

# CLIMATE RESILIENCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE & COVID-19 RECOVERY IN PRESTON

## FINAL REPORT

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## PROJECT WEB PAGE

To access outputs from this project, including the Full Report, the Rapid Literature Review and Community Researcher Training Materials, see [Project Web Page](#).

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## FOREWORD

There was, and still is, much talk of 'building back better' from the pandemic with a focus on transforming society and the economy in a greener, low carbon and climate resilient manner to respond and adapt to the interlinked and worsening climate and ecological/biodiversity crises. Part of this conversation involves learning some of the lessons from the pandemic to inform societal responses to the planetary crisis. Some of these lessons include an acknowledgement of the central role and necessary agency of the state in responding to threats to lives and livelihoods, and how the pandemic itself has been caused by the same unsustainable and unjust economic model/system that is the root driver of the planetary crisis.

This report makes a valuable place-based contribution to this on-going debate, demonstrating the need to link, inter alia, public health (including mental health), sustainability, energy transitions, climate resilience to socio-economic equality and social justice outcomes. It does so by offering an innovative synthesising of three approaches, models or areas of concern - Community Wealth Building, Doughnut Economics and Place-Based Climate Action - and applying them in a case study of Preston. All three models can be characterised as pioneering, novel and challenges to the political, policy and economic status quo, not least to the dominant (and inadequate) orthodox political responses to the crises mentioned above, which can be viewed as forms of 'greening business as usual'. It is precisely the application and testing of new ways of thinking, acting, governing that we will need in the years and decades ahead in the face of the planetary crisis and the need to respond and transform to that crisis in a manner which is not only effective, timely and at scale, but also just and with wide democratic support. Synthesising and applying them, as this report has done, adds yet another layer of novelty and innovation.

I would like to highlight two important dimensions of the report. Firstly, it demonstrates the effectiveness and support for localised and resolutely place-based pathways beyond both the unsustainable and unjust economic status quo, and I would also suggest, beyond 'greening business as usual'. Community Wealth Building, itself first practiced within the UK in Preston, with its stress on the central role of public sector 'anchor institutions', as this report points out, can be harnessed towards achieving local climate, ecological outcomes and is compatible with moving beyond a narrow focus on 'economic growth' as the main or only policy objective. Secondly, the report offers to my mind a hopeful set of findings and lessons that can be applied and adapted to other localities. One of the consequences of the planetary and pandemic crises has been an increase in anxiety and

mental illness amongst sections of the population. Particularly in relation to the global and existential threat of the climate catastrophe, it is sadly all too easy to move from awareness to despair, both in terms of the enormity and scale of the threat and challenge, and the demonstrable lack of global and national climate action by states. So perhaps here, as the report stresses, it is at the local level that we can see innovation, the necessity of 'doing things differently', and providing real, tangible and effective forms of climate action that benefit people, place and planet.

Beveridge talked about the 'five giants' that the post-war British welfare state was created to tackle - namely, want (caused by poverty), ignorance (caused by a lack of education), squalor (caused by poor housing), idleness (caused by a lack of jobs, or the ability to gain employment), and disease (caused by inadequate health care provision). While sadly all of these are still present (and need, as this report suggests, to be integrated within localised plans and models to combat climate change), this report can be viewed as 'notes from the new front line' in the battle against new 'giants' our generation faces. These new giants could be summarised as the planetary crisis; deepening and dangerous socio-economic inequality; prioritising growth rather than jobs; health and wellbeing; hopelessness and fear; and related to the latter, a lack of belief and imagination for constructing viable and significant transformations to the policy and economic status quo. As local notes from this new front line, this report offers valuable insights gained from people 'in the trenches' as it were, those dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, social injustice and the climate and ecological crisis.

The report is testament to how, when faced with the multiple crises we face, we can witness the resilience of communities, speedy and collaborative responses by local anchor institutions (the local state), and the real possibility of transformative change at the local level. Moreover, perhaps above all else, the report shows how explicitly linking these crises, and showing their causal connections, can co-create novel and effective societal, policy and institutional responses (such as citizens' assemblies and City-level Climate Commissions for example), based on local knowledge and place-specific considerations. The report also points to the importance of seeking out local climate and economic actions that maximise co-benefits, and in that way help generate the necessary democratic support for the required transformative solutions that climate science has indicated will be necessary.

*John Barry*  
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This document reports on the 'Climate Resilience, Social Justice & COVID-19 Recovery in Preston' project. Funded by the Place-Based Climate Action Network (PCAN) with additional support from the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan)'s Institute of Citizenship, Society & Change and Centre for Sustainable Transitions, this comprised a rapid literature review (supported by a webinar and workshop) and a qualitative research project. The project sought to explore how recovery from COVID-19 could create innovative opportunities for climate action and social justice, translating into practice the rhetoric of 'build back better' and serving as a springboard to accelerate action for a future that respects and prioritises the wellbeing of people, places and the planet.

## 2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

### 2.1 COVID-19

COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency of international concern in 2020 (WHO, 2020) and has subsequently proved to be a highly disruptive global crisis - with social, economic and environmental impacts for nations, municipalities, communities, families and citizens. In Preston, the cumulative number of people testing positive since the start of the pandemic is 51,173, with the number dying with COVID-19 on the death certificate totalling 436 at the time of writing this report (27 April 2022) (GOV.UK, 2022a, 2022b).

COVID-19 has highlighted that the health of people is inextricably connected to planetary, economic and societal wellbeing. As Baybutt and Dooris (2021) and de León *et al* (2021) argue:

- As a zoonosis, it has shone a light on humans' exploitation of nature, linked to an unsustainable food system driving habitat and biodiversity loss.
- It has revealed inadequacies in preparedness linked to our globalised economy.
- It has demonstrated how health crises can threaten economic and social stability, and highlight and amplify existing societal inequalities.
- It has prompted expert commentators to argue that the so-called 'pandemic' has in reality been a 'syndemic' - characterised by synergistic interaction between biological, social and ecological conditions and requiring urgent action on the wider health determinants.

It has been strongly argued that the COVID-19 crisis should not be viewed as separate to the climate and ecological crises (WWF - World Wildlife Fund for Nature, 2020, p7):

"the same forces driving an increased risk of pandemics are also exacerbating the current planetary emergency of nature loss and climate change, putting the health of current and future generations at risk."

### 2.2 Place-Based Climate Action

The 2021 report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2021) is widely understood to have signalled 'code red for humanity' (United Nations, 2021) and is a further urgent warning that without urgent action to cut emissions there will be irreversible changes to the global climate system and ecosystems. This warning was reinforced by the Climate Change Conference, COP26 (United Nations Climate Change, 2021) and reiterated in the second two contributions to the Sixth Assessment Report (IPCC, 2022a, 2022b).

Urban areas are home to more than 4 billion people and account for more over 60% of global energy use and 70% of global greenhouse gas emissions (Fanning *et al*, 2020, p3). They also experience huge inequalities in health, education, housing, employment and access to services and opportunities (*ibid*).

While climate change is evidently a global emergency, cities and towns can be understood as testbeds or experimental laboratories for achieving decarbonisation (Stripple and Bulkeley, 2019). This perspective spotlights their role in climate action - both mitigation and adaptation - with commentators emphasising their crucial contribution going forward, complementing national- and international-level action (Muggah, 2000; Sharif, 2019).

The Place-Based Climate Action Network (PCAN) is a five-year Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded project running from 2019-2024. A key aim is to set up climate commissions to transform climate policy into action 'on the ground' to bring about transformative place-based change (PCAN, 2021). Connecting researchers and decision-makers from public, private and third sectors, PCAN comprises five platforms designed to facilitate two-way multi-level engagement between these stakeholders: three climate commissions and two theme-based platforms on adaptation and finance.

A key focus of climate action is the reduction of Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions to meet net-zero targets.<sup>1</sup>

### **2.3 Community Wealth Building**

Community Wealth Building offers localities a common sense and self-reliant way of creating a place-based economy with better outcomes for everyone (Manley and Whyman, 2021, p4) and is defined by the Democracy Collaborative (2019) as:

“a system-changing approach to community economic development that works to produce broadly shared economic prosperity, racial equity, and ecological sustainability through the reconfiguration of institutions and local economies on the basis of greater democratic ownership, participation, and control.”

Focused on 'place' and the 'common good', community wealth building offers a democratic approach to local economic development (Kelly and Howard, 2019, p9). Firstly, it is concerned to maximise the potential of anchor institutions - public sector or not-for-profit organisations that are major employers, have a significant spend and are rooted in their locality - to procure in ways that benefit localities and communities. Secondly, it focuses on extending democratic principles from governance and politics to the economy (Howard, Dubb and McKinley, 2014). Prioritising community-based, democratic and public ownership, community wealth building aims to ensure that wealth created locally is more equally owned and equitably distributed.

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<sup>1</sup> Scope 1 emissions from sources that are owned or controlled (e.g. fuel combustion, company vehicles, fugitive emissions); Scope 2 emissions linked to purchased electricity, heat & steam; Scope 3 all other indirect emissions (e.g. purchased goods & services, sold products, transportation [up & down stream], business travel, commuting, waste, investments, leased assets & franchises) (Osborne, J. *et al*, 2019).

Challenging the orthodox neoliberal economic model, the community wealth building approach proposes “economic interventions” able to “reconfigure the core institutional relationships of the economy in order to produce better, more egalitarian outcomes as part of its routine functioning” (Guinan and O’Neil, 2020, p6). Through facilitating democratic ownership through co-operatives and municipally owned services, the intention is to create a more sustainable, resilient and relocalised economy (Boland, 2014).

Championed in the UK by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES), which drew particular learning from both Cleveland (Ohio, USA) and Mondragón (Basque Country, Spain), community wealth building has been pioneered in a number of cities and towns, including Preston. From 2012, following the financial crash, Preston City Council partnered with CLES and Dr Julian Manley and colleagues at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). The resulting Preston Model has been influential in popularising community wealth building (Manley and Whyman, 2021; Brown and Jones, 2021), with a strong focus on producing a co-operative entrepreneurial ecosystem (Preston Model, 2022).

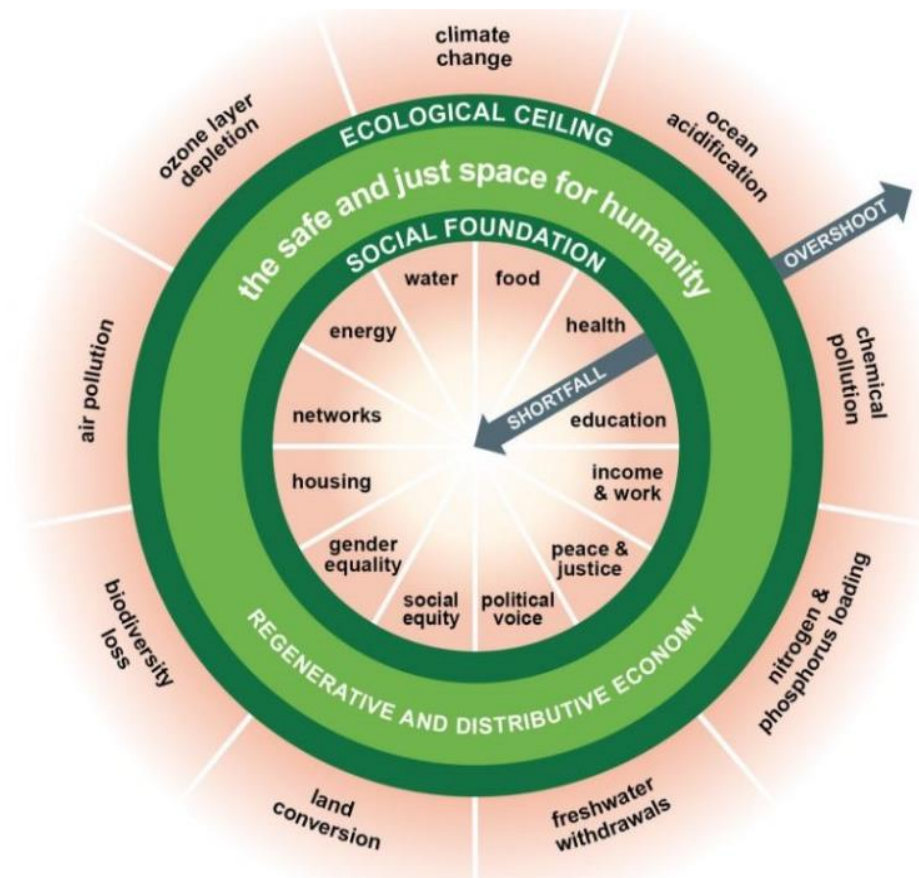
The report ‘*Community Wealth Building 2.0: Leading Resilience and Recovery in Preston*’ (Preston City Council, 2021b) comprehensively brings together the city’s aspiration to achieve social, economic and environmental justice through fostering partnerships between the public, private and community sectors. Building on the City Council’s climate emergency declaration (Preston City Council, 2019), this reflects a growing concern to integrate place-based climate leadership, governance and action within the framework offered by the Preston Model – and prioritises eight themes:

- Progressive procurement of goods and services.
- Commitment to social value.
- A more diverse and democratic economy.
- Decent and fair employment.
- Making financial power work for local places.
- Using the Council’s assets for social and environmental benefit.
- Harnessing the ‘power of place’ through collaboration with other anchors.
- Place leadership.

## **2.4 Doughnut Economics**

First articulated in a 2012 Oxfam discussion paper, Doughnut Economics (Raworth, 2017) challenges mainstream economic thinking and the mantra of economic growth – instead being concerned to enable humanity to thrive within the means of the planet and focusing on the shifts in mindset needed to enable this. This thinking views the economy as “embedded within, and dependent upon, society and the living world” and takes inspiration from ecological, green, feminist, institutional, behavioural and complexity economics (DEAL, 2021). The visual representation of Doughnut Economics proposes a ‘safe and just space for humanity’ between the social foundation and the ecological ceiling. Drawing on the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), the social foundation comprises twelve essential needs for a ‘good life’ that no one should be without – water, food, energy, housing, education, income/work, social and information networks, health, peace/justice, a political voice, social equity and gender equality. Informed by the work of the Stockholm Resilience Institute (Rockström *et al*, 2009; Steffen *et al*, 2015), the

ecological ceiling articulates the nine planetary boundaries that must stay intact if we are to protect the life support systems on which life depends – biodiversity loss, climate change, ocean acidification, land conversion, nitrogen & phosphorus loading, air pollution, chemical pollution, ozone layer depletion and freshwater withdrawals.



**Figure 1: The Doughnut of Social and Planetary Boundaries**  
 Credit: Kate Raworth and Christian Guthier. CC-BY-SA 4.0  
 Source: Raworth, 2017

This Doughnut ‘model’ can best be understood as a compass to guide humanity as we navigate the 21st century and its challenges, prompting us to reflect, reimagine and remake the future. To get into the ‘sweet spot’ – the safe and just space between the concentric rings – we must design economies to be ‘regenerative’ and ‘distributive’ by design (Raworth, 2017, p29). While initially designed to be used at the global level, Doughnut Economics has now been downscaled with cities (e.g. Amsterdam) and other municipalities and local authorities (e.g. Cornwall County Council) experimenting with using it as a decision-making tool to guide and measure socio-economic and environmental progress. This work is being led by the Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL) platform (<https://doughnuteconomics.org>), launched in 2020 to support the translation of the Doughnut Economics concept into place-based action.

Collaborating with C40 Cities, Biomimicry 3.8 and Circle Economy for the Thriving Cities Initiative (TCI), DEAL produced the *Creating City Portraits* report with three flagship cities, Amsterdam, Portland and Philadelphia (Fanning et al, 2020). To create a City Portrait, cities are encouraged to view their locality through four interconnected lenses (Figure 4):





**Figure 2: The Four Lenses of the City Portrait**  
**Source: Fanning et al, 2020, p7**

Fanning et al (2020, pp7-8) describe the process:

“How can our city be a home to thriving people, in a thriving place while respecting the wellbeing of all people and the whole planet?...Taken together, the four lenses of the City Portrait are intended to start and inform a public discussion about what it would mean for your city to achieve local aspirations, while respecting the rights and aspirations of others, and the living planet.”

