Centre for the New Midlands

The Bristol Road Corridor

Unlocking the Potential of Birmingham's Innovation Corridor

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Reimagining the Region



Executive summary

The Bristol Road Corridor brings together an unusually rich concentration of assets stretching from Birmingham city centre to Longbridge through a sequence of established neighbourhoods, employment locations, innovation assets and regeneration opportunities. Along its length sit the University of Birmingham, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, major transport infrastructure, thriving local centres, internationally recognised institutions and communities with strong local identities. Together, these assets represent one of the UK's most significant concentrations of knowledge, health, research and economic potential.

The roundtable explored how these assets could work more effectively as a connected whole. Participants considered how the corridor could evolve from a collection of successful but largely independent places into a nationally recognised innovation corridor; one that links research, healthcare, education, business, housing and community life whilst ensuring that investment and growth benefit existing communities as well as future generations. The discussion recognised that the opportunity is not simply to improve mobility between destinations, but to create a more integrated, inclusive and prosperous corridor where economic success and quality of place reinforce one another.

Three themes emerged consistently throughout the discussion:

- **Connectivity must be understood in its widest sense.** While improved public transport will be important, participants emphasised that successful connectivity also depends on reliable journeys, active travel, attractive public realm, links to local centres and stronger relationships between institutions and surrounding communities. Transport should be viewed as an enabler of better places rather than an end in itself.
- **Growth should strengthen local identity and quality of place.** The corridor is not a single destination but a series of distinctive neighbourhoods and centres, each with its own character, history and assets. Future growth should celebrate these differences rather than dilute them. Participants highlighted the importance of stewardship, affordable housing, community involvement and everyday improvements that make investment visible and meaningful to residents.
- **A stronger shared narrative and partnership framework are required.** Whilst substantial investment and activity are already taking place across the corridor, participants identified an opportunity to establish a clearer collective vision and a more compelling proposition. This includes developing a shared identity for the corridor, strengthening collaboration between institutions and communities, coordinating investment priorities and presenting a coherent story to investors, businesses, government and residents.

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the potential to position the Bristol Road Corridor as the UK's first **Complete Innovation Corridor:** a place where transport, housing, health, education, research, employment and community life are planned and delivered in a more integrated way. Participants believed this would provide a distinctive proposition for Birmingham and the wider West Midlands whilst helping ensure that growth delivers social value alongside economic benefits.

The roundtable was intentionally exploratory and was not designed to produce a detailed delivery plan. However, participants identified several practical next steps, including establishing a continuing stakeholder group, developing a shared vision, building a place-based evidence base, strengthening community involvement and creating a clearer investment proposition. Taken together, these actions could help transform the corridor from a collection of connected destinations into a connected corridor of complete places, where innovation, opportunity and prosperity are shared more widely across Birmingham and the wider region.

The opportunity: a corridor with exceptional assets

Stretching roughly 10 kilometres from Birmingham city centre towards Longbridge, the Bristol Road Corridor is not a single district but a chain of places, institutions and communities. Its strength lies in the combination of assets and the opportunities that could emerge when they are better connected.

- **Knowledge and talent:** the University of Birmingham and its research, education and skills base.
- **Healthcare and innovation:** Queen Elizabeth Hospital and the wider health and life-sciences ecosystem.
- **Regeneration and employment:** Longbridge and its continuing role as a major development and jobs destination.
- **Stewardship and community:** Bournville and the long-standing role of Bournville Village Trust in housing, place management and community life.
- **Transport and access:** the Cross-City rail line, the city centre and existing walking, cycling and road networks.

These assets sit alongside a range of established neighbourhoods, commercial centres, businesses and development opportunities. The corridor's history shows that purposeful investment can shape places for generations. The challenge now is to build on that legacy in a way that is coordinated, inclusive and fit for the future.

The potential is not only economic. A connected corridor could improve access to jobs, education, healthcare, culture and leisure; support more sustainable travel; create places where people want to live and work; and help ensure that the benefits of investment reach neighbouring communities.







The challenges that must be addressed

Participants recognised a tension at the heart of the corridor: significant economic and institutional strengths exist alongside persistent inequalities. Health outcomes vary between communities, while barriers relating to skills, social mobility, housing affordability, perceptions of safety and community fragmentation have a significant effect on people's lives.

Major infrastructure can also act as a physical barrier, dividing neighbourhoods as well as connecting destinations. The presence of successful institutions does not automatically mean that surrounding communities benefit from their growth. Participants questioned how the corridor could make these relationships more reciprocal and ensure that investment is felt locally.

A further challenge is fragmentation. Projects, organisations and initiatives are active across the corridor, but the overall story and shared purpose are not always clear. When decisions are made site by site or institution by institution, opportunities to align housing, transport, skills, research, employment and public realm investment can be missed.





