re-use of urban sewerage[?] on the land which has far reaching implications for re-development otherwise there will eventually be a crisis due to the shortage of phosphorous on land.  
<https://medium.com/university-of-leeds/keeping-soil-alive-with-regenerative-agriculture-9a25cbb4bc5e> <https://www.arc2020.eu/regenerative-agriculture-part-2-a-soils-first-farming-food-policy/>

It is noteworthy that groups crucial to a sustainable re-localisation are NOT represented on the Growth Board – and I wonder how many other vital roles and sectors are NOT represented – like those in health and social care for example.

Finally this is just the first instalment of a consultation response to the City council. As should be clear I am making my own consultation response and will not be using their tick box format. It may then mean that this will not get counted – but when I have finished sending around this and other instalments it will nevertheless probably get noticed.....

.... More to follow....

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13<sup>th</sup> December 2020