Amsterdam is the best-known city to have adopted Doughnut Economics, its government having declared that it would use this as a framework for recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and avoid future crises (Nugent, 2021). The city has subsequently worked with DEAL to create a City Portrait with the vision of being “a thriving, regenerative and inclusive city for all citizens, while respecting the planetary boundaries” (DEAL, 2020, p.3).

## 2.5 Building Back Better, Fairer and Greener

Place-based climate action, community wealth building and Doughnut Economics have all responded to and considered the implications of COVID-19, with the consequence that engagement with the three approaches has been accelerated by the pandemic. This interest has been stimulated by a recognition that COVID-19 has offered insights into a possible new future. As Baybutt and Dooris (2020, p2) have noted,

“Following ‘lockdowns’, air travel plummeted, and cities and towns saw greatly reduced motor traffic, an increased uptake of cycling and walking, improved air quality and decreased carbon emissions. People commented on a new-found connectivity with nature and there was an upsurge in...local food growing acknowledging community gardening’s role in helping people to navigate crisis, nurturing emotional well-being and providing access to fresh cultural food. All of this points to the potential for the disruption caused by COVID-19 to serve as a catalyst to the sort of truly transformative change necessary to translate into practice the rhetoric of ‘Build Back Better’.”

In many places, lockdowns have been associated with new patterns of working and learning, and with reduced air and motor travel, increased uptake of cycling and walking, improved air quality, decreased carbon emissions and a new-found connectivity with nature (de León et al, 2021). All of this points to the potential for the disruption caused to serve as a catalyst to the sort of truly transformative recovery necessary to ‘build back better’.

In 2020, the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Green New Deal conducted a 'Reset' Inquiry, consulting 57,000 people. This found popular support for "an ambitious transformation of the UK into a greener, fairer, more equal society as it emerges from the COVID-19 crisis...amid growing concern that the government is attempting to rush the country back to a pre-Covid 'business as usual' model" (Taylor, 2020). This call for a just transition (Pinker, 2020) that integrates commitments to both social and ecological justice is encapsulated in the resulting Policy Report (All Party Parliamentary Group on the Green New Deal, 2020, p.13) concluded:

"We are at a critical juncture, and the decisions that this Government makes in the coming months will lock us into one of two alternative routes. Ministers can either rebuild the existing system with a small amount of green gloss, locking in unacceptable levels of inequality and setting us on a collision course with climate catastrophe, or they can use this moment to lay the foundations for a greener, fairer Britain and set the economy on a path to a modern, post-carbon future."

More widely, a number of commentators have argued that the pandemic offers a hugely important opportunity to re-imagine and create a new, different and better future - with de León *et al* (2021) calling for the disruption caused by COVID-19 to be harnessed and used as a springboard to imagine a new future and accelerate transformative action for human and planetary health and wellbeing (p.e836):

"COVID-19 recovery is about much more than our ability to contain and control disease; it is symbolic of our commitment and courage to challenge the status quo, envision what it means to thrive as people and planet, and go beyond building back better to deliver the future that is wanted and needed."

### **3. THE EVALUATION: AIMS, CONTEXT AND METHODS**

#### **3.1 Aims, Objectives and Research Questions**

The project aimed to explore, both conceptually and with stakeholders from Preston's anchor institutions and diverse communities, how recovery from COVID-19 could translate into practice the rhetoric of 'build back better' and create innovative opportunities for climate action and social justice - examining how disruption from one threat might galvanise momentum to address another.

The project was guided by the following research questions:

- How has the COVID-19 pandemic been experienced by Preston's anchor organisations and communities and what have they learned about their resilience, responsiveness and adaptability?
- Has the COVID-19 pandemic offered glimpses of what a different future - and if so, what might this look like?
- What are the perceived links with and opportunities to address climate change and related ecological and social challenges during Preston's recovery from COVID-19 and what does this mean for organisational and community-led action?
- What potential synergy is offered by exploring the convergence and intersection of place-based climate action, community wealth building and Doughnut Economics, and what might such an integrated city-based approach to fostering human flourishing within planetary boundaries mean for transformative recovery from COVID-19?

## 3.2 Context

Preston, situated in Lancashire in North West England, received city status in 2002 and has a population of 144,147. It is home to Preston City Council, Lancashire County Council and the main campus of UCLan. Preston is the 46<sup>th</sup> most deprived area out of 317 districts and unitary authorities in England. It has 64,800 dwellings, with 82% being owner-occupied or private rented sectors and a higher-than-average proportion in the registered social landlord sector, and more than 15% of households deemed to be living in fuel poverty. While its population is predominantly white, around 20% (28,000) are Black or minority ethnic. General health indices are noticeably lower than the national averages, as is life expectancy at birth for both males (76.7) and females (80.5). The percentage of people in employment, at 65.9%, is lower than the national average of 75.1% and the overall deprivation score is 27.4 compared to 21.8 for England as a whole (Lancashire County Council, 2022; Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, 2022).

Economically, Preston has evolved over time from a market town servicing the textile industry to a city with a diversified economy, heavily reliant on public-sector employment. In 2012, following the collapse of a part-privately financed city centre development, Preston City Council adopted community wealth building as an alternative approach to local economic development. They worked with other local anchor organisations to establish where procurement spend was flowing, while also becoming a Real Living Wage employer. Discovering that £458 million was being spent outside the Preston and wider Lancashire economy, a procurement practitioners' group was formed to re-localise spend. By 2017, over half had been re-localised – with Preston moving out of the 20% most deprived cities in the UK, 4,000 Real Living Wage Jobs being created and unemployment being significantly reduced. In November 2018 Preston was named most improved and most rapidly improving city in UK in the *Good Growth for Cities Index* by Demos and PWC (Partington, 2018), based on factors such as health, transport, work-life balance and skills and employment among its population; for example, unemployment decreased from 6.5% in 2014 to 3.1% in 2017 (CLES & Preston City Council, 2019, pp. 20-21). In 2021, using this same index, Preston was named the best city to live and work in the North West of England. Commenting, Council Leader Matthew Brown stated (Preston City Council, 2021b):

“This success links closely to the significant improvement on our local economy we continuously strive for through the Preston Model and our Community Wealth Building Agenda. Underpinning our support for the economic and social wellbeing of all Prestonians by building a richer and more democratic economy in Preston. I am particularly pleased to see above average improvements in income inequality, jobs, environment, work-life balance and housing affordability.”

Community wealth building continues with further worker-owned co-operatives and plans for an increase in municipal ownership. A recent indication of how community wealth building has helped to ensure that the Preston economy is more resilient to economic shocks is provided by furlough rates: in December 2020, Preston had a rate of 6.9% compared to a national average of 12.5% (McManus, 2021). Strengthening the local economy and ensuring local resilience against global-scale challenges are priorities for Preston City Council. As mentioned in Section 2.3, the report *Community Wealth Building 2.0: Leading Resilience and Recovery in Preston* (Preston City Council, 2021a) sets out the city's aspirations for social, economic and environmental justice through public, private and community sector partnerships. Alongside this, in 2019, Preston City Council declared a climate emergency and committed to a target of net-zero by 2030 (Preston City Council, 2019).

While community wealth building remains the driving framework for Preston City Council and its partners, *Community Wealth Building 2.0* Preston City Council, 2020a) reflects a bolder strategic ambition embracing a commitment to place-based climate leadership, governance and action. While there is no explicit mention of Doughnut Economics, the Council Leader and officers have demonstrated interest in engaging with this framework – for example through participation in the *When Preston Meets the Doughnut* webinar (UCLan, 2021).

### **3.3 Project Leadership and Governance**

The project was led by a core team of three UCLan researchers (Prof Mark Dooris, Dr Alan Farrier, Dr Ioan Charnley-Parry), responsible for overall project management, planning and guiding the research, securing ethics approval and undertaking data collection, analysis and interpretation. The core team was supported by a Project Oversight Group (comprising members from UCLan, Preston City Council, Community Gateway Association and Climate Action Preston), which provided general guidance, advised on sampling and facilitated recruitment of participants from the three participating anchor institutions and the wider voluntary, community and faith sectors. It was made clear to participants that their involvement was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the data collection. Data was stored securely, according to UCLan research governance guidance, and for those in focus groups, anonymity was assured, with no quotes being attributed to individuals. Those in interviews – all senior people from within Preston’s anchor institutions – were asked to consent to data being attributed to them, identified by role, with the option of ‘member checking’ (reviewing attributable quotes).

### **3.4 Methods**

#### **3.4.1 Semi-Structured One-to-One Interviews and Focus Groups (Online)**

In order to hear voices, perspectives and views from selected anchor organisations and Preston’s diverse communities, the primary data collection methods for the project were online semi-structured interviews and focus groups, conducted with multiple stakeholders – where feasible involving community researchers (see 3.4.2). Ten interviews and 12 focus groups were held online with a total of 68 stakeholders:

- Preston City Council – Officers, Councillors: 4 interviews, 3 focus groups.
- UCLan – Staff, Students: 4 interviews, 5 focus groups.
- Community Gateway Association – Executive Team, Staff, Tenant and Independent Board Members: 2 focus groups.
- Voluntary, Community and Faith Sectors (VCFS): 1 focus group.
- Climate Action Preston: 1 focus group.
- Lancashire Enterprise Partnership: 1 interview.
- Preston Vocational Centre: 1 focus group.

It proved particularly challenging to access the voices of community stakeholders, including young people and those in sheltered accommodation. As noted above, it has not been possible to hold the intended participatory stakeholder dialogue events in an online format.

All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber. Using NVivo qualitative data management software, data were

subjected to a two-stage manual thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) using a common thematic coding framework. One member of the research team identified themes within the raw data by using a line-by-line analysis of verbatim transcripts and interpreting their implications in relation to the aims of the research (O'Leary, 2004). Initial analysis and coding were cross-checked and refined by other members of the research team to produce a first draft of the analysis. Two of the community researchers (see Section 3.4.2) took up the opportunity to comment on and offer observations of the initial coding of the data, to be fed into the writing of the final report, with both being acknowledged as contributors. Data coded around the theme of partnerships and collaboration (see Section 4.3.4) were additionally analysed psychosocially by a member of the research team and the analytical discussion is included in Section 5 of this report.

Participants who were interviewed one-to-one and who were identifiable in the data by specific role were offered the opportunity of 'member-checking' quotes to be used in the final report for accuracy and, in some cases, sensitivity (Birt *et al*, 2016).

### **3.4.2 Community Researchers**

Five volunteer community researchers were trained online to work as co-researchers in collecting data and quality checking analysis. These were recruited via the Broadgate Community Connectors Group and Climate Action Preston, using a mixture of email communication and circulation of electronic recruitment posters with contact details. A £50 voucher was also offered to each individual in appreciation of their participation. The initial intention was to recruit an additional cohort of volunteer researchers via Our Lady's Catholic High School, but logistical challenges related to COVID-19 made this impractical.

The research team obtained a template for face-to-face Community Researcher training from colleagues within the Centre for Citizenship and Community. This was developed from a previous collaboration with members of the Preston community. Taking account of the specificity of this research project and COVID-19 related constraints (which required all activities to be undertaken remotely), the training programme was adapted to run online with two-hour sessions run over three weeks.<sup>2</sup> This required ensuring access to and skills in using the necessary technology and negotiating with the community researchers to find a suitable set of times and dates.

The sessions were split into the following topics: understanding the study; interviewing techniques and practice; and planning the data collection. Interest and engagement from the group was high and the focus groups were set up as soon as possible after the training to retain momentum and confidence. Wherever possible, community researchers participated in a focus group with a member of the research team (one-to-one interviews were conducted by the research team only). In advance, they decided who would ask which questions. As noted in Section 3.4.2, the community researchers were also given the opportunity to comment on and offer observations of the initial coding of the data, to be fed into the writing of the final report.

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<sup>2</sup> Community Researcher Training Materials: see <https://pcancities.org.uk/climate-resilience-social-justice-and-covid-19-recovery-preston> and <https://pcancities.org.uk/sites/default/files/Community%20Researcher%20Training%20Powerpoint%20APRIL%202021%20weeks%201-3%20complete.pdf>

### 3.4.3 Rapid Review

The PCAN grant was used to lever additional funding from UCLan's Institute of Citizenship, Society & Change and Centre for Sustainable Transitions, enabling a rapid review of literature and other relevant materials/documentation to be commissioned. Forming a separate report,<sup>3</sup> this contextualises place-based climate action, community wealth building and Doughnut Economics; explores how the three concepts/approaches intersect and relate to each other; and captures and distils learning relating to their local application within the UK.

### 3.4.4 Conceptual Development

Closely linked to the Rapid Scoping Review, an additional strand of the project involved conceptual development, exploring the convergence and intersection of place-based climate action, community wealth building and the Preston Model, Doughnut Economics. With COVID-19 restrictions meaning that data collection has had to be wholly online, it was not possible to hold participatory stakeholder dialogue events, which were intended to facilitate creative engagement, interaction and praxis development.

However, a webinar and workshop helped progress this conceptual thinking, feeding into the rapid review:

- **Webinar 'When Preston Meets the Doughnut'**: Held on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021, 'When Preston Meets the Doughnut: Community Wealth Building and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economics' (UCLan, 2021) was organised under the auspices of UCLan's Institute of Citizenship, Society & Change and attracted 746 registered participants from all over the world. It included contributions from Kate Raworth (Oxford University's Environmental Change Institute and author of *Doughnut Economics: seven ways to think like a 21st century economist*); Cllr. Matthew Brown (Leader of Preston City Council and a key driving force behind the Preston Model of community wealth building); and John Barry (Professor of Green Political Economy and Director of the Centre for Sustainability, Equality and Climate Action at Queen's University Belfast).
- **Community Wealth Building & Local Place-Based Climate Action Workshop**: Held on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2021, this invitation-only stakeholder workshop was convened by UCLan's Institute of Citizenship, Society & Change in collaboration with Queen's University Belfast's Centre for Sustainability, Equality and Climate Action and PCAN. Exploring the intersection of place-based climate action, community wealth building and Doughnut Economics and, the workshop brought together 18 selected stakeholders (including economists, local authority officers, academics and government advisors) to debate the question: "What would community wealth building look like when it integrates local place-based climate action and ecological protection and restoration, and prioritises the wellbeing of the planet alongside that of people and place?"

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<sup>3</sup> Rapid Review: see <https://pcancities.org.uk/climate-resilience-social-justice-and-covid-19-recovery-preston> and <https://pcancities.org.uk/sites/default/files/RapidReview%20FINAL.pdf>

## 4. FINDINGS

Four interconnected overarching themes comprising interrelated sub-themes emerged from the data analysis:

- Impacts of COVID-19 – including: mobility and travel; working practices; mental health and wellbeing; and nature engagement and connectivity.
- Institutional Responses to COVID-19 – including: adaptability; resilience; and safety and support.
- ‘Building Back Better’ and Future Implications for Preston – including: tackling inequalities; buildings and the physical environment; shifting mindsets; rhetoric versus reality – the tendency to return to ‘normal’; and embedding enduring changes in working practices.
- Anchor Institutions’ Strategic Priorities and Plans – including: sustainability and climate action; wellbeing; community wealth building; partnership working; and a focus on the long-term.

### 4.1 Impacts of COVID-19

The challenges of the pandemic have inevitably been experienced in different ways, and the first overarching theme focuses on diverse impacts on individuals, communities, workplaces and organisations. However, common characteristics were the widespread uncertainty and fear relating to COVID-19, combined with restrictions on movement and inter-personal interaction arising from lockdowns and other regulatory or advisory containment measures. Linked to these, cross-cutting sub-themes emerged from the findings: mobility and travel; working practices; mental health and wellbeing; and nature engagement and connectivity.

#### 4.1.1 Mobility and Travel

Restrictions on mobility and travel have been a core feature of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide and a central component of government regulations and guidance in the UK. They were introduced in 2020 in an attempt to reduce or slow the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and were most severe during periods of national lockdown. This not only had direct impacts on the physical freedoms of citizens to travel locally, regionally or nationally but also restricted where and how people could work, socialise, enjoy leisure and recreation and carry out day-to-day activities.

