

TEN PRIORITIES FOR THE FORMER COALFIELDS



the **coalfields**
regeneration trust



Industrial Communities **Alliance**

The proposals

*These proposals have been produced jointly by the **Coalfields Regeneration Trust** and the **Industrial Communities Alliance**, drawing on their extensive knowledge of former mining communities across England, Scotland and Wales and on their hard-won experience in promoting jobs, growth, environmental improvement and community cohesion. The proposals have also been informed by discussions at recent meetings of coalfield MPs.*

1. A replacement for EU funding

Assuming Brexit goes ahead, the former coalfields and other less prosperous parts of the country will lose EU funding for regional and local development. West Wales & the Valleys, for example, presently receive €2bn in EU funding. The UK government has promised a Shared Prosperity Fund but the details are still to be decided. The coalfields need:

- A UK Shared Prosperity Fund worth at least as much as the EU funds it is intended to replace
- Financial allocations to Scotland and Wales, and to local areas in England, that are driven by need
- Local management and decision making, including respect for the devolution settlement

2. Support for industry

The coal industry has disappeared (a handful of opencast mines excepted) but manufacturing remains a key component of most former coalfield economies. For years, manufacturing output has stagnated and the UK economy is weaker as a result. The UK government's Industrial Strategy targets high-end technology but so far does relatively little for the rest of industry. The coalfields need:

- A more broad-based, inclusive Industrial Strategy
- Greater use of the opportunities under State Aid rules to support jobs, growth and raise productivity
- In England, restoration of regional investment aid in the Assisted Areas, which cover just about all the former coalfields
- Support for small businesses, including through the provision of suitable premises

3. Higher quality jobs

A number of former coalfields, particularly in Yorkshire and the Midlands, have been successful in attracting substantial numbers of new jobs in sectors such as warehousing. Unquestionably better than unemployment, but too many of the new jobs offer low pay and poor terms and conditions and often they are vulnerable to automation. The coalfields need:

- A more determined effort to promote higher quality jobs in former mining areas, including in high-end manufacturing and services
- Support for business investment in new technology, to speed the move from low-paid activities to higher-paid opportunities in engineering and computing and cushion the impact of automation
- Support for ideas and innovation

4. Investment in education, skills and health

Too many young people in the former coalfields don't reach their full potential, too men and women are held back by low skills, and too many suffer from health problems that make them unattractive to employers and keep them parked on benefits. The incapacity claimant rate in the former coalfields is higher than just about anywhere in the UK – and those 'on the sick' are generally no longer former miners. The coalfields need:

- Good quality schools for all
- High quality apprenticeships, including entry-level opportunities, for young people who do not move into higher education
- Life-long learning opportunities for the many who missed out on education and training first time round
- Serious efforts, beyond the existing Work and Health Programme, to equip more of the men and women on incapacity benefits to re-enter the labour market

5. Growth beyond the big cities

The assumption in government has too often been that growth in the big cities will pull the rest of the regions along. In practice this doesn't work and there are drawbacks for smaller places when public and private services are centralised on the cities. Though there are commuting flows between the big cities and the former coalfields, the coalfields (total population nearly 6 million) are too big and in some cases too remote to rely just on growth in the cities. Growth in the big cities is welcome but the coalfields need:

- A Northern Powerhouse and a Midlands Engine that are less about the big cities and more about the surrounding places where so many people live
- Recognition in Scotland and Wales that City Deals and Growth Deals need to be inclusive of surrounding areas and address their uniqueness and diversity
- A Stronger Towns Fund that addresses the numerous smaller places across the former coalfields
- Maximisation of the development opportunities on former pit sites, including for renewable energy projects with community benefits and geothermal energy schemes

6. Investment in local connectivity

Better connections between the big cities don't always offer a great deal to surrounding places. For coalfield towns and villages, the priority is for better local transport so that jobs in the cities can be accessed and so that people can get to and from businesses on trading estates, business parks and in town centres. The coalfields need:

- Higher priority for investment in local rail networks, including the re-opening of lines, reinstating passenger services on existing freight lines, new stations and new rolling stock
- New investment in local bus services, including restoration of the services lost as a result of cuts to local authority budgets
- A shift away from the Treasury's *Green Book* investment rules, which prioritise the reduction of congestion in high-wage areas such as London
- Digital connectivity on a par with the best parts of the country

7. Local authorities with the ability to deliver

The ability of local authorities to deliver services and to lead local economic development has been sorely damaged by cuts to their budgets. In the former coalfields, especially in England, the cuts have generally been much larger than in more prosperous parts of the country – a recent analysis identified Barnsley (in the heart of the former Yorkshire coalfield) as having experienced the very largest cut of all. The coalfields need:

- Resourcing for local councils and the devolved administrations that enables them to deliver for their communities
- A new funding formula for councils in England that properly reflects need and does not disadvantage places with low revenue from business rates
- Empowerment for all local authorities, individually and/or in local groupings, not just those in urban areas that strike devolution deals with government

8. Support for community infrastructure

The UK's former coalfield communities are distinctive in their history, in their present-day problems and opportunities, and in their location in mainly smaller towns, often in an otherwise rural context. Former coalfield communities also retain their own distinctive institutions in need of on-going support. The coalfields need:

- Restoration of government funding for the Coalfields Regeneration Trust in England, which ended in 2015, limiting the CRT's ability to support community projects and investments
- Renewal of the present CRT funding from the Scottish and Welsh Governments
- Protection for community assets, such as playing fields and recreation grounds held by the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation (CISWO) and other bodies

9. Re-balance spending on culture, arts and sport

Funding from the National Lottery and bodies such as the Arts Council and Sport England is very welcome but on a per capita basis the former coalfields receive less than their fair share. This is partly because so much money goes into prestige projects, nearly all in London and the big cities, and partly because there has been an assumption that projects in the big cities will deliver benefits to the residents of surrounding areas. For the poor and less mobile this is rarely the case. The coalfields need:

- A shift in the balance of Lottery funding towards the Boards – such as England’s Big Lottery – that spend money more equitably across the country
- Greater representation in decision-making for ordinary people and their communities
- More support for grassroots projects in disadvantaged communities, including for working up bids
- Support for the distinctive heritage of the coalfields – in music and brass bands for example

10. A better deal on miners’ pension fund surpluses

The 1994 deal in which the government agreed to underwrite the two miners’ pension schemes (MPS and BCSSS) has served scheme members well but has resulted in a multi-billion financial windfall for the Treasury out of all proportion to the risk to which the government has been exposed. The coalfields need:

- A re-negotiation of the 50-50 division of surpluses from the miners’ pension funds, leaving more for the benefit of retired miners and their dependents
- A willingness on the part of government to re-invest some of the vast windfall it has already received – and is still scheduled to receive in coming years – into former coalfield communities



the **coalfields**
regeneration trust

The Coalfields Regeneration Trust is the only charitable body and grant-giving organisation dedicated to supporting mining communities across the UK

Coalfields Regeneration Trust, 1 Waterside Park, Valley Way, Wombwell, Barnsley S73 0BB
t: 01226 272800

e: crt.england@coalfields-regen.org.uk

www.coalfields-regen.org.uk



Industrial Communities **Alliance**

The Industrial Communities Alliance is the all-party association of local authorities in the industrial areas of England, Scotland and Wales

National Secretariat, 1 Regent Street, Barnsley, S Yorkshire S70 2EG

t: 01226 200768

e: natsec@ccc-alliance.org.uk

www.industrialcommunitiesalliance.org.uk