

A year of change:

Public good, public building

what the nation needs now





FOREWORD

In April 2024, SCAPE launched our Charter for Change, Building for Public Good. In anticipation of a General Election, the Charter put forward a set of four key policy recommendations that would support a more sustainable, skilled and empowered public sector and construction industry.

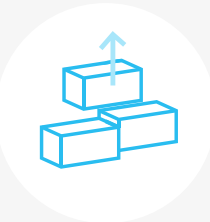
At SCAPE, we work with local authorities up and down the country, and we know that each region has its own specific set of challenges. At the heart of the Charter was the acknowledgement that when it came to Government policies, there could be no ‘one size fits all’ to regional challenges, and SCAPE has spent the past year travelling across the country to put our policy recommendations to the test. This document provides an overview of those conversations with clients and contractors across the UK.

From Yorkshire to Wales, the South to East Midlands, we’ve been speaking to local authorities and contractors to gather a full picture of the public sector’s built environment needs. Though there are indeed unique asks for each region, what we’ve found is a public sector united in its ambitions and commitments to its communities.

At the same time, there’s no denying that the country is already in a very different position to when the Charter was launched. With pledges to build 1.5m homes over five years, investment in infrastructure, and a reform of the planning system, the Government has also made several key announcements in line with our recommendations, from the reinstatement of the Chief Construction Advisor to a new national construction upskilling programme. The Government is looking to harness construction’s ability to deliver. The Government’s growth mission has construction at its core, recognising the sector’s power to deliver it. So, as the Government settles into its second year in power, what are the regional priorities, and how do they parlay into the national agenda? Where do we go from here? And how can we make sure that we are generating long-term public good as we build?

Mark Robinson,
SCAPE Group Chief Executive

WHAT DID WE RECOMMEND?



Building a brighter future

- Spearhead a national recruitment campaign to elevate the construction skills agenda
- Encourage public-private secondments that attract and retain talent
- Invest in future-proofed skills to build safe, sustainable assets



Enabling efficient building

- Reinstate the Chief Construction Advisor role within central government to provide leadership and accountability
- Fix profit margins for contractors to create certainty in the market
- Invest in a digital estate portfolio to improve asset management



Empowering local government

- Set public sector asset management functions up for success
- Mandate the development and commissioning of local social value delivery strategies
- Give local authorities more devolution of powers and fair funding



Supporting sustainable construction

- Set strict national targets and commercial incentives for reducing construction waste
- Update and enforce building regulations to make sustainability non-negotiable
- Strengthen funding initiatives to keep decarbonisation on the local agenda

At a glance:
Mapping the nation’s built environment needs

YORKSHIRE

- Brownfield site regeneration for logistics infrastructure
- What are the urgent needs?**
Tighter local control over funding allocation.

EAST MIDLANDS

- National Grid fusion improvement projects
- STEP fusion plant
- What are the urgent needs?**
Green skills and clear pipeline visibility.

WALES

- Aberforth Power Station redevelopment
- Cardiff Airport installation
- What are the urgent needs?**
Green skills and talent retention.

SOUTH AND SOLENT

- Public transport infrastructure improvements for new housing delivery
- What are the urgent needs?**
Strong, open communication with local communities about the benefits of public transport over cars.

The nationwide needs:

Where are the similarities?

Whether addressing the skills gap, funding, social value or otherwise, some topics came up again and again, as did welcome solutions to the ongoing and widespread challenges facing our public built environment.

Collaborate to grow

The benefits of public-private partnerships may be well known, but its importance cannot be stressed enough: successful collaboration between the public and private sectors results in skills exchange, maximised efficiencies and alleviated risk for the public sector. For best results, the public sector should seek to engage a private sector partner as early as possible on a project or delivery programme. Not only will this facilitate smoother, longer term knowledge sharing, it will also enable private sector partners to embed themselves in local communities earlier. This will have knock-on positive effects on social value delivery in turn.

Take Arc Partnership as an example, this unique joint venture between Nottinghamshire County Council and SCAPE, recently extended to 2031, supports the local authority in running its land and property portfolio, driving initiatives like efficient and sustainable regeneration, asset management and design.

It's not only partnerships between public and private that the country's built environment will benefit from. When local authorities join forces to review pipelines and workloads, it enables them to move away from an inefficient, project-by-project approach to one which is more strategic and streamlined — improving regional spending, maximising social value and long-term skills generation.



The nationwide needs:

Where are the similarities?

Pipeline priorities

Up and down the country, contractors, local and combined authorities believe in the importance of apprenticeships and fostering local skills. The value this brings both to communities and the built environment sector is felt keenly — but pipeline visibility remains one of the key barriers to turning those apprentices into long-term employment opportunities. Public built environment projects at present often exist in isolation, rather than as part of a structured, multi-year strategy, which makes it difficult to retain workers long-term.

Shifting to a programme-focussed delivery approach will afford the regional public sector greater visibility over upcoming projects and more ability to align government targets with regional talent — creating more opportunities for apprenticeships and early-career workers to grow.

Power to the regions

The Government has stated its support for devolving more power to local and combined authorities, and as far as the built environment is concerned, those changes can't come soon enough. With greater trust, transparency and control handed over from central government, local leaders are empowered to meet the specific needs of their communities.