Reflecting on the travel-related changes that resulted from COVID-19 and its containment measures, those in leadership positions within Preston’s anchor organisations emphasised the novelty of the impacts and the capacity to adapt:

“If you look at commuting, you know, at the very beginning of the lockdown...it was a very, very strange world with the vast majority of people at home most of the time, very few people in the city centre, very few people on the roads.” [Interview – Chief Executive, Preston City Council]

“I used to travel all over the world, up and down to London, etc...Now, I haven’t stepped foot on public transport for over fifteen months, and it’s quite extraordinary but I’ve managed to do my job.” [Interview – Vice-Chancellor, UCLan]

These travel-related experiences were highlighted by a substantial number of participants and – counter to the isolation-related mental health influences identified in Section 4.1.3 – were predominantly welcomed and perceived positively:

“When I went out in the first lockdown, the amount of traffic had gone down and there were lots more people out cycling, just generally out for a ride, families and children, and that was a real positive I thought.” [Focus Group – Climate Action Preston]

“I really liked...the lack of cars and the lack of road traffic actually...Just to kind of be able to move about the city in a free way was great and it brings a different vibe I think to communities.” [Focus Group – UCLan #3]

The reduction in car usage, shift in modes of travel and the changes in people’s commuting patterns presented some participants with opportunities to think more deeply about traditional assumptions and reflect on how changes could be embedded during recovery and a gradual societal ‘return to normal’ and what impact reducing travel and the need to travel could potentially have when done at scale:

“I think a big part of it is travel...Even if we were to take ten percent of the way that we structure staff involvement or student engagement...a ten percent reduction from what we were, it’s still probably quite a significant amount of journeys that wouldn’t be happening to get into campus.” [Focus Group – UCLan #1]

“If we looked at, realistically, the University resulting or reducing its Scope Three<sup>4</sup> emissions, there are going to be some really difficult conversations about travel, aren’t there? And people getting on a plane and travelling overseas...” [Interview – Director, Estates & Capital Projects, UCLan]

This led some to consider shifts in travel- and work-related behaviour as a symbol of societal adaptability and potential for positive change:

“I think one of the things that COVID, the pandemic, illustrated to me, was that on a society level we are able to do things, and I think one of the biggest things was that during lockdown we’ve had reduction in transport and that if there’s a will by the government, we can actually get things done.” [Focus Group – UCLan #4]

As explored further in Section 4.4, the implications of these shifts, viewed as a successful demonstration of ‘what is possible’, were clear to a number of participants. They discussed the feasibility of harnessing the positives into the future through both reducing work-related travel and further shifting modes of travel, securing reductions in emissions and thereby impacting positively on air quality and climate change targets:

“We’d never have dreamed to do this. Because that saves you travelling into Preston, me travelling into Preston, it’s saved God knows how many miles since we’ve all been in this lockdown, it can only be better for the planet.” [Focus Group – Councillors, Preston City Council]

“It shows that reducing that traffic, reducing the people commuting into the city, if we can persuade people onto alternative modes of transport, of cleaner modes of transport, then from an air quality perspective, that’s great and, obviously, it helps from a climate change point of view as well.” [Focus Group – Officers, Preston City Council #2]

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<sup>4</sup> See Footnote 1 on p2



However, it was also noted that, along with the reduction in travel per se, the pandemic had discouraged people from using buses and trains due to fear of COVID-19 transmission - and that overcoming this might prove challenging:

“I think one of the things is going to be getting people out of the cars again and back into public transport, and that trust and that confidence to be able to do that.” [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #1]

#### **4.1.2 Working Practices**

Changes to working environments, practices, patterns and expectations were a central feature of the pandemic for many people, resulting from the implementation of regulations and guidance relating to mobility/travel and inter-personal contact. During periods of government-mandated ‘lockdown’, citizens were instructed to work from home where possible and to only ‘go to work’ if and when it was not possible to do so from home. This created substantial challenges and negative impacts for some, while presenting opportunities and positive effects for others.

In the early stages of the pandemic, restrictions were introduced very rapidly, resulting in significant changes without much time for preparation or transition. Despite the speed of change, many people already possessed devices such as mobile phones and laptops that enabled them to conduct at least some of their work remotely:

“I think a lot of people had some equipment already for mobile working, phones, tablets, laptops, so maybe it wasn’t as big an operation as it could have been.” [Interview - Deputy Leader, Preston City Council]

However, it was also noted that home-based working was not possible or appropriate in many instances or for many professions:

“Our service hasn’t really been able to operate from home in the same way. I’ve got a couple of office-based staff who have managed to work from home but joiners, plumbers, electricians, it doesn’t fit in.” [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #1]

For others, the challenge to effective working was less to do with their role than with their home environment and new ‘alternative workspace’, which left many feeling vulnerable and uncomfortable. This again highlights how COVID-19 revealed and exacerbated inequalities - this time related to the type and size of people’s homes and living conditions:

“That just doesn’t work for a whole load of people either. For example, just personally, I have to work in my bedroom, which just isn’t a great environment.” [Focus Group - UCLan #1]

“It’s flagged up inequality, so a lot of students have said that they have felt very exposed in their home environments. Certainly, in meetings, sometimes they feel at a very social disadvantage when somebody’s got a lovely background behind them and they’re perched on the bed from their teenage bedroom because they’ve gone home to study...Interestingly, we [also] have members of staff who’ve gone home to live with elderly parents and are back in their teenage bedroom, working without a desk, sitting on the bed all day, and I don’t think we’ve really taken account of...the fact that people are not always in possession of appropriate spaces to work within their home.” [Focus Group - UCLan #2]

For many, the shift to remote working, with the unfamiliarity and perceived constraints of platforms such as Teams and Zoom, posed challenges to communication and team inter-relationships and dynamics:

“There is a sense in which non-verbal communication does lag on Teams, so you can’t always pick up, irony can be difficult with people that you don’t know very well. There’s all sorts of things that just don’t work very easily when you’re getting to grips with a new team and different ways of working.” [Focus Group - UCLan #2]

“I came into post April of last year, so up until about two weeks ago I hadn’t met my staff in person... I’m only just now starting to go out and about. So, what I would say was the negative impact of that...sometimes it can be more difficult to build relationships: now that we’re meeting face-to-face, issues are surfacing that people feel able to tell me that they couldn’t tell me when we were just talking virtually.” [Interview - Chief Executive, Lancashire Enterprise Partnership]

Further, participants found the sheer number of online meetings tiring - an experience heightened their ‘back-to-back’ nature and by the working day to extend beyond normal hours due to the absence of clearly-defined boundaries:

“I think one of the key factors for Teams is that this is unrelenting. So, you don’t have the small breaks that come with those social connections, you walk between meetings, you meet somebody, you stand and talk for a few minutes.” [Focus Group - UCLan #2]

“I think the other thing that has started to get me down, is all these Teams meetings, mainly because there’s no break between them. Even if you try and put breaks in, people can see your status, people think that, you know, if you haven’t completely filled your calendar up, that people can talk to you.” [Focus Group - UCLan #4]

Among those individuals and work teams who did spend an increased amount of time working and/or studying from home, or where it became their working norm, isolation was raised by several people as a prominent effect of lockdowns and restricted working models, as was its impact on wellbeing (as explored further in Section 4.1.3):

“Working in isolation at home, it has had an impact on one or two members of the team, they’ve been struggling. So, I think it’s the impact on wellbeing of people working remotely, not feeling part of the team communication and the interaction with team members.” [Focus Group - Staff, Community Gateway Association]

“I live in a flat, I had no outside garden space and lived on my own...At first it was quite difficult going from being in a shared office, so being around people constantly, to then being stuck in this room, on my own all the time. And...I’m not ashamed to admit this, but I’d find myself, some afternoons, just crying...I don’t think I realised how much things were actually affecting me subconsciously, because it is a big change going from being around lots of people to then being completely isolated.” [Focus Group - UCLan #4]

As discussed in Section 4.4.5, alongside the negative impacts arising from changed working practices, participants felt that remote working had opened up new opportunities and had positive effects - related to reduced commuting time, increased productivity, the flexibility to engage in more activities and a more appropriate work/life balance:

“I think my productivity has probably increased twenty to thirty percent.” [Interview - Chair of Board, UCLan]

“I haven’t really had to adapt that much, except to have meetings on Teams and that’s been fine...You do save a lot of time and...I work more efficiently at home.” [Focus Group - UCLan #1]

“One of the other positives has been the ability to participate in many more events because the travel cost and travel time is taken out...People have been able to engage in far more staff development opportunities...and you can drop in and out of something without having to commit to a whole two days...if it was an in-person event.” [Focus Group - UCLan #2]

Linked to this, there was also some anxiety and a sense of sadness at what the future might hold when moving away from the current situation:

“It’s meant that I can be at home when my children come home, I can do more baking because I can quickly go between meetings and get things out of the oven and what have you. And it’s almost the other way round, that the thought of going back to campus is filling me with anxiety, it’s just like, I’m not sure I want to do that just yet. I do, but...there is going to be a sense of loss for me when I go back to campus of...the ability to...be at home actually, for the children when they come home, that’s what I’m going to miss.” [Focus Group - UCLan #3]

### **4.1.3 Mental Health and Wellbeing**

The COVID-19 pandemic has both created and exacerbated personal and societal challenges - one of the most prominent impacts being on health and wellbeing. Alongside the debilitating physical impacts of the virus itself, influences on mental health have also been significant:

“I think that we are seeing, across society and in the University, the negative consequences of lockdown and the stress, depression and mental health challenges that this has caused.” [Interview - Vice-Chancellor, UCLan]

“I think...this lockdown has affected students’ - and adults’ - mental health, I do. But...we’re a centre with a difference and we pride ourselves on the pastoral side and the wraparound support we give these young people.” [Focus Group - Preston Vocational Centre]

As noted in Section 4.1.2, one of the most prominent issues related to mental health for participants was that of isolation related to lockdown restrictions. Government-mandated limitations on mobility/travel and inter-personal interactions were introduced at various times following the onset of the pandemic, affecting people’s social and work lives. These restrictions included who was permitted to go ‘out’ to work and who was required to work from home, representing a significant functional shift in working norms that remained in place for many over a significant time period.

Those interviewed reflected on the mental health consequences of lockdown-related isolation and an increased lack of movement beyond the immediate vicinity of homes - both for employees within anchor organisations and members of Preston’s communities:

“Not travelling, so I’ve been kept at home more...For the first few months it was a bit novel but then got boring. And...definitely an impact on mental wellbeing over the last three or four months.” [Focus Group - Executive Team & Board Members, Community Gateway Association]

“It’s impossible to generalise, but a recurrent piece of feedback, is that the combination of isolation from friends, family, colleagues, normal activities, has exacerbated a number of existing mental health [issues] that people have had.” [Focus Group - UCLan #3]

Others commented on the wider implications for community relations and cohesion arising from the isolation and related mental health issues being experienced in communities:

“Essentially, mental health and loneliness, that sort of isolation is a real issue for the community. And, obviously, mental health will play out in many different ways and impact on services...When you come to think about antisocial behaviour and neighbour disputes, all those sorts of things that are often interwoven with people’s poor mental health.” [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #2]

Another issue raised by several participants was the increased anxiety, worry and fear experienced during the pandemic. The source and nature of this varied between participants, from anxiety about the virus itself, to anxiety about interacting with people beyond their immediate household, to concerns about returning to normal working arrangements following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions:

"I have asthma, COVID absolutely petrified me to start with and I didn't want to go out and I didn't want to go and do any of the shopping and I didn't want to see people...to the point where my family just thought I was being more paranoid than was really healthy, for me and for them. And I think...in terms of the University then, I actually found that quite difficult, I didn't bring that to any of the conversations that I had with my colleagues or with my line managers, it was something that I kept to myself." [Focus Group - UCLan #4]

"Even though many are welcoming the loosening of restrictions, as I personally am, there's also some understandable anxiety about returning to campus, re-engaging with the world, how safe is it really?" [Focus Group - UCLan #3]

An indicator of the impact of the pandemic on people's health has been a rise in demand for counselling services. The anxiety, stresses and concerns generated or exacerbated by the spread and risk of COVID-19 and resulting containment measures have led not only to increases in referrals, but also to an increasing severity of cases:

"I'm seeing increases in the demand for the staff counselling service, which...is not the only indicator we have but I always think is an important one." [Focus Group - UCLan #3]

"What we're also seeing is an increase in the proportion of those cases that the counsellors are rating at the more severe end of the scale." [Focus Group - UCLan #3]

The shift in working patterns and norms resulting from lockdown restrictions was identified by many as a regular, sometimes daily, source of stress - although one that affected different people in different ways:

"I've had one or two meetings in recent days that have made me reflect on the fact of how much this has affected different people in different ways. And psychologically, people are dealing with it differently and...some people have naturally adopted the technology, for example, as a means of communication, more than others." [Focus Group - Staff, Community Gateway Association]

Many participants found the increased number of online meetings to be draining or overwhelming, emphasising the necessity of scheduling breaks into their working day:

"I need to design in some space because I found myself just doing back-to-back, to back-to-back and after about four or five of them, you're Zoomed out, you know." [Interview - Chair of Board, UCLan]

Interacting with mental health impacts, physical effects from an increase in screen time were also raised as an important impact on wellbeing:

"There is Zoom fatigue as well, you know. I think as we approach summer, there's a point, particularly in me anyway, where...my eyesight is just failing...looking at a screen constantly." [Focus Group - UCLan #3]

#### **4.1.4 Nature Engagement and Connectivity**

Despite the numerous health challenges faced by individuals throughout the pandemic highlighted in Section 4.1.3, the creation of new work patterns and environments and a stronger 'rooting' in place due to travel-related restrictions were understood to have

resulted in a stronger engagement with nature and natural environment. Participants reflected on their and other people's relationship with the outdoors, green spaces and the wider environment, and the implications going forward:

"When we were in full lockdown...the roads were so quiet, you could see nature returning. There were lots of videos online of animals coming back into towns and cities and taking over villages...Even just sat in my front garden in an urban area, you could kind of see it and feel it...nature creeping back and it was fantastic and you just want to see more of it." [Interview - Deputy Leader, Preston City Council]

"Promoting physical and mental wellbeing through horticulture, we have tried, whether it be the volunteers we bring in or family and friends...I feel like people appreciate the green spaces and parks a lot more." [Focus Group - VCFS]

This nature connectedness was closely linked to an increased focus on outdoor exercise, which was similarly highlighted as a positive outcome for both physical and mental health:

"A lot of local communities found more out about what was on their doorstep, in terms of outdoors, the environment...While indoor leisure, indoor sport, was all shutdown, then people were seeking to go and explore further afield." [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #2]

"One of the few good things from the pandemic is less car use...And I think people are exploring and appreciating the natural environment a lot better...I was by myself really and the only thing I could do was go for a walk. So, when I was actually three stone heavier, what would be a twenty-minute walk became a two hour walk because there was nothing to do during the day." [Interview - Leader, Preston City Council]

Reflecting on this, participants commented on a perceived improvement in work/life balance, with more time in the day resulting from not having to travel:

"People seeing the benefits of having free open green space...I think after the first lockdown, people were trying to go back running, ride their bike, they had a better work/life balance because it wasn't necessarily, quickly get into work, quickly get home." [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #2]

Furthermore, for some, the experience and habit of taking daily outdoor exercise was able to be transferred to their return to their workplace:

"What I've realised is not only can I cycle to work if I choose to...but I could actually walk there and back. Because the only form of exercise at one point was one walk a day or one outing a day and that really got me into some very different habits, about work/life balance and doing things differently." [Focus Group - UCLan #3]

However, the experience of having to spend more time in at home and being more tied to one's immediate locality also highlighted the stark inequalities profiled and exacerbated by the pandemic, specifically the difficulties facing some people that did not or could not as readily access green or pleasant outdoor spaces:

"I think there's been a real sort of inequality in experience around COVID. If you live in a house and you've got a garden, which I'm very fortunate to have, my experience of lockdown, particularly in the first one, was actually quite pleasant. I didn't have to travel, I could sit outside because the sun was shining, and I had colleagues who didn't have any of that, you know, who lived in a flat with no outdoor space and on their own. So, I think isolation was a big problem for quite a few people." [Focus Group - UCLan #4]

However, as highlighted by a Preston Councillor, this served to spotlight the importance of parks and green spaces as a key responsibility of local government:

“The other thing that I would say is really, really important that’s come out of this, is the love of our green spaces and parks for health and wellbeing. The amount of people who are using those now just to get that fresh air because not everybody has a garden or any green space...Parks...[are] usually one of the things to go because of [local authorities] not having the money. But I think people have recognised the importance of health and wellbeing...and preventative measures to keep people healthy going forward.” [Focus Group - Councillors, Preston City Council]

## **4.2 Institutional Responses to COVID-19**

As indicated within Section 4.1, the challenges of the pandemic have been experienced by organisations as well as by individuals and communities. The second overarching theme concerns responses of anchor institutions participating in the study, which have, unsurprisingly, varied - reflecting differences in size, remit and structures. However, key sub-themes to emerge from the data related to adaptability, resilience, and safety and support - primarily relating to how organisations have responded, although also reflecting community-based experiences.