1. Connecting the corridor

Transport should enable better places - not be an end in itself

Connectivity was discussed as a foundational requirement for the corridor's future. Participants noted that geographical proximity does not necessarily translate into easy access: congestion and unreliable bus journeys can make destinations that appear close on a map feel distant in practice. Peak-period bus speeds were cited in the discussion as falling to around 5–8 mph in some sections.

The Bristol Road has been identified as a priority mass-transit corridor. Options raised included bus rapid transit, light rail and very light rail. The discussion emphasised the need to assess options against the outcomes they could deliver and not simply the transport technology itself. Reliability, capacity, access to local centres and the ability to support sustainable housing growth should be central to the case.

A connected network of local centres

The corridor should not be treated simply as a line between Longbridge and the city centre. Participants stressed the importance of serving the places in between and connecting residents to the services, jobs and opportunities they use every day. That means considering public transport alongside walking, cycling, interchange, street quality and the relationship between transport stops and local destinations.

Better public transport could also support more homes in accessible locations and reduce reliance on short car journeys. Housing growth and densification along the corridor, which could potentially create some 10,000 - 15,000 homes, further strengthens the case for improved mass transit and better connectivity.

Make the wider benefits visible

Participants questioned whether conventional transport appraisal captures the full value of investment. A narrow assessment can overlook the relationships between transport, housing, productivity, health, access to education, land use and social inclusion. A more place-based approach could help make the case for investment by assessing the combined economic and social returns across the corridor.



2. Growth that strengthens local identity

One corridor, many distinctive places

The corridor's character changes as it moves through established residential areas, student neighbourhoods, the university and hospital quarter, local centres and regeneration areas. Participants cautioned against imposing a single identity that flattens these differences. The aim should be to strengthen the connections between places while retaining the local qualities that make each one distinctive.

A shared corridor identity need not compete with local identity. Residents can feel attached to their neighbourhood, to Birmingham and to the wider Midlands at the same time. The important question is how people themselves understand these connections and this should be explored directly rather than assumed.

Community experience is part of the investment case

The discussion highlighted the importance of small-scale, visible improvements alongside major developments. Residents may judge change through the quality of a local park, crossing, street, play area or public space as much as through the headline value of a regeneration scheme. These everyday experiences influence whether investment feels relevant and whether people trust the process.

Participants pointed to the value of testing ideas with residents, businesses and community groups before committing to interventions. Design-excellence panels and other structured forms of local review were discussed as possible models. The principle is straightforward: communities should help shape the places they use, and engagement should influence decisions rather than simply explain.

Housing, affordability and inclusion

Housing affordability was identified as a critical issue, particularly for key workers and the people who sustain the corridor's institutions and economy. Nurses, laboratory technicians, researchers and other workers may struggle to live near their workplaces. Participants argued that key-worker and affordable housing needs to be planned alongside employment and transport growth, rather than addressed only after demand has increased.

The wider ambition is to ensure that growth supports healthier, more complete neighbourhoods: places where people can access homes, jobs, services, green space and transport, and where the benefits of innovation are not confined to institutional campuses or individual development sites.





3. Building partnerships, investment and governance

From separate projects to a shared proposition

Participants identified the lack of a compelling shared narrative as a major barrier to the corridor's potential. The West Midlands has substantial strengths, but the region can struggle to communicate them confidently and consistently. A clear story for the Bristol Road Corridor could help investors, public bodies, institutions and residents understand how its different assets reinforce one another.

Participants also discussed the importance of place branding. While individual destinations along the corridor possess strong identities, there is currently no simple way of communicating the collective proposition to investors, businesses, talent or visitors. A clear and authentic narrative could help the corridor become more visible and distinguish it nationally.

The proposed ambition - to establish the Bristol Road Corridor as the UK's first "Complete Innovation Corridor" offers a way to bring together research, healthcare, education, industry, housing, transport and community life.





Coordinate the innovation ecosystem

The discussion identified several innovation locations and initiatives across the region, including the Health Innovation Campus, Knowledge Quarter, Coventry and Warwick Investment Zone and the Wolverhampton Green Innovation Corridor. Our delegates raised the risk that these areas could end up competing against each other for attention and investment when a coordinated approach might create greater value for everyone. It should be recognised that the West Midlands Growth Company has mapped out the region's innovation assets – available by visiting **www.investwestmidlands.com**

A governance framework at the Combined Authority level was discussed as one way to clarify the roles of different places, reduce duplication and help partners recognise that success in one part of the region can benefit others. Existing regional strategies and convening bodies may provide a starting point, but the discussion suggested that their potential to align activity is not yet fully realised.



From ambition to action

The roundtable was always designed to be exploratory and was not intended to settle on a final programme of work. However, participants identified a number of practical actions that could help translate shared ambition into meaningful progress.