### **4.2.1 Adaptability**

As already highlighted, lockdowns and related regulations and Government guidance restricted mobility/travel and inter-personal interaction at various points during the pandemic. The need for institutions to adapt was imperative if they were to continue to function effectively in the face of these unprecedented restrictions.

Alongside the negative impacts arising from changed working arrangements, as discussed in Section 4.1.2, many participants reflected positively on the adaptability of organisations and individuals, revealing a strong sense of agility and capacity to rise to a challenge:

“I think it was quite impressive how we managed to go from in-person campus to virtual campus within, well days...we managed to flip from one to the other.” [Focus Group - UCLan #1]

“Sheltered schemes have been well managed, like I say, we’ve had no outbreaks there. We’ve opened an extra care scheme in the middle of the pandemic. We’ve housed I don’t know how many homeless people. We’ve got all our IT kits, we’re in a fabulous place to where we were twelve months ago, IT wise. I think I’d give us ten out of ten, to be quite honest, in all three, resilience, response and adaptability, A plus.” [Focus Group - Staff, Community Gateway Association]

“Typical of our organisation, and I’m sure many organisations like us, our people respond to that challenge and have done a wonderful job over the last twelve to fifteen months in maintaining services, to enable the people of Preston at least to receive some service level that they would need in their daily lives...with [necessary] changes in those service delivery models.” [Interview - Deputy Chief Executive, Preston City Council]

Participants highlighted the collective response of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) departments within an incredibly short space of time as a particularly laudable feature of organisational adaptability:

“Yes, it has shown us to be resilient and adaptable...We had the technology there, we just didn’t use it initially, because we didn’t have to use it and now it’s become part of the norm.” [Focus Group - UCLan #2]

“We had not one remote way of working when this hit, please believe me, we didn’t. So, all those things had to be loaded and quite a lot of them could be done remotely by our beautiful ICT department, very efficient they are.” [Focus Group - Councillors, Preston City Council]

Commenting more broadly, some participants reflected on the lasting benefits arising from the rapid transition to putting in place and/or utilising the digital infrastructure:

“I think the University has actually developed in a number of ways, particularly in digital learning and the use of the digital infrastructure.” [Interview - Vice-Chancellor, UCLan]

“I work in inter-professional education, we’ve massively expanded that nationally and within our own University, because we were freed up from room bookings and timetables. So, much easier to bring people together from different perspectives, from different groups, and get them working together, so that’s been really positive.” [Focus Group - UCLan #2]

“I suppose one of the good things from a Preston City Council point of view, is the flexibility that we’ve got out of this, in relation to working from home. Obviously, not everyone can work from home and there’s been people who have not been able to work from home, but it’s shown that we can be flexible as a council.” [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #2]

It was also noted that the agility highlighted in relation to institutional adaptation had also been a cross-cutting feature within communities and society as a whole:

“...using that example of how people did pull together and did, you know, completely changed their lifestyle to help each other to get through something really urgent, just kind of proves that as a society we can do it and we can be unselfish about things, you know. We can go into isolation or stop going to work. And it’s been very, very, very difficult for a lot of people but we’ve managed it.” [Focus Group - Climate Action Preston]

#### **4.2.2 Resilience**

Participants reflected on the resilience demonstrated in the face of the pandemic, a feature closely related to the rapid adaptive capacity and agility of Preston’s anchor institutions discussed in Section 4.2.1. For many, this resilience revealed the ‘human face’ of organisations, with staff and other stakeholders acting collectively to respond to unprecedented challenges:

“I think there’s been fantastic resilience shown, you know, among the staff particularly. People have been deployed to other areas of the business and picking up new things...as new services have needed to be put on to assist the customers through.” [Focus Group - Staff, Community Gateway Association]

“Our team was redeployed...90 percent of our workload was answering calls on the vulnerable support line, and that was on and off, nearly twelve months...There was poverty, mental health, crisis points, there was a lot of work with charities and like referring people to food banks and things like that. Obviously, we had no training in this, we were all just muddling through it together as best we could.” [Focus Group, Officers, Preston City Council #2]

“I believe the University provided the facilities and the staff were resilient...I think the resilience is coming from the staff side, not the University.” [Focus Group - UCLan #2]

Reflections upon the manner in which people came together during the pandemic to a far greater extent than usual, demonstrating the capacity for collective resilience and co-operation, were seen as highly encouraging features of how both communities and institutions had responded to the pandemic. Notions of 'coming together, 'teamwork' and 'putting differences aside' were present in these reflections:

"You saw that pulling together where there'd never been before. And I think the beginning of that was the clap for carers and the NHS... I remember going out...and getting to talk to people that I'd never spoken to for ages." [Focus Group - Councillors, Preston City Council]

"Before it began there was no real sense of community. When the pandemic began, you saw lots and lots of people pulling together that wouldn't ever before. And a good example of that actually, is that in councils it's very political and we've got Labour, Liberal, Conservative, and quite often there's a load of that bah-hoo politics and that argy-bargy type thing. When the pandemic started, we started having a three-way meeting." [Focus Group - Councillors, Preston City Council]

"I think the fact that we've actually been able to carry on right the way through and deliver the majority of our services, whether it's face-to-face or online or even over the phone, I think just shows our resilience really, you know, our determination really, because we have such a great team and a lot of support out there." [Focus Group - VCFS]

Across multiple sectors, the resilience demonstrated by institutions, staff teams and workforces took the form of a positive and solution-orientated mindset in facing and 'stepping up to' an acute challenge and continuing to function effectively and as close to normal as possible under restrictive circumstances:

"I think that UCLan is sometimes at its best when it's managing a crisis or a significant challenge. I think we 'step up to the plate' incredibly well and the University pulls together...We put the students and the staff experience at the heart of what it is we're trying to achieve and we look after each other. And I think we've demonstrated that hugely in the last twelve months or so." [Interview - Vice-Chancellor, UCLan]

"I think that's down to our mindset... 'what do we need to do to continue as best we can normally? How can we make things happen?' There is still a corporate plan to deliver, so a mindset that we continue as normal, you know, we adapt and we show resilience and we change things to deliver the same outcomes." [Focus Group - Staff, Community Gateway Association]

"As we've gone through the pandemic process, with lockdowns and then reopening and lockdowns and whatever, I think it's showed their resilience has been quite good really. Because as a young person, you're a bit fearless really and a bit risk-taking, so you're just back on and see what comes and adapt around it, and I think that's what they do." [Focus Group - Preston Vocational Centre]

As well as appreciating and applauding the impressive agility and resilience of institutions, workforces and communities, participants reflected on the gravity, scale and impact of the pandemic. In doing so, they acknowledged the enormity of the efforts put in place and questioned their long-term viability:

"It's the same few people trying to cover...things. So...I suppose the resilience is there but...it's not sustainable because those people are getting exhausted." [Interview - Director, Estates & Capital Projects, UCLan]

"We didn't stop any of our waste and recycling services...[because] there's nothing more important to the average resident than getting their bins emptied every week...And that was incredibly difficult for the service at the time, because I think we forget the enormity of the first lockdown and the impact that it had." [Interview - Chief Executive, Preston City Council]



“The environmental protection team I manage...deal with things like noise complaints, antisocial behaviour, that type of thing, and they’ve had a massive increase in workload...a fifty percent increase...And obviously we don’t get any additional resources for that.” [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #2]

### 4.2.3 Safety and Support

A core focus of institutional responses to the COVID-19 pandemic was safety – of staff, students, customers and the public. Closely aligned with this was a concern to provide appropriate support. The importance of reducing COVID-19 transmission and maintaining healthy, safe and supportive spaces strongly influenced the strategies, behaviour and actions of organisations:

“Firstly, the health and welfare of staff and students because it’s been sort of mission critical and I think we’ve organised really well for that.” [Interview - Chair of Board, UCLan]

“I think it’s also important to note that we have put the safety of our colleagues and our tenants first and foremost...at the forefront of everything we’ve done throughout.” [Focus Group - Staff, Community Gateway Association]

“The first thing was to keep the people safe and try and get those really important messages across.” [Focus Group - Councillors, Preston City Council]

The increased imperative of ensuring safety inevitably posed practical and financial challenges for Preston’s anchor institutions:

“I think grounds maintenance is a great example. We have teams of people normally, who would work in a van together, going round, driving round sites, and we said, we’re not doing that. We can’t do that for the safety of our operatives, we can’t have six of them in a van.” [Focus Group - Executive Team & Board Members, Community Gateway Association]

“It’s cost us a lot of money that, in one sense, we can ill afford...the things we’ve had to put in place for safety reasons.” [Interview - Chair of Board, UCLan]

There was also awareness and frustration at the environmental impacts arising from safety being prioritised. Alongside frustration about the waste from disposable masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE), one participant reflected on the increased vehicle emissions resulting from the introduction of safety measures:

“Because you can’t socially distance in vehicles, we’ve had to hire extra vehicles in, which means that’s obviously had an impact on diesel usage and CO2 production and all the other things that goes with using fleet.” [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #1]

Although safety has undoubtedly become a central priority across all organisations, some participants drew attention to the challenges that their operations presented and the perceived and actual risks to staff and clients:

“There were...colleagues that had to continue to go into our tenants’ homes...to make sure our tenants and those homes remained safe, which...was a real issue...in terms of, ‘did our staff want to go in there, did our tenants want to let them in there and could we get our hands on all the PPE equipment to allow us to go in there safely?’ So, lots of different challenges you kind of forget about.” [Focus Group - Executive Team & Board Members, Community Gateway Association]

Alongside safety, organisations also prioritised support to staff, clients and other stakeholders, as highlighted in in Section 4.1.3. In the context of the University, one participant highlighted the challenge for support services posed by the so-called ‘infodemic’:

“And the more colleagues, I think, pick up stories in the media, some of which are well-based, some less so probably, all of those things are really...challenging us to provide better, more immediate and more extensive support for colleagues.” [Focus Group - UCLan #3]

### **4.3 Anchor Institutions’ Strategic Priorities and Plans**

A third overarching theme to emerge from the data - closely linked with the focus on ‘building back better’ and its future implications for Preston (see Section 4.4) - was a focus on anchor institutions’ strategic priorities and plans. Within this, sub-themes were: wellbeing; sustainability and climate action; community wealth building; partnership working; and a focus on the long-term.

#### **4.3.1 Wellbeing**

Individual and community wellbeing was understood to have been embedded in the strategies of anchor institutions over many years. For Preston City Council, wellbeing and a focus on fairness, equality and social justice were identified as key components of community wealth building and the Preston Model:

“The leader, Matthew Brown, emerged onto the cabinet with that community social value responsibility some years ago and has progressed up to leadership...That area of work is a...fundamental agenda item for the cabinet...community wealth building. Making sure that there’s an inclusivity, fairness...all of those things are fundamental to the policies that we develop and, therefore, the business that we deliver.” [Interview - Deputy Chief Executive, Preston City Council]

For UCLan, it was also argued that top-level ‘buy in’ to prioritising wellbeing as a key agenda for the organisation was vital:

“[Wellbeing] affects everything.... it affects how we design buildings, how we do staff workload models, how we run the timetable, what kind of air conditioning we provide, whether we provide car parking, so it covers everything. So, it really does need to be a whole Vice-Chancellor’s Group approach. I mean the Vice-Chancellor’s very committed to it, very committed to it, from a personal perspective, and that helps lot.” [Interview - Chief Information & Infrastructure Officer, UCLan]

For Community Gateway Association, wellbeing was viewed as intrinsic to their mission and remit, operationalised through focusing on areas such as employment, skills development, budgeting, food security and social support:

“[Our wellbeing commitment is] about supporting individuals, it’s about supporting communities, but also supporting partners...First and foremost, we’re here to look after our tenants in our communities, to provide them with a good house and a supportive service.” [Focus Group - Executive Team & Board Members, Community Gateway Association]

In the focus group with Preston City Councillors, some ‘real world’ examples were given about how health and wellbeing was being promoted from multiple angles within the community, and how the pandemic has strengthened this focus:

“Things like the green spaces, parks...getting our housing stock right, so that people are not living in dire places that are not fit to live in, making sure that they also take into account climate change - all those things are now beginning to speed up quicker than they were before because of going through COVID. And the will to try and get people well, it’s more proactive...rather than reactive.” [Focus Group - Councillors, Preston City Council]

The wellbeing of the community was often intertwined with issues of sustainability in the discussions. For example, when discussing the focus on sustainability with the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP), this was linked to their 'Social Value Charter' which sees taking care of the most vulnerable in the community as intrinsic to the sustainability of that community:

"The Lancashire Enterprise Partnership Board recently agreed to produce a new social value charter and one of the reasons for doing that was, we do capture the social value we create but that's not the same as driving as much social value out. It's capturing what would otherwise happen. And a classic example would be, you know, we might be focused on creating the job but actually, the real value comes from who gets that job. And are we doing enough work around making sure that those furthest from employment, for example, are getting the right sort of employment opportunities." [Interview - Chief Executive, Lancashire Enterprise Partnership]

The responsibility of anchor organisations to look after community wellbeing came into even sharper focus during the pandemic, in that it was seen as an urgent need. Reflecting on this, there were concerns about the lack of resources to cope with expectations and demand:

"We don't have enough staff to do the stuff on wellbeing and health...for the last five or six years the expectation has been that local authorities, and I know this is certainly the case at Preston, that we will do more for less, and we're absolutely at capacity, we can't do anymore and that's the problem. It doesn't really matter how integrated things could be or how much value you can add...if you don't have the resource, and it isn't just about the staff, it's about the resources." [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #1]

#### **4.3.2 Sustainability and Climate Action**

Sustainability was understood to be a key strategic priority guiding the future direction of the three anchor institutions involved in the research study. Participants suggested that action on the climate and ecological emergencies were now fundamental to their future plans and would need to be built in to all their policies.

For UCLan, the Vice-Chancellor and Chair of the Board emphasised the key role of the new strategic plan and related sub-strategy, and the significance of the Board's oversight and governance in leading radical action:

"We're about to launch the new strategic plan that takes the University up to 2028, deliberately to coincide with its 200th Anniversary, and we will include a priority area and sub-strategy around future proofing and the importance of sustainability...This is incredibly important, as part of what is going to attract students is our environmental responsibility and commitment." [Interview - Vice-Chancellor, UCLan]

"The [University Board Environment Working Group] is looking at all aspects of best practice in other universities, other organisations, what are we doing, what should we be doing? It's absolutely fundamental...We're talking about the future of the human race here, I can't think of anything that could be more important. And it's also equally important, I think, for our staff...and students, to understand the issues...I think there are whole areas where we should really be much, much more radical." [Interview - Chair of Board, UCLan]

Visible and explicit accountability for keeping to the promises made was identified as key to the success of the strategic implementation process:

"[Sustainability is] one of the key themes in our new University Strategy...[which] means that we can overtly be challenged on it. We're going to make statements that are going to be in the public, that the Vice-Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor's Group will be held accountable to by the Board, and we only put things in there that are going to happen." [Interview - Chief Information & Infrastructure Officer, UCLan]

Alongside the positive assertions of senior leaders within UCLan, staff and students in focus groups questioned the research profile of the University, suggesting that it could focus more strongly on the creation of sustainable materials and better ways of recycling. They also raised a range of issues relating to operations and services, including procurement and supply chains, energy, travel, food and campus design. In relation to food, it was argued that the university needs to encourage students to consume less and buy local, with an increase in plant-based food. In relation to campus design, there was some criticism relating to the lack of investment in green space:

"And so, I feel like if there was a way for UCLan to have more green areas, then that's fantastic for both wellbeing and the environment. I don't know how this was missed, frankly." [Focus Group - UCLan #1]

Preston Council's leadership highlighted how it has demonstrated its commitment to prioritising climate action by declaring a climate emergency, incorporating commitments within its refreshed Community Wealth Building Strategy and creating a dedicated cabinet post supported by a working group:

"When we were looking at the refresh [of our Community Wealth Building Strategy]...we declared a climate emergency." [Interview - Chief Executive, Preston City Council]

"The cabinet has expanded its number and has created a Climate Executive member...with responsibility for climate related matters. And she will also be responsible for...the ruling administration's climate change policies." [Interview - Deputy Chief Executive, Preston City Council]

"There's also been a climate change task and finish group and they've got a report coming out fairly soon...We're a bit disappointed, obviously, COVID has delayed that...But with climate change and things like green energy and stuff like that, you've got to do the right thing at the right time to maximise the effect." [Interview - Deputy Leader, Preston City Council]

However, while welcoming this commitment, other participants from the Council questioned the feasibility of meaningful action:

"I'm not disappointed but I'm yet to be convinced that having a cabinet member for climate change will actually make any difference at all. Because the cabinet members don't do the work, it's the staff that do the work, and if we don't have the staff and the resource to back that up, then I'm not exactly sure what it is we're going to achieve, to be honest really." [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #1]

Noting the financial challenge, participants from Community Gateway Association highlighted the inclusion of climate action within plans going forward, with a major focus being incorporation of energy efficiency within new build and retrofit (see Section 4.4.2):

"There have been brief discussions about [the climate agenda] featuring heavily in our next corporate plan...I think financial support is one of the biggest concerns, the amount of work that we need to do will be exceptional." [Focus Group - Staff, Community Gateway Association]

Participants from Preston Vocational Centre, a subsidiary of Community Gateway Association, echoed this commitment:

“I think we’ve always had an eye on sustainability and environmental impacts...We pride ourselves on as much recyclability as we can...We have a waste transfer system... And [we ask] ‘do we actually need that much resource?’...So, we’ve always had that look at how we run the centre that way, impact wise.” [Focus Group – Preston Vocational Centre]

While sustainability and climate action has been increasingly embedded in the strategy of many anchor organisations, there was surprise that climate change was not made explicit in Lancashire Enterprise Partnership’s strategic framework:

“Lancashire Enterprise Partnership has a strategic framework, which was in place before I joined...Health and wellbeing is one of the key enablers of the entire economic framework. What’s interesting for me is climate change was not mentioned in any of that and if we could redo the draft, climate change would be very high as a strategic objective. And I don’t think it was necessarily an oversight, I think it was just so embedded in everybody’s psyche it was like, well of course we’re concerned about climate change, we don’t need to set it out, but I think we do.” [Interview – Chief Executive, Lancashire Enterprise Partnership]

### **4.3.3 Community Wealth Building**

As noted in Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2, community wealth building, as encapsulated in the Preston Model, is a key strategic driver for Preston City Council, with commitments to climate action, sustainability and wellbeing being embedded within the refreshed strategy ‘Community Wealth Building 2.0’:

“Our drive for localism and community wealth building is absolutely...fundamental to what we are...We wanted to make sure that climate change was embedded [in Community Wealth Building 2.0] and given proper due status...[We’re] trying to embed environmental consciousness into everything...” [Interview – Chief Executive, Preston City Council]

However, it was accepted that there were certain elements of the Council’s operations that were hard to change, mainly for financial reasons, and that priorities such as climate change were having to compete with what was perceived to be their ‘core’ business.

The Preston Model is perceived as an opportunity to do something different, by influencing partners and putting alternatives in place – in areas such as procurement, employment and the broader democratisation of the economy. Although it tended to be participants from Preston City Council that highlighted the significance of the City’s approach to community wealth building, the significance of UCLan, Community Gateway Association and other anchor institutions having ‘signed up’ to the endeavour was also strongly noted:

“We’re clearly seen as a critical part of the city, an absolutely genuine anchor institution. The University and the city are very, very closely interwoven – and our location and the fact that we’re the only University in Preston gives us a real presence.” [Interview – Vice-Chancellor, UCLan]

“As a community-based organisation, anything that we do that benefits the community is supporting that Preston Model...employment opportunities, employment skills that we give our tenants, creating that wealth locally...What we do complements that Preston Model naturally...Also, with a lot of the procurement exercises we do, we’re always conscious of the Preston pound and making sure we choose local suppliers where we can.” [Focus Group – Staff, Community Gateway Association]

“Supporting local independent businesses and shops...Yes, I totally agree...[the Preston Model is] about supporting the local economy.” [Focus Group – Preston Vocational Centre]

It was argued that, while the work of many in the voluntary, community and faith sectors supports the Preston Model, organisations on the ‘coal face’ are often too distracted by seeking short term funding in order to survive to develop their understanding and engagement and get fully involved:

“We were approached at the beginning to get more involved but sometimes it can be quite difficult in the voluntary sector, because of the funding aspect...But I really would like to explore the Preston Model a little bit more and how we can kind of work within that because we need to be sustainable.” [Focus Group – VCFS]

While there was a general consensus that Preston’s commitment to community wealth building and climate action pre-dated COVID-19 and had, in many ways, been delayed rather than accelerated by the pandemic, it was also acknowledged that the Preston Model has the potential to play a key role in framing and helping address COVID-19 recovery and galvanise climate action. Specifically, there were suggestions about how anchor organisations could work together to operationalise aspirations related to community wealth building – in areas such as recycling and energy:

“UCLan can work with the Preston community in identifying better ways of managing waste and trying to kind of recycle the waste and creating job opportunities for them. So, identifying new innovative ways of processing them and coming up with new materials or new products, which the community can then take forward and start to...really generate economy in a smaller scale at the start.” [Focus Group – UCLan #1]

“We’ve got opportunities for further funding to community wealth building, which will look at...democratic companies within the renewable energy sector, potentially, and retrofitting, or the clean energy sector...[and] we’re having conversations with the NHS as an anchor about...production of energy for the community.” [Interview – Leader, Preston City Council]

Bringing together conceptual framing with policy and practice, several participants highlighted Doughnut Economics, suggesting that its adoption would offer an important opportunity to strengthen the Preston Model into the future, strengthening its focus on the wellbeing of people, communities and the planet:

“The different future, for Let’s Grow Preston, is to follow the principles of Doughnut Economics. Rather than...measuring wealth, let’s look at wellbeing. Let’s encourage the economy to be driven by people feeling valued, by people having a voice and being heard and aspirations growing...Being able to grasp this positive glimpse of a future where communities are more cohesive, where people feel valued, are more resilient, are stronger...if you build stronger more resilient communities, then climate change will become part of the solution...Everything should be done with consideration to the planet and how what we do affects ‘glocal’ [global/local] change.” [Focus Group – VCFS]

“The more I’ve learnt about the Preston Model, the more hopeful that makes me...our council has a view that’s beyond just our own political self-interest...They’re talking about, on the whole, Doughnut Economics...I think that all feels very positive. If that’s what we’ve got at the centre of it, then that’s great. I think the difficult thing is we’re coming out of the whole neoliberal situation that we’ve been in for a long time, and we need something to replace it...And I think things like the Preston Model are very good because it is about seeing us as a community, rather than seeing us as individuals.” [Focus Group – UCLan #5]

This thinking resonated with a comment made by a UCLan participant, highlighting the importance of framing the University's strategic plan in regenerative terms:

"Just being sustainable so that you're not using up too many resources is actually no longer good enough because so much has been destroyed already. So, people now talk about the whole thing of being regenerative and bringing back natural resources...[For] this new strategy...we should do the right framing." [Focus Group - UCLan #1]

#### **4.3.4 Partnership and Collaboration**

The resilient response to the pandemic has shown how success has often relied on or been strengthened by partnerships with other organisations, some already in existence, some newly forged. Anchor institutions viewed this collaborative approach as essential in pursuing common strategic priorities such as climate action, sustainability and wellbeing:

"I think we do work really closely with Preston City and Lancashire County...I think the Student Centre sort of embodies that because realistically, Preston City [Council] would never have had the money to transform the city like that. We have regular conversations...with Preston City [Council], about the Local Plan...I don't think there's any point in us doing our own things individually. If we could do things collectively and work together it would be better really and I think there is a desire to try and pull together." [Interview - Director, Estates & Capital Projects, UCLan]

Participants from multiple sectors discussed how the pandemic had galvanised partnership working across organisations, breaking down traditional silos, cutting through 'red tape' and encouraging differences to be put aside:

"It was the level of co-operation, so competition suspended for a period of time and there was kind of co-operation between businesses for the greater good I think, which was really helpful." [Interview - Chief Executive, Lancashire Enterprise Partnership]

"It has brought many community organisations together, collaborating not competing." [Focus Group - VCFS]

"Even though local authorities perhaps can have a reputation for silo working or...being a bit bureaucratic, I think...they've demonstrated the absolute opposite. I mean what people have said [and done]...has been extraordinary." [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #2]

In part this has been enabled by practical issues, such as the realisation that technology could be used to a greater extent to bring organisations together (see Section 4.1.2):

"I think that's been one of the...things, embracing technology...Zoom meetings like this. It's been quite helpful for even doing wider meetings...You can reach a lot more people quite easily without having to...congregate in a room. So, there's been...[climate] working groups with the NHS and Lancashire-wide So, yes, definitely a better sort of collaboration." [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #2]

While appreciating the challenges involved and the need sometimes to adjust and compromise, they highlighted how the experience of responding to one emergency spotlighted the need for continued collaboration into the future - particularly pertinent in collectively facing up to the climate and ecological emergencies:

"People have, over the last twelve months, worked together more, that's what I've kind of felt and sensed...This is a massive, massive, enormous [challenge] and no single organisation is going to solve it on their own. It's an opportunity, but you've got to get past all the politics and the personalities to make it happen, which is easier said than done." [Focus Group - Executive Team & Board Members, Community Gateway Association]

"[We're] trying to be as absolutely ambitious as possible but understanding that, particularly working with partners, you can only move at a certain pace." [Interview - Chief Executive, Preston City Council]

For Preston City Council, the wide-ranging commitment to community wealth building was seen to offer an important focus and opportunity to use the pandemic as a catalyst to work in partnership with other organisations to address inequality:

"Working with the other anchor institutions, the hospital, the University, places like that, to try and get better wages, getting poorer people into better jobs, to raise the floor levels of poverty...We really need to make better inroads into it and COVID has highlighted that." [Interview - Deputy Leader, Preston City Council]

Looking ahead at how the anchor institutions' commitments to sustainability and climate action could be effectively implemented, there was again a recognition that partnership working is essential:

"I think collaboration's going to be key as well, particularly around the carbon neutral agenda and meeting those targets. Right across the sector, there's going to be collaboration, in terms of procurement, to gain efficiencies to actually make this work and make it deliverable." [Focus Group - Mixed, Community Gateway Association]

Furthermore, participants highlighted the importance of this collaborative approach including the voices of 'ordinary people' through the use of deliberative democratic mechanisms:

"And to be able to move forward, we need to listen to those climate assemblies that are made up of regular people because politicians do not always have the right answers." [Focus Group - UCLan #5]

#### **4.3.5 Focus on the Long-Term**

The data suggested that the experience of COVID-19 has encouraged anchor institutions increasingly to think long-term and embed this perspective into their strategic planning. For some, this had been a challenge pre-pandemic, but the crisis had shone a light on the need to move beyond short-term decision-making:

"We need to move away from these one-year budgets, to be looking at least three to five years, and this longer-term projection about growth or shrinkage because otherwise... we're never going to have time to plan to do it differently. It's always knee jerk..." [Interview - Director, Estates & Capital Projects, UCLan]

"We've always had the ability to plan and prepare for the un-encountered, but I don't think we'd anticipated the pandemic...the long-term impact. We probably anticipated short-term things but long-term... I think we've learnt from that and going forward, the contingency, I think we're more prepared and resilient to do that." [Focus Group - Preston Vocational Centre]

While many found it challenging to think beyond the immediate crisis posed by the pandemic, an example was given in the voluntary, community and faith sectors of how the pandemic was used to develop and refresh their long-term strategy:

"When we did our initial risk assessment last year, we did do a roadmap to take us through to the end of the year...It was a bit firefighting initially, because it was all new to everybody...It's been a really good learning curve in that respect. Yes, we do have a long-term strategy, we just amend it to adapt to the current situation." [Focus Group - VCFS]



For some, the experience of the pandemic combined with the imperative of looking ahead to the challenge of climate change prompted a review of organisational strategy to ensure this was 'fit of purpose' into the future:

"Quite a bit of what was in our...five-year corporate plan, which takes us from '19 to '24... COVID came in the early, mid-point of that. We've had a good look at that plan to make sure...it's still deliverable...And I think...the vast majority of what's in that plan... is still appropriate, is still relevant." [Focus Group - Executive Team & Board Members, Community Gateway Association]

#### **4.4 'Building Back Better' and its Future Implications for Preston**

A key focus of the research study was an exploration of how COVID-19 might serve as a springboard and accelerator for building a better future. While this thinking did not resonate with all participants, the fourth overarching theme is 'building back better' and its future implications for Preston. Key sub-themes to emerge were: tackling inequalities; buildings and the physical environment; shifting mindsets; rhetoric versus reality - the tendency to return to 'normal'; and embedding enduring changes in working practices.

##### **4.4.1 Tackling Inequalities**

Reflecting on how COVID-19 could serve as a catalyst to build a better future, Preston City Council's senior leadership emphasised the importance of tackling inequalities, including those relating to health and wellbeing. While noting that these were already priorities, they acknowledged that the pandemic has spotlighted and exacerbated them:

"We knew already...the health inequalities, but now they're massively amplified by COVID. And that gives us a real focus and an opportunity to try and make better inroads on something that we really haven't made big inroads on, you know, people living twenty years longer in one part of the city than in another, it's unacceptable." [Interview - Deputy Leader, Preston City Council]

"There's lots of areas that we are reinvigorated about...Public health and health inequalities are a really important area...[with] an enormous bearing upon people's quality of life and life chances...Linkages to educational disparities and housing, living conditions, economic outcomes and everything else, are of enormous significance...And everything we do, in terms of environment, whether enabling cycling, walking, public parks, open spaces...all the recreation, whether linked in to the provision of arts, culture, sporting activity, things that improve physical and mental health...it should be a holistic approach." [Interview - Chief Executive, Preston City Council]

Significantly, the pandemic catalysed a collaborative approach at the grassroots level, which looked set to continue and evolve to the benefit of disadvantaged communities:

"Rather than just throw money at the problem of food insecurity and food poverty, Preston City Council contacted the local grass roots organisations to ask how they could help them to help their communities. As a result, a Food Hub Network was created...Preston is in a great position to build upon the connections and the collaborative work...and make significant changes to those living in poverty and insecurity with chaotic lives." [Focus Group - VCFS]

"Right at the very beginning there were very real shortages [of food]...that put a lot of people in a real collaborative mode...We've now got...about 50 community organisations sharing waste food and they're just collaborating...to the benefit of communities and those most in need...We acknowledge the exhaustion and the fatigue that is there within the community...but still, there's a real appetite from those organisations to look at new things beyond COVID, beyond the crisis provision of food...working together at a neighbourhood level to look at...sustainability of food and all of that. So, I think there's a real opportunity that has arisen now." [Focus Group, Officers, Preston City Council #2]

#### 4.4.2 The Built Environment

When asked about the rhetoric of 'building back better', a number of participants talked about buildings and the wider physical environment. At a macro level, Preston City Council's Chief Executive reflected on how the pandemic had amplified existing challenges, and emphasised the need to consider implications for the city as a whole:

"We've been contemplating, what does COVID recovery mean, in all sorts of different areas, in terms of...how can we improve the lives of the most disadvantaged, to how can we ensure that the city has a viable future? [Also], what will the city centre be moving forward - the challenge of the high street? So...we wanted to position Preston as an accessible, affordable, attractive city, with great connectivity. [Interview - Chief Executive, Preston City Council]