1. **Convene a continuing stakeholder group** with representation from anchor institutions, public bodies, business, landowners, transport partners and communities.
2. **Agree a concise shared vision for the Bristol Road Corridor**, including what a "Complete Innovation Corridor" should mean in practice and how success would be recognised.
3. **Map Existing Programmes, Projects and Investment:** Develop a shared understanding of current and proposed developments, infrastructure investments, community initiatives and institutional plans across the corridor. This would help identify opportunities for alignment, reduce duplication and reveal gaps where intervention may be required.
4. **Embed Stewardship and Community Participation** to raise expectations for place quality, create opportunities and give residents a meaningful voice, using the vast experience of BVT and CNM's Decent Neighborhood Standard as the guiding framework
5. **Create a Place-Based Evidence Base** bringing existing data on connectivity, housing affordability, jobs and skills, health, environmental resilience, public realm and the distribution of benefits.
6. **Identify a small number of early, visible interventions** that improve everyday experience and demonstrate the value of working across organisational boundaries.
7. **Develop a Corridor-Wide Investment and Place Narrative:** Create a clear proposition that communicates the corridor's unique combination of innovation, health, education, housing, connectivity and community assets. A stronger shared narrative could help attract investment, talent and policy support whilst raising the profile of the corridor nationally.
8. **Define Success and Measure Impact:** Agree a set of shared outcomes and indicators that extend beyond economic metrics alone. Measures should reflect connectivity, neighbourhood quality, inclusion, health, environmental performance and whether local communities experience tangible benefits from growth and investment.





Conclusion: the case for a complete innovation corridor

The Bristol Road Corridor already has many of the ingredients associated with a nationally significant place for innovation and growth. Few places can combine the scale of the research excellence of the University of Birmingham, the healthcare assets of Queen Elizabeth Hospital, the regeneration opportunities at Longbridge and a network of established communities within a single connected corridor.

The discussion made clear that the corridor's greatest opportunity lies not in any individual asset, institution or development project, but in the relationships between them. The challenge is to connect places as well as destinations; communities as well as institutions; and economic growth with the wider social, environmental and health outcomes that create prosperous and sustainable places.

That requires more than new infrastructure or a stronger brand. It means connecting people to opportunity, protecting the character of local places, planning housing and transport together, and ensuring that institutions and investment are more closely linked to the communities around them. It also requires partners to move beyond isolated projects towards a shared, long-term purpose.

The concept of the **Complete Innovation Corridor** emerged as a powerful way of describing this ambition. It reflects the belief that innovation and economic growth are most effective when supported by thriving neighbourhoods, strong communities, attractive places and a shared commitment to long-term stewardship.

The opportunity, therefore, is not simply to improve a transport corridor. It is to create a nationally significant model for how innovation, investment, housing, mobility and community life can work together at the scale of a city-region corridor. If the partnerships, leadership and shared purpose identified through this roundtable can be sustained, the Bristol Road Corridor has the potential to become not only a driver of economic growth for Birmingham and the West Midlands, but a benchmark for inclusive and place-led development across the UK.

The central message delivered through the roundtable was that the potential and appetite exists to turn a collection of successful places into a connected corridor of complete places, where innovation, investment, health, education, mobility and community life reinforce one another, and where prosperity is shared across Birmingham and the broader region.



About the convenors

STRIDE TREGLOWN

Stride Treglown is an employee-owned UK architecture and design practice, founded in 1953, with expertise spanning architecture, urban design, masterplanning, landscape architecture, planning and related disciplines. Its regional studios combine local knowledge with multidisciplinary expertise, with an emphasis on collaborative design and creating positive outcomes for people and places.

Centre for the New Midlands

The Centre for the New Midlands is an independent, non-partisan, not-for-profit think tank focused on the social and economic challenges facing the Midlands, initially with a focus on the West Midlands. It works with residents, organisations and academic partners to develop ideas, inform debate and put forward practical recommendations for a better region.





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Director of Midlands Strategy and Partnerships, Stride Treglown

Our delegates

Delegate	Role	Organisation
András Kárpáti	CEO	Cordia UK
Ash Davies	Account Manager	Camargue
Chris Smith	Founder and CEO	Centre for the New Midlands CIC
Clive Fletcher	High Streets Lead	West Midlands Combined Authority
Ian Tipton	Director of Midlands Strategy and Partnerships	Stride Treglown
Jade Tilley	Associate Planner and Engagement Consultant	Arup
Jasmine Ceccarelli-Drewry	Director, Place Strategy & Social Impact	Avison Young
Joanna Lee-Mills	Chair of the Board	Auxesia Homes
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Natalie King	Associate Director and Account Leader	Arcadis
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Will Savage	Managing Director	Marca Strategy



Raynee De Zoysa (Chair)
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Creating a ‘better’ West Midlands

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