With regards to local housing, participants from Community Gateway Association highlighted the inclusion of climate action within their plans going forward but also raised concerns about how both new housing and retrofitting that takes account of the climate emergency is going to be funded:

"One of our objectives...in our corporate plan is to make our homes more energy efficient...So, we're in the throws right now of assessing, what does post-2024 look like and, in reality, what does, climate change, carbon neutral by 2050 look like?...We know, indicatively, it's going to be a very big deal and a very expensive deal but...we're not in this alone and the rest of the sector and the rest of the country is in it." [Focus Group - Executive Team & Board Members, Community Gateway Association]

"We've got quite an ambitious development programme...a thousand properties by the end of 2024, new homes. And, obviously, we are building those to a greener standard...[but] also trying to understand what we need to do for our existing 6,500 [homes]...In terms of testing out modern methods of construction and, you know, various other kind of green initiatives, we're not taking the lead on that. But we are taking a keen interest in it and we are monitoring to see what's happening and trying to use that learning from other people." [Focus Group - Executive Team & Board Members, Community Gateway Association]

In relation to energy, insulation and retrofit, there was a recognition of the need to tackle inequalities and address fuel poverty - but also to invest in training and skills development, and create opportunities to create jobs in worker co-operatives (a key feature of the Preston Model - see Section 4.3.3):

"We've got to be cautiously optimistic but I still think it's systems and it's investment longer term that is of enormous importance. And we know that those in fuel poverty will have the least well insulated homes...The challenge for retrofit...I mean, the damage that was done by the Coalition Government in 2010 by removing or diluting the building regulations, in terms of energy efficiency, an absolutely appalling decision...And retrofitting is an absolute...nightmare...to try and get it right and to be done cost effectively" [Interview - Chief Executive, Preston City Council]

"We're very keen on working with Community Gateway, as a start, to look at retrofitting of properties and, potentially, would that be good for...worker owned companies to do that, [to] really push the boundaries of Preston Council." [Interview - Leader, Preston City Council]

For UCLan, an unexpected by-product of COVID-19-related lockdowns was the opportunity to build its new flagship Student Centre and Square - already designed with wellbeing, environmental sustainability and community cohesion as key principles - with minimal disruption:

“In terms of ‘building back better’, physically, the development of the Student Centre and Square has taken place over the last twelve months...We have benefitted because we have had the space to do it while relatively few people have been on site. This has given us a chance to develop our campus in ways that will enhance academic activity and the city as a whole.” [Interview – Vice-Chancellor, UCLan]

Reflecting on the future and the benefits of reducing the size of its ‘estate’, participants saw space utilisation as a key challenge for UCLan in the context of blended working, hot-desking and modes of delivery going forward – highlighting the tensions between reducing carbon emissions and preserving a sense of community:

“Universities...don’t use space very efficiently...So it’s...creating a lot of carbon and we’re not really using it and it costs a lot of money and we don’t really have enough money to maintain it... Surely we can, as a smart organisation, find better ways to utilise space? And there’s always been a pushback and, I have to say, largely from academics, about why we possibly couldn’t do it any other way because it’s the way they’ve always done it.” [Interview – Director, Estates & Capital Projects, UCLan]

“As far as the campus is concerned, I suppose that it sets up a real tension in me. I really don’t want to give up my office but maybe I should, you know?...Prior to the pandemic there was a lot of empty space...There are some real tensions there between having a community that has a physical centre of gravity and [other] modes of communication.” [Focus Group – UCLan #2]

#### 4.4.3 Shifting Mindsets

While some participants did not readily make a connection between the experience of the pandemic and the potential this offered to think creatively about a different future, others highlighted the unique opportunity presented and the urgent need for organisations to harness their learning from responding to the COVID-19 crisis so as to be better equipped to respond to the longer-term climate and ecological emergencies. This was seen to relate to the imperative of embedding a lasting shift in mindsets that prioritised urgent action on climate change and sustainability.

UCLan participants pointed to these shifts in how people are thinking and emphasised the need to harness this to enable truly transformative change:

“I think one of the challenges...is to get [the university] to keep that *thinking different* mentality for when they come back. And, you know, one of the things that I’m nervous about...It’s a once in a lifetime opportunity, this, to do something *different*. But if we don’t seize the opportunity...we’ll just drift back to how we were.” [Interview – Director, Estates & Capital Projects, UCLan]

“I think it’s changed the way people are. I think it’s changed the way they think and that’s an immense opportunity around health, wellbeing, families, sustainability, education, communication...Even though I would never have wished for this horrible, terrible experience, I think that it can be transformational in a positive way going forward.” [Interview – Chief Information & Infrastructure Officer, UCLan]

While there was a general consensus that Preston City Council’s commitment to climate action pre-dated the pandemic, having been galvanised by its declaration of a climate emergency in 2019, there was a strong sense that COVID-19 offers the biggest opportunity that organisations such as the Preston City Council have had to alter their working practices to deliver services in a more sustainable way:

"I mean I think it would be almost criminal if we didn't look to change things as a result, because if we can't learn from a worldwide pandemic that's lasted eighteen months and still isn't finished, then I'm not sure what it would take for us to learn and change." [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #1]

Responding to comments about individuals returning to old habits and behaviours, one UCLan student highlighted the gap between individual and organisational mindset change, advocating for organisations and governments to lead and embed change on a macro scale:

"I do think it needs systemic change and we need attitudes changing, rather than individuals making changes...we need radical investment in things." [Focus Group - UCLan #5]

Reflecting on individual and community action, a member of Climate Action Preston argued that one key factor in the ability to foster change is a community's ability to access information and take collective action, rather than feeling isolated and helpless:

"One of the things is about this awareness... [It's] about people knowing what they can do...We know that there's been some discussions about having a Climate Emergency Centre in Preston and it seems such a good idea. Because people generally are hearing... 'there's a climate emergency', but then because it feels...so big, where do you start? What can you do as an individual, what can you do as a community, what can we do as a city?" [Focus Group - Climate Action Preston]

At the point when interviews and focus groups were conducted, a number of participants felt immersed in the uncertainty of the situation, making it difficult to engage with questions about what the future may look like:

"I would like to think it's not, you know, the old normal, that we have a kind of different normal going forward. But then, what is normal going to look like? And I don't think any of us really know right now." [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #1]

"There's still that uncertainty around all this I think...what comes next, what does it mean?" [Focus Group - Executive Team & Board Members, Community Gateway Association]

Coupled with this uncertainty, there was also a sense that the rebuilding process will take longer than many are willing to accept:

"It's been a huge collective trauma for everyone and it's going to take years just to get over, in my opinion, if not a decade, potentially." [Interview - Leader, Preston City Council]

#### **4.4.4 Rhetoric vs Reality - the Tendency to Return to 'Normal'**

Counter to this focus on positively embedding a radical shift in mindset that prioritises climate action, some participants expressed scepticism and disappointment about the gap between Government rhetoric and reality:

"I think the challenge now, as we come out of the pandemic...is that this government is focused very much on getting back to business as usual, even with the rhetoric that Boris talks about, with *let's build back better*, it's really, let's build back the same...let's go back to how we were." [Focus Group - UCLan #4]

"It's a shame that we're not building back better really and even as we're opening up, we're prioritising opening up airports and flying before we can even go to the pub locally, it doesn't make any sense." [Focus Group - Climate Action Preston]

Many participants noticed an increase in people becoming more involved in their local community and putting more time and effort into their local community (e.g. community gardening in local green spaces). There were concerns about how this would be affected by a particularly rapid 'return to work'.

"It just shows you that, you know, people care about their local area, people will be more involved, but it's how do we continue that and sustain it? Because my worry is, if people do return to the normal, back to the office, we want every bit of blood out of you, and then by the time you get home you've no energy to be involved in your local community, then we will lose that momentum." [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #2]

At an institutional level, there were also concerns that the focus on ensuring a rapid 'return' and 'recovery' would mean that staff and students or other clients won't have the reflective space to learn from their experience and consolidate positive changes:

"I feel rather sceptical that actually some big lessons and so on will follow, not only because of the 'back to normal' but also, because I don't think people will give themselves the mental space and time to really reflect and think about what we'll learn and what will change." [Focus Group - UCLan #2]

Towards the end of the data collection period, as some of the lockdowns started to ease, participants began to describe the pandemic as a missed opportunity. In doing so, they raised concerns that, while those already concerned about sustainability and the environment may make adjustments to their way of living, many individuals just wanted to return to 'normal':

"It will have [an impact] for those who are on the edge of considering their carbon usage and impact on the environment, I'm sure it's made them reflect. But are people prepared to fly less? Well, they've got to at the moment because there's no choice...but from discussion with colleagues at work, most people can't wait to get back on a foreign holiday and whatever else." [Interview - Chief Executive, Preston City Council]

#### **4.4.5 Embedding Enduring Changes in Working Practices**

In talking about 'building back better', participants identified changes to working practices as a key area offering potential to re-orient priorities and integrate a commitment to climate action and carbon reduction. In reflecting on possibilities going forward, the first observation related to increased skills and confidence in using technology:

"I don't think that we're going to go back to doing everything face-to-face. I think we will still use some of those online tools to do things that are a little bit different and...wider reaching. And...[people] who were less comfortable using technology have been surprised at how easy they found it to, for example, become familiar with Zoom...So, I think it's given people the opportunity to explore those kind of skills that they didn't even know they had or they'd been too anxious to try. That's been a positive thing." [Focus Group - Climate Action Preston]

Second, participants noted that the necessity of virtual technology has challenged assumptions about productivity, 'presenteeism' and what could and couldn't be done online:

"What everybody's learnt from COVID...was that some of our people...could do an amazing job and you'll never see them. So, it's built up...a level of trust in others and in themselves, and it has also broken down some myths about the fact that you've got to be present to perform. So, I think that we've managed to crack that nut...nobody will stand up, I don't think, and say, you can't do these things digitally now." [Interview - Chief Information & Infrastructure Officer, UCLan]

“On a working practices basis, I think it’s been a real wake-up call for the Council, in terms of how our services can be delivered.” [Focus Group - Officers, Preston City Council #1]

Third, participants celebrated how the use of technology has enabled networking on a global scale, enabling engagement and linkages that would not formerly have been envisaged or realised:

“The main impact for me has been on networking and I’m sure everyone’s experienced this, is that suddenly it opened up such huge potential to speak to so many different people in so many different places...And that has kind of engendered lots of really lovely connections that wouldn’t have been made and projects and links that may not have happened before.” [Focus Group - UCLan #3]

Fourth, one UCLan participant offered a personal reflection about how embracing virtual technology has been of enormous value to people with disabilities:

“From a personal perspective, it’s been genuinely a dream come true for me because I’m deaf and everyone now has their own personal captions on Teams...I think some disabled people have been quite significantly impacted.” [Focus Group - UCLan #3]

And fifth, the glimpses of a possible new future, characterised by a reduction in traffic and noise, reduced emissions and increased nature connectivity, were viewed as important catalysts for embedding changes to working practices long-term:

“So, I think, if people can do their jobs without travelling [and] using carbon fuels, then I think it’s got to be done, as long as they’re equally productive...So, I think...[hybrid] working is going to be one or two days a week in the office, instead of five, unless you really, really have to be in for some reason. So, I think it would be massively good for the environment.” [Interview - Deputy Leader, Preston City Council]

It is important to highlight that the experience of using virtual technology was not the same for every organisation. For example, Community Gateway Association specialise in dealing directly and in-person with some of the most vulnerable members of the community. For them, a nuanced approach was seen to be essential, harnessing virtual technology for activities such as Board meetings, but returning to face-to-face working with their tenants:

“We work with funders, we work with treasurer advisors, they travel the country to have the meetings with us. I think those meetings work equally well, you know, remotely, and what will, therefore, have a big impact on the environment with the less miles travelled and it will save time as well. So, I think the different ways of working, I think some of them we will take on going forward.” [Focus Group - Staff, Community Gateway Association]

“We’re not going to be an organisation that goes significantly remote in the way we work. We are still going to be a face-to-face organisation...I think there’s a danger that these working practices can mean organisations fall behind an IT screen and...I think we will continue to have a very personal and face-to-face relationship with our tenants and our communities.” [Focus Group - Executive Team & Board Members, Community Gateway Association]

Linked to this, one participant highlighted the complexity of decision-making, noting that online working is not necessarily ‘the solution’:

“I feel often, there’s an assumption that online doesn’t cause emissions...[and] I think about all the thousands and thousands of hours of Zoom calls that have been recorded and are sitting in all of these huge data factories that actually have huge emissions...And if it’s winter and everybody’s sitting in a separate house heating it, while being online, that’s, of course, also huge emissions. My worry, I think, is that we might get the overall story wrong.” [Focus Group - UCLan #1]

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings in Section 4 revealed a number of perspectives related to: impacts of COVID-19; responses to the pandemic and its impacts; institutional strategic priorities and plans going forward; and 'building back better' and future implications for Preston. While a diversity of issues emerged under each of these headings, it is pertinent to discuss key interconnected cross-cutting themes that permeated the findings.

### 5.1 Wellbeing

First, it is perhaps self-evident that wellbeing was a primary consideration for both institutional and community stakeholders. While the impacts of COVID-19 on health were most immediately physical, the mental health consequences have been multifarious and societally far-reaching, prompting organisations to consider their 'support offer' for employees. Alongside the fear and uncertainty related to the virus itself, the regulatory and advisory restrictions associated with rapidly changing patterns of work and social contact were linked to boredom, loneliness, anxiety and depression – and it is widely recognised that the pandemic has triggered new, and exacerbated pre-existing, mental health conditions (Xiong *et al*, 2020; O'Connor *et al*, 2021). Furthermore, as Baybutt and Dooris (2020, p1) comment:

“Both physical and mental health effects of COVID-19 are in part mediated by social wellbeing – with the impacts of containment measures strongly influencing patterns of interaction and connection.”

For some, the lack of a dedicated or appropriate office space at home, the blurring of work/home boundaries, the relentlessness of online meetings and the constraints on in-person interaction were widely perceived to be debilitating and difficult to deal with (Williams, 2021). For others, the work-related changes, though in part challenging, were welcomed – perceived to offer more flexible family-friendly working schedules, reduced commuting and increased productivity. Likewise, though people struggled with the restrictions imposed on mobility and travel, they generally liked the changes associated with reduced motor traffic (see Section 5.4). These contrasting experiences illuminated how the same global health event could be experienced differently, dependent on socio-economic and personal circumstances, working preferences and personality – reflecting wider research (Ipsen *et al*, 2021; Stansfield and Shah, 2021). This points to the value of organisations taking a reflective and nuanced approach to 'recovery', harnessing the positives of remote working and space rationalisation in ways that prioritise decarbonisation and tackle climate change, while also meeting the needs of employers, customers and employees. Such an approach requires a focus on finding 'win-win' solutions but may also necessitate difficult decisions that acknowledge the need for trade-offs between conflicting priorities.

Reflecting on the findings, it is interesting to note that participants' responses resonated strongly with the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' framework (Aked *et al*, 2008). People clearly found it challenging not *connecting* in-person, but demonstrated remarkable agility in adjusting to virtual communication; participants talked about the value of *being active*, of taking up regular exercise as a way of establishing a routine to help cope with boredom and anxiety – often outdoors, anecdotally reinforcing the existing evidence about the value of 'green exercise' (Rogerson *et al*, 2019); there was a focus on re-engaging with 'place',

*taking notice* of and enjoying nature and green space; people celebrated the strengthened connectivity within communities and the spirit of solidarity and *giving* (South *et al*, 2020); and, looking to the future, there was a focus on *learning* from the experience of living with and responding to COVID-19 and applying this learning to future challenges.

Wellbeing was also a key focus for participants when talking about anchor institutions' strategic plans, already embedded in their thinking but further spotlighted by the pandemic. Stakeholders recognised that wellbeing determinants are wide-ranging, emphasising the role of income, food security, education, skills development, employment, housing, green space and building design, and highlighting connections to agendas such as inclusion, fairness, social value and sustainability. When reflecting on opportunities to 'reset' and do things differently in the future, a number of participants likewise highlighted the centrality of wellbeing, alluding to the Preston Model's community wealth building approach and to Doughnut Economics. This focus on 'wellbeing economies' has been prominent in commentaries exploring notions of 'building back better and fairer', with Büchs *et al* (2020, p4) arguing that recovery from COVID-19 must prioritise "human health, wellbeing and ecological stability."

## **5.2 Tackling Inequalities**

A second cross-cutting theme was a focus on equity and fairness and the need to tackle inequalities in society. As noted in Section 5.1, participants highlighted how their own experiences, and the experiences of colleagues and 'clients' (members of the public, tenants, students), had differed - determined not only by individual characteristics, but also by personal and socio-economic circumstances (Bambra *et al*, 2020). For example, type of employment fundamentally affected how possible it was to work remotely, with many in lower-paid jobs without their own transport not having the choice to avoid daily interpersonal contact. Likewise, people's home environment affected how effectively they could 'socially distance', how comfortable and confident they felt using remote technology to work or learn, and how 'trapped' they felt - influenced by whether they had a garden or other outdoor space. Recognition of how inequalities were made visible during the pandemic was also highlighted when discussing institutional responses, with participants reflecting on how the people's roles, combined with shifting patterns of behaviour, created a range of work-related pressures. One example was refuse collection, impacted by increased levels of food and household waste (Everitt *et al*, 2021; Filho *et al*, 2021).

Reflecting on these contrasting experiences, it is apparent that the pandemic has revealed and amplified entrenched social, economic and political inequalities. Marmot *et al* (2020) argue convincingly that the experiences of COVID-19 need to be viewed in relation to pre-existing patterns of inequality and disadvantage, noting that the people and places that were struggling pre-pandemic have been most negatively impacted and face the greatest risks of entrenched poverty and disadvantage into the future.

This thinking is reflected by Baybutt and Dooris (2020, p1), who note that: COVID-19 should be viewed not as a pandemic, but as a syndemic, characterised by "the synergistic interaction between biological, social and ecological conditions" and "strongly influenced by the wider determinants of health and health inequalities." Looking forward, it is also apparent that, without an explicit commitment to tackling these injustices, the long-term societal-level impacts of COVID-19 are likely to further exacerbate inequalities. As Bambra *et al* (2020, p967) argue:



“It is vital that this time, the right public policy responses (such as expanding social protection and public services and pursuing green inclusive growth strategies) are undertaken so that the COVID-19 pandemic does not increase health inequalities for future generations.”

In discussing future-facing strategic priorities and plans, participants emphasised that Preston’s existing commitment to community wealth building signalled a firmly established commitment to tackling disadvantage and pursuing fairness and social justice. This commitment was acknowledged to exist against the backdrop of financial constraints and national-level policy often oppositional to local aspirations. Since the data collection took place, HM Government (2022) has launched its ‘Levelling Up’ programme, aimed at spreading opportunity more equally across the UK. It is noteworthy that the National Audit Office has simultaneously published its own report scrutinising the decisions and policies of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (Davies, 2022), which criticises the lack of an evidence-informed approach, concluding (National Audit Office, 2022):

“The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has not consistently evaluated its past interventions to stimulate local economies, so it doesn’t know whether billions of pounds of public spending have had the impact intended. With its focus on levelling up, it is vital that the Department puts robust evaluation arrangements in place for its new schemes to promote local growth.”

A social justice lens was seen as pivotal to the notion of COVID-19 recovery (see Section 5.4), with participants highlighting the need to tackle health and related societal inequalities in ‘building back better’ – echoing calls for a ‘just transition’, which arguably requires an “ambitious social and economic restructuring that addresses the roots of inequality” (Pinker, 2020, p9). Over the past few months, spiralling energy bills and increasing concern about fuel poverty among those on lower incomes, heightened further by the war in Ukraine, have served to heighten the importance of this thinking (ONS, 2022). Furthermore, they emphasised how the collaborative culture engendered during the pandemic (see Section 5.3) had spotlighted and sought to address the needs of disadvantaged communities in relation to priorities such as food security.

### **5.3 Co-operative and Collaborative Working**

A striking and perhaps surprising outcome of the data from an affective perspective is the overall sensation of positivity, hope, ambition and aspiration for a better future based on the experiences of facing COVID-19 challenges. One of the ways this was manifested was in the persistent and frequent reference to collaborative working – a further cross-cutting theme highlighted by participants in relation to workplace and community impacts, institutional responses, strategic priorities and the idea of ‘building back better’. Importantly, this was often seen to be innovative, with participants from both UCLan and Preston City Council officers welcoming the shift from competition to co-operation. These observations echo findings from research examining local government responses to the pandemic (Gore *et al*, 2021, pi), which emphasised that:

“The far-reaching impacts of the pandemic have meant that local responses have required the involvement of not just official government bodies, but also organisations in all segments of society...not just between different public service providers alongside long-established voluntary sector bodies, but also drawing in a myriad of neighbourhood mutual aid groups, concerned local businesses and members of the general public.”

Although reflections were often couched in strategic terms, for example regarding opportunities from business development, there was also a sense that such collaboration

has the potential to become more than this – concerned with relationship building and consolidation, catalysed by a fresh perspective emerging through the pandemic and related containment measures. For some, this shift in ways of working was viewed as an opportunity for ‘radical’ change, not the usual language of major institutions.

This same feeling was repeated in business and political spheres. Whereas competition has been the main mode of operation within the business world, the movement towards collaboration was remarked upon as an extraordinary achievement for the greater good. Similarly, councillors welcomed the fact that COVID-19 had served as a stimulus for local politicians to work together across political boundaries, perceived to be a massive step. Just as the norm of ‘competition’ in business was disrupted, so was the norm of ‘political rivalry’ based on ideology and party membership. This shift towards co-operation was seen to go beyond politics, with reflections on ‘clap for carers’ pointing to a new-found humanity in, and rekindling of, relationships. A similar perspective, even more pronounced, was evident in Community Gateway, the local independent housing association. Though already committed to working co-operatively with tenants, the pandemic reinforced this approach and revealed a sense of hope and ambition going forward. The cohesive effect of collectively facing up to the crisis was celebrated and referred to in terms of learning for the future, reflecting a genuine desire to move beyond ‘politics’ and ‘personalities’.

The celebration of this new-found collaborative spirit and broadened sense of agency and empowerment resonates with reflections of Morgan *et al* (2022) regarding the collaborative ‘connected community approach’ and of South *et al* (2020, p307), who argue that:

“Looking forward to the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, a collaborative approach to rebuilding community health, wealth and wellbeing will be needed...Many local authorities will have developed partnership arrangements with the voluntary and community sector that have withstood the test of this pandemic, having demonstrated capability to respond quickly to community needs...This is an opportunity to create a new way of working and to realise the ambition of a more community-centred system.”

Instead of a central figure/group/authority being expected to take on the full burden of responsibility for an action related to an aspect of community, it was noted that passive acceptance of routine responsibilities became shared and active among many – with community and voluntary groups willing and keen to play a part and work as part of a team. The spirit of collaboration and togetherness thus became an accepted part of working for the common good. Reflecting on participants’ voices, it was noteworthy that, whereas organisations already experienced and sophisticated in terms of group relations (such as the housing association and some voluntary sector bodies) expressed a strong desire to learn from the experience so as to strengthen collaboration into the future, others seemed more fearful that this enhancement of relationships could be transient, with the cohesiveness only possible in moments of crisis. Looking to the future, this collaborative culture is pertinent to how Preston prioritises a ‘wellbeing economy’ (Büchs *et al*, 2020) and develops a place-based approach to addressing the climate and ecological emergencies: as Yuille, Tyfield and Willis (2021, p4) note, “A collaborative and aligned approach is needed both within councils (between officers and politicians, different departments, and political parties) and with wider stakeholders.”

## 5.4 Seizing the Moment: COVID-19 as a Springboard for Transformative Change

The fourth cross-cutting theme was a recognition of the urgency of 'seizing the moment' - ensuring that the 'once-in-a-lifetime' opportunity offered by COVID-19 is used as a springboard to reflect, reset and chart a new course for the future. This points to a recognition that, in the very disruption caused, crises offer the potential to accelerate transformative change (World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2020, p4):

"Like all crises, the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to be a catalyst for positive change. Clearly, in the short term, its consequences are overwhelmingly negative...But precisely because it is so disruptive a shock to our economic and political systems, there is also the possibility that COVID-19 will help accelerate the emergence of...profound market shifts with exponentially positive consequences for people and planet."

As already noted in Section 5.1, when discussing impacts of COVID-19, participants highlighted not only the 'negatives' but also the 'positives' - the decreased noise and pollution; an opportunity to enjoy walking and cycling in a safer and more conducive environment (Harrington and Hadjiconstantinou, 2022); and the time and space to take exercise and reconnect with nature and the outdoors (O'Brien and Foster, 2020). Alongside these observations, they also reflected on how people's experiences of these 'benefits' was mediated by societal inequalities, as discussed in Section 5.2. Similarly, in discussing institutional responses to the pandemic and strategic priorities going forward, participants highlighted the importance of building on the remarkable agility and adaptability shown by consolidating the things that had worked well. For example, the environmental benefits of utilising remote technology and reducing work-related commuting were widely recognised; the decreased number of motor vehicles and resultant decline in noise, air pollution and vehicular emissions were seen as broadly positive for both human wellbeing and climate change mitigation; and enhanced engagement and connectivity with parks and green space was identified as a benefit to be taken forward. In short, the government-mandated restrictions to mobility and social interaction served to reveal an alternative to simply 'returning to the old normal' and highlight the potential and widespread appetite for system change. However, it was also apparent that organisational stakeholders, while generally endorsing the need to prioritise the climate and ecological emergencies, were often not clear about the detail of what appropriate strategic and operational responses should comprise; and, at a community level, awareness of and prioritisation of climate change and environmental these issues was variable, perhaps reflecting the immediacy of other concerns. Reflecting on these observations, while the value of cross-sector collaborative and participatory knowledge mobilisation is clear, it is also noteworthy that the data collection took place prior to COP26 and the highly-publicised release of the latest reports from IPCC (2021, 2022a, 2022b).

There was also a sense from participants that community wealth building and the Preston Model (Preston City Council, 2021a) offers important potential to help frame and steer COVID-19 recovery in ways that not only tackle inequalities but also galvanise climate action, a process that some thought would be further strengthened through closer engagement with Doughnut Economics (Raworth, 2017; Fanning *et al*, 2020), with its dual focus on meeting human needs and respecting planetary boundaries.

These observations reflect a widespread appreciation that, alongside the pain, suffering, injustice and predicted long-term damage, COVID-19 has offered glimpses of what a new and different world might look like. Across the globe, lockdowns have been associated with

new patterns of working and learning, and with plummeting air travel, reduced motor traffic, renewed interest in cycling and walking, enhanced air quality, decreased carbon emissions and engagement with the natural environment (Baybutt and Dooris, 2020; de León *et al*, 2021). These glimpses clearly offer significant potential for the disruption caused to serve as a catalyst to the sort of truly transformative recovery necessary to 'build back' or 'bounce forward' better (Poland and Ziolo, 2021).

Place-based climate action, community wealth building and Doughnut Economics have all considered the implications of, and sought to respond to, COVID-19 - with the consequence that engagement with the three approaches has been accelerated by the pandemic. A group of local government, environmental and research organisations has proposed a blueprint for how Government can use the pandemic as a springboard to accelerate climate action at the local level and ensure that recovery from COVID-19 is truly 'green' (ADEPT *et al*, 2021). CLES (2020a) has called for local government to take an integrated approach to economic, social and environmental justice and for a reimagining of how local economies can prioritise wellbeing over economic growth, advocating the use of community wealth building in building back better, fairer and greener from the pandemic (CLES, 2020b, 2020c; Leibowitz, 2020). Stratford and O'Neill (2020, p9) have considered how Doughnut Economics can guide post-pandemic recovery, arguing that "we need to focus our efforts on building a wellbeing economy – an economy that meets human needs and improves quality of life, without destabilising the Earth systems upon which we depend," while the Wellbeing Economy Alliance has proposed ten principles for recovery, based on the Doughnut framework (Büchs *et al*, 2020).

Looking to the future, the evidence relating to the climate and ecological emergencies clearly points to the urgency of putting in place a comprehensive place-based approach supported by organisational and community level plans. In seizing the unique opportunity presented by COVID-19, it will be important to combine a strategic vision for transformative systems-level change with tangible actions that visibly harness learning and accelerate progress in tackling the interrelated challenges of the climate emergency, ecological crisis and societal inequalities. In this regard, it is relevant to note that local action takes place within a context facilitated or constrained by national policy, requiring Preston's anchor institutions to adopt an advocacy role, to secure the changes necessary to enable meaningful progress. One example is energy, with the UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee (2021) noting that "financial support is needed for community energy schemes to thrive" and expressing its disappointment that "regulatory barriers appear to be stalling any further significant roll-out of community energy projects."

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This report has reflected on the 'Climate Resilience, Social Justice & COVID-19 Recovery in Preston' project, which sought to explore the following questions:

- How has the COVID-19 pandemic been experienced by Preston's anchor organisations and communities and what have they learned about their resilience, responsiveness and adaptability?
- Has the COVID-19 pandemic offered glimpses of what a different future - and if so, what might this look like?

- What are the perceived links with and opportunities to address climate change and related ecological and social challenges during Preston’s recovery from COVID-19 and what does this mean for organisational and community-led action?
- What potential synergy is offered by exploring the convergence and intersection of community wealth building and the Preston Model, Doughnut Economics, and place-based climate action, and what might such an integrated city-based approach to fostering human flourishing within planetary boundaries mean for transformative recovery from COVID-19?

A qualitative research study was conducted, comprising ten semi-structured interviews and twelve focus groups with a total of 68 stakeholders from both anchor institutions and communities within Preston. As detailed in Section 4, analysis of the data revealed four interwoven overarching themes:

- **Impacts of COVID-19:** The first theme focused on the diverse impacts on individuals, communities, workplaces and organisations. Highlighting issues relating to travel, work, mental wellbeing, and the natural environment, these impacts were both negative and positive.
  - Widespread uncertainty and fear about COVID-19 combined with isolation resulting from restrictions on travel and inter-personal contact to cause stress, anxiety and other mental health problems. Connected to this, the radical shifts in working practices further heightened feelings of disconnection and made it difficult to put in place clear boundaries between work and personal life? For some, feelings of vulnerability were reinforced by a lack of confidence in using new technology.
  - More positively, others thrived using remote working, valuing a reduction in commuting time, increased productivity and the chance to find a better work-life balance. Alongside the negatives of feeling restricted by not being able to travel, people welcomed the reduction in car use, the increase in cycling and the changed ‘sense of place’ created. Noting the remarkable adaptability demonstrated, participants were deeply affected by this glimpse of a different way of living, prompting them to consider how such changes could be embedded to reap longer-term environmental, health and social benefits.
  - People’s stronger ‘rooting’ in place resulted in increased connectivity with and appreciation of nature. While acknowledging that experiences had differed, participants reflected on how the pandemic had changed their and other people’s relationships with green space and the wider outdoors – and expressed enthusiasm to consolidate these positive wellbeing and sustainability impacts as organisations and communities plan for the future.
  - It is also important to note that how people experienced the changes relating to travel, work and inter-personal contact reflected and amplified inequalities within society: participants identified key influences such as role and feasibility of this being practised remotely; personal circumstances and type and size of home and ability to accommodate an ‘impromptu’ workplace; familiarity and confidence with using virtual technology; and access to green and outside space.

- **Institutional Responses to COVID-19:** The second theme focused on how Preston's institutions have responded to the pandemic.
  - The restrictions introduced to control COVID-19 transmission required organisations, as well as individuals and communities, to demonstrate agility. Participants applauded the adaptability shown by their organisations, with particular mention of the key role played by ICT departments in facilitating the shift to remote working - and the opportunities to harness benefits into the future.
  - Participants also reflected on the resilience demonstrated in the face of the pandemic, which was seen to have revealed the 'human face' of organisations, with staff taking a solution-focused approach and acting collectively to respond to unprecedented challenges. Although questioning the long-term viability of increased workloads and redeployment responsibilities, people were optimistic for the future - citing how people had put aside differences and worked together co-operatively rather than competitively, both within and between organisations.
  - A core focus of institutional responses to the pandemic was the safety of, and support available to, staff, students, customers and the public. The importance of reducing COVID-19 and maintaining healthy, safe and supportive spaces strongly influenced the strategies, behaviour and actions of organisations. As well as affirming the success of the overall approach, participants highlighted how costly it had been for their organisations and the challenges posed to particular services.
  
- **Anchor Institutions' Strategic Priorities and Plans:** The third theme, closely linked with the focus on 'building back better' and its future implications for Preston, was a focus on anchor institutions' strategic priorities and plans.
  - Wellbeing was understood to have been embedded in anchor institutions' strategies over many years, closely entwined with commitments to fairness, equality and social justice. The importance of an holistic approach was noted, with housing, green space, employment and food security all being identified as key determinants, alongside concern to connect wellbeing of people with sustainability and climate action.
  - Sustainability was viewed as a key strategic priority guiding the future direction of the three anchor institutions involved in the research study. Participants suggested that action on the climate and ecological emergencies - with appropriate accountability and reporting mechanisms - were now fundamental to their future plans and would need to be built into all policies going forward. Alongside this, there was an appreciation of the enormous amount of work remaining and the challenges of effectively prioritising and funding action.
  - Community wealth building, as encapsulated in the Preston Model, is a key strategic driver for Preston City Council and was alluded to by participants from other anchor institutions. While acknowledging financial constraints, participants climate action, sustainability and wellbeing thought it significant that commitments are all embedded within 'Community Wealth Building 2.0' (Preston City Council, 2021). Although COVID-19 has delayed work in many areas, the Preston Model was seen to offer potential to help frame and address COVID-19 recovery and galvanise climate action. Several participants highlighted Doughnut Economics, suggesting that its adoption could strengthen the Preston Model, amplifying its focus on the wellbeing of people, communities and the planet.

- The resilient response to COVID-19 has shown how success has often relied on or been strengthened by cross-organisation partnerships. Anchor institutions viewed this collaborative approach as essential in pursuing common strategic priorities such as climate action, sustainability and wellbeing. Participants also celebrated the breaking down of traditional silos and a shift from competition to co-operation.
- The data suggested that the experience of COVID-19 has encouraged anchor institutions to think long-term and embed this perspective into strategic planning. For some, the pandemic combined with the climate emergency had prompted a review of organisational strategy to ensure this was 'fit of purpose' into the future.
- **'Building Back Better' and Future Implications for Preston:** The fourth theme focused on how COVID-19 could be a springboard and accelerator to build a better future.
  - Reflecting on how COVID-19 could serve as a springboard and accelerator to build a better future, participants emphasised the importance of tackling societal inequalities, which have been both spotlighted and exacerbated by the pandemic. Significantly, the crisis had catalysed a collaborative approach at the grassroots level, which - resources permitting - looked set to continue and evolve to the benefit of disadvantaged communities.
  - When asked about the rhetoric of 'building back better', a number of people talked about buildings and the physical environment. At the macro level, there was a focus on UCLan's new Student Centre and Square alongside future City development that ensures equity, viability, connectivity and vitality. At an organisational level, participants highlighted the importance of, and tensions involved in, reviewing space utilisation in the context of blended working, estate planning and decarbonisation strategy. In relation to local housing, the concern was to promote wellbeing and sustainability - and energy efficiency and insulation for new build and retrofit were highlighted as essential in tackling both the climate emergency and fuel poverty. While cost was a key concern, there was also optimism about the opportunity to prioritise skills development and invest in worker-owned companies.
  - While some participants were sceptical about the gap between the Government's 'build back better' rhetoric and the emerging reality, many more highlighted the unique opportunity presented by the pandemic and the urgent need for organisations to harness their learning from responding to the COVID-19 crisis so as to be better equipped to respond to the longer-term climate and ecological emergencies. While some were not convinced that the pandemic would be significant in mobilising climate action, others felt strongly that the glimpses of what might be possible could and should help embed a lasting shift in mindsets and help accelerate urgent transformative systemic change.
  - More specifically, people identified changes to working practices as a key area offering potential to re-orient priorities and integrate a commitment to climate action and carbon reduction. Reflecting on possibilities going forward, a key focus was how the continued and expanded use of technology could enable remote and blended working where appropriate and viable. Additionally, participants highlighted how glimpses of a possible new future - characterised by a reduction in traffic and noise, reduced emissions and increased nature connectivity - could be a springboard for embedding changes to working practices long-term.

Alongside the interviews and focus groups, a rapid literature review was undertaken to examine the intersection of place-based climate action, community wealth building and Doughnut Economics - supported by a webinar and workshop facilitating further conceptual thinking. This concluded that to effectively tackle the inter-related challenges presented by the climate emergency, the ecological crisis and growing societal inequalities, we need an approach that questions dominant discourses and appropriately positions social, economic and ecological considerations. Taking stock of the unique opportunity offered by the pandemic, Poland and Ziolo (2021, p.219) conclude:

“To put it bluntly, normal is killing us and the planet. Instead of ‘bouncing back’, we need to ‘bounce forward’ into new ways of thinking and doing, seizing the opportunity for deep and transformative structural reform that puts the well-being of the majority, and the planet, first.”

Suggesting that there is value in spotlighting and fostering synergy between these three framings to achieve co-benefits, the review argued that, moving forward, we need Place-Based Climate Action that proactively connects the local with national and global-level action, and is guided by what can be termed *Doughnut-shaped Community Wealth Building*, harnessing the particular strengths of the concepts/approaches in relation to the inter-play of research, evidence, theory and practice.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Regarding ‘next steps’, it is important to appreciate the ‘real-world’ context. Characterised by an absence of supportive national policy and severe resource constraints, this evidently limits what anchor institutions, voluntary, community and faith sector organisations, and communities can do. Acknowledging this ‘reality’, the following inter-connected recommendations are not the ‘endorsed views’ of either partner organisations or individual research participants’, but ideas that flow from the research study and rapid literature review - presented in the spirit of stimulating an engaged and productive discussion and debate about: what type of future we want; what needs to happen to enable this future; and what is possible within the contextual constraints.

### **7.2 Recommendations for Discussion and Debate**

#### **7.2.1 City Level**

- Seize the opportunity to use COVID-19 as a springboard to accelerate transformative change in Preston, by:
  - combining insights from Community Wealth Building 2.0 and Doughnut Economics to pursue the vision of our city as a thriving, equitable, regenerative and inclusive city, and guide its transition to a greener, fairer, post-carbon future
  - harnessing the experience of responding to an emergency to prioritise and implement a comprehensive place-based response to the climate and ecological emergencies.



- Consolidate the co-operative approach developed during the pandemic, building on existing partnerships, by:
  - creating a cross-sector Climate Commission or similar governance structure able to lead the City's work going forward - guided by a post-carbon 'roadmap' and informed by a citizen-based Climate Assembly
  - identifying tangible opportunities to collaborate across sectors to progress decarbonisation, increase carbon literacy and test innovative solutions.
- Continue to prioritise action on inequalities, by:
  - reflecting on the implications of the pandemic, which has spotlighted and exacerbated these
  - critically engaging with and implementing the Lancashire & Cumbria Health Equity Commission's recommendations within the context of Preston.
- Build on the positives glimpsed during the pandemic through anchor institutions to prioritise development across the city, to deliver:
  - a green and active transport system and infrastructure
  - safe and attractive natural environments.

### **7.2.2 Organisational Level**

- Review organisational responses to the pandemic to capture learning and ensure preparedness and resilience into the future.
- Promote wellbeing through nature-based and other social prescribing.
- Take a nuanced but radical approach to future work policies and practices, which:
  - harnesses the positives of virtual technology for carbon reduction and wellbeing, and its wider potential for reducing travel, space utilisation and energy use
  - implements 'win-win' blended solutions that prioritise decarbonisation while meeting the needs employers, clients and employees - but also acknowledges that there may be difficult trade-offs.
- Implement 'whole system' and 'whole life cycle costing' approaches in institutional plans to ensure sustainable operations and address the climate and ecological emergencies.
- Review opportunities within further and higher education and vocational training to invest in research, innovation and learning opportunities, which:
  - develops the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to enable and support Preston's just transition to a greener, fairer, post-carbon future
  - offers solutions to problems generated and/or spotlighted by the pandemic (e.g. use of plastic-based personal protective and testing equipment)
  - provides insight into the relative wellbeing and carbon reduction benefits of face-to-face and remote working and learning.
- Build on the vision set out in Community Wealth Building 2.0, and the net zero ambitions of Community Gateway, UCLan and other institutions, to encourage anchor, local business and community partners to work together to meet growing demand for renewable energy, retrofit and other green technologies, including through community energy initiatives to create community wealth and address fuel poverty.

- As a group of anchor institutions, advocate collectively for supportive national-level policy that facilitates place-based action to tackle the climate and ecological emergencies, calling on Government to provide increased financial support and remove unhelpful regulatory barriers.

### **7.2.3 Community Level**

- Advocate for citizens to have a voice in future planning, decision-making and action relating to the climate and ecological emergencies, through the establishment of a citizen-based Climate Assembly.
- Celebrate and nurture the collaborative culture mobilised at a grassroots level by voluntary, community and faith sector organisations, strengthening their capacity to address inequalities, tackle disadvantage and strengthen resilience.
- Build on the practical projects already underway and explore opportunities to forge wider partnerships and extend impact.

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## APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULES

### COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

<p><i>COVID-19 has obviously had profound impacts across the whole of society. We're interested in exploring and understanding how the pandemic has affected people's lives in Preston. We also want to hear your thoughts and perspectives on recovery from COVID and what this might mean in terms of reimagining the future of your community and the city as a whole.</i></p>	
1.	<p>Looking back over the past year, what, if anything, has the COVID-19 pandemic, and the experience of living with it, changed about your life, attitudes and perspectives?  <i>Prompt: e.g. political opinion</i></p>
	<p>→ Could you give some examples, starting with anything positive?</p>
	<p>→ Is there anything negative you want to add?</p>
2.	<p>Reflecting on your experience, has anything particularly struck you about how your community has responded and/or adapted?</p>
	<p>→ Could you give some examples?  <i>Prompt: as necessary</i></p>
<p><i>One of the central themes to emerge in newspapers and social media discussions has been the potential of the COVID-19 pandemic to encourage recovery efforts that focus on what's been called 'building back (or bouncing forward) better'.</i></p>	
3.	<p>Do you feel that COVID-19, its impacts and the various forms of 'lockdown' have offered glimpses of a different future?  <i>Prompt: does this make you feel optimistic about the possibility of a better future?</i></p>
	<p>→ Does this make you feel optimistic about the possibility of a better future?</p>
	<p>→ If 'yes', could you give a few examples?</p>
	<p>→ If 'no', why not?</p>
4.	<p>Have you heard about or been involved in any discussions about this idea of 'building back better'?  <i>Prompt: if necessary, check understanding of this and explain briefly.</i></p>
	<p>→ If 'yes', how and to what extent?</p>
	<p>→ Could you give some examples?</p>
<p><i>Informed by this concern to 'build back better', this project is focusing on the potential to integrate climate resilience, wellbeing and social justice within Preston's economic and social recovery from COVID-19.</i></p>	
5.	<p>Are you concerned about climate change and do you see it as an emergency?</p>
6.	<p>Do you think that climate change and environmental issues should be central in decision-making going forward in the City of Preston?</p>
	<p>→ If 'yes', could you please expand?  <i>Prompts:</i>  <i>To what extent are they already priorities?</i>  <i>Why should they be prioritised?</i>  <i>How should they be prioritised?</i></p>

	→ If 'no', why not?
	→ Any examples relating to your specific community/organisation? <i>Prompt: tailor question and prompts as appropriate - e.g. PVC focuses on construction</i>
7.	We're also interested in the areas of wellbeing and social justice. <i>[N.B. edit/reduce number of questions depending on time]</i>
	→ What do these terms mean to you?
	→ Do you think that wellbeing and social justice should be central in decision-making going forward in the City of Preston?
	→ If 'yes', could you please expand? <i>Prompts: To what extent are they already priorities? Why should they be prioritised? How should they be prioritised?</i>
	→ If 'no', why not?
	→ Any examples relating to your specific community/organisation? <i>Prompts: Tailor question and prompts as appropriate.</i>
8.	Do you think that there are links between action for wellbeing and action on climate change and for a sustainable future?
	→ If 'yes', could you please expand? <i>Prompt: What are these and what are the challenges and opportunities?</i>
	→ If 'no', why not?
9.	Looking ahead, do you see further opportunities for Preston to use its experience of COVID-19 as a lever to strengthen action on climate change / and to build a thriving future that prioritises the wellbeing of people, place and planet?
	→ If so, how - could you give some examples/further thoughts about what could happen in the community?
	→ And could you give some examples/further thoughts about what you would like to see key organisations doing?

## ORGANISATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

<p><i>COVID-19 has obviously had profound impacts across the whole of society. We're interested in exploring and understanding how the pandemic has impacted the work of anchor organisations in Preston. We also want to hear your thoughts and perspectives on recovery from COVID and what this might mean in terms of reimagining the future of Preston City Council/UCLan/Community Gateway Association/Lancashire Enterprise Partnership [delete as appropriate] and the city as a whole.</i></p>	
1.	<p>Looking back over the past year, what have been its main impacts on Preston City Council/UCLan/Community Gateway Association/Lancashire Enterprise Partnership [delete as appropriate] and the people you serve?</p>
2.	<p>Reflecting on what's happened, what has this experience revealed about the resilience, responsiveness and adaptability of your organisation?</p>
	<p>➔ Could you give some examples?  <i>Prompt: as necessary, covering each term.</i></p>
<p><i>One of the central themes to emerge in policy and media discussions has been the idea of 'building back (or bouncing forward) better' - focusing on the potential of the COVID-19 pandemic to serve as a catalyst to transform our future through green and fair recovery.</i></p>	
3.	<p>Do you feel that COVID-19, its impacts and the various forms of 'lockdown' have offered glimpses of a different future?</p>
	<p>➔ Does this make you feel optimistic about the possibility of a better future?</p>
	<p>➔ If 'yes', could you give a few examples?</p>
	<p>➔ If 'no', why not?</p>
4.	<p>Has the idea of 'building back better' featured in discussions within your organisation and/or been incorporated within recovery plans?  <i>Prompt: if necessary, check understanding of this and explain briefly.</i></p>
	<p>➔ If 'yes', how and to what extent?</p>
	<p>➔ Could you give some examples?</p>
	<p>➔ [if appropriate to interviewee/FG] How do you see this relating to the Preston Model and the city's commitment to Community Wealth Building [and UCLan/PCC's role in this]?  <i>Prompt: please explain/give an example.</i></p>
<p><i>Informed by this concern to 'build back better', this research project is focusing on the potential to integrate climate resilience, wellbeing and social justice within Preston's economic and social recovery from COVID-19.</i></p>	
5.	<p>Are climate resilience and wider concerns about sustainability and the environment key strategic values or priorities for Preston City Council/UCLan/Community Gateway Association/Lancashire Enterprise Partnership [delete as appropriate]?</p>
	<p>➔ If 'yes', could you please expand and give examples and/or links to relevant documents?</p>
	<p>➔ If 'no', are there particular reasons why not?</p>
6.	<p>We're also interested in the areas of wellbeing and social justice.  <i>[N.B. edit/reduce number of questions depending on time]</i></p>

	→ Are wellbeing and social justice key strategic values or priorities for Preston City Council/UCLan/Community Gateway Association/Lancashire Enterprise Partnership [delete as appropriate]?
	→ If 'yes', could you please expand and give examples and/or point us to relevant documents?
	→ If 'no', are there particular reasons why not?
7.	Looking ahead, do you see opportunities to use recovery from COVID-19 as a catalyst to strengthen action for climate resilience and build a thriving future that prioritises wellbeing of people, place and planet?
	→ ...in your own organisation?
	→ If so, how - could you give some examples/further thoughts?
	→ ...working across [and providing leadership within] the City of Preston?
	→ If so, how - could you give some examples/further thoughts?