Councils know these needs better than anyone. In West Yorkshire, for example, much of the development opportunities are found in mining towns with plenty of hard-to-reach brownfield land prime for logistics schemes — a major economic driver in the region. These needs differ vastly from the pressing housing needs in, for example, the south, which national policies tend to focus on. With more control over funding and development decisions at a local level, all communities will stand to benefit.



The regional differences:

Where are the gaps?

Despite some common threads, some regions have hyper-specific needs that require hyper-specific solutions.

Bespoke upskilling

Construction skills are already high on the national agenda, with a £600 million committed investment from the Government. But each region is delivering vastly different projects, meaning a bespoke set of skills is needed for each. In Wales, for example, there are two major energy infrastructure projects underway: the Aberforth Power Station and the solar panel installation at Cardiff Airport. For projects like these, green skills and sustainability expertise are vital to successful delivery.

The Welsh Government has initiated a mapping exercise to ensure these needs are met — but Wales isn't alone in needing to plug a specific talent gap. Regional differences need to be reflected in and supported by national policies across the UK to avoid the delays, inefficiencies and rising costs that can be caused by insufficient local skills.

All aboard: The transport problem

While the Government has committed to improving connectivity in the North West with a new Manchester-Liverpool railway, transport and connectivity requirements vary by region — bringing different sets of challenges with them. The East Midlands lags behind the North West in transport investment from government, which impacts its ability to scale its economy.

Meanwhile, the priority for Central South is ensuring that public transport better serves the Solent area as it does not have a viable public transport offer. Here, alongside exploring initiatives like water network transport and green bus lanes, local authorities also need to focus on raising awareness amongst communities about the benefits of different public transport methods. With backing from central government, campaigns like this can make a real difference.

Changing the channel: Communication between local and central government

As the UK devolves more power to local and combined authorities, several participants in SCAPE's roundtables suggested that introducing dedicated roles — such as Funding Officers or reinstating Government Officer positions — could help strengthen communication between the regions and Westminster, particularly around budgets, strategy and priorities.



Capitalising on momentum:

What next?

The Government has made a strong start over the past year, putting construction at the centre of its mission for economic growth and making significant progress on investment and policy.

Now, the focus is on delivery. How can we capitalise on the promising commitments and turn them into long-lasting growth, locally as well as nationally? What are the biggest issues, and what will make the biggest difference if addressed?

We can start by looking at the national priorities. Over the next few years, the UK is looking to deliver major infrastructure projects across the country, from transport system overhauls to national port expansions — as well as making significant investments into green energy innovations. That’s alongside the 1.5 million homes, and the ongoing urgent improvements to the country’s schools and hospitals to keep the country running.

One thing’s for sure: though there will be common themes, each of these sectors needs its own unique solution. SCAPE’s conversations over the past year indicate that public-private collaboration is especially

critical to successful infrastructure delivery, where many of the technical skills needed sit within the private sector. Early onboarding of private partners will help here. Meanwhile, it’s clear that officials at all levels — central and local government — will need to get behind the green skills agenda if the country is to deliver the green energy projects that will support decarbonisation. Whilst the £600 million promised for construction skills is a solid start, a dedicated focus on green and future-focussed knowledge equipment is also urgently needed.

Health, housing and education are the foundations of a successful and sustainable economy, and the needs of these sectors vary hugely region-by-region. Putting more power and control over funding into local authorities and combined authorities’ hands will enable each region’s needs to be addressed head-on — and procurement will also have a role to play here. As local governments increasingly look to gain greater control

over their spending money, it will be more important than ever that they feel able to work with partners they trust to get the job done quickly, efficiently and sustainably. Selecting a delivery partner can be long, costly and cause delays, but working with a procurement partner such as SCAPE streamlines the process — indeed, over the past five years alone, SCAPE has saved the public sector £118 million via accelerated procurement.

By embracing collaboration, empowering local decision-making, and prioritising skills development, the UK can turn ambition into action—ensuring that these national priorities translate into lasting, tangible benefits for communities across the country.

Over the last five years, SCAPE has saved the public sector £118m via accelerated procurement

ABOUT SCAPE

SCAPE is one of the UK's leading public sector procurement authorities, dedicated to creating spaces, places and experiences that leave a sustainable legacy within the community. Owned by, and managed for, the benefit of the public sector, SCAPE provides time and cost-effective support throughout the design, development, and construction process.

Since 2006, SCAPE has supported over 12,000 projects across the UK with their compliant, competitively tendered frameworks. Working closely with 24 construction, civil engineering, consultancy and utilities partners, SCAPE has a buying power of £21bn and is currently performance managing over 1,800 live projects.

SCAPE is a contracting authority and centralised purchasing body that offers frameworks which comply with the Public Contracts Regulations and the Utilities Contracts Regulations for England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. Its suite of consultancy, civil engineering, construction and utilities frameworks has achieved Gold Standard verification through Constructing Excellence and the highest level of compliance for the Carbon Reduction Code.

SCAPE is part of the National Association of Construction Frameworks (NACF), the UK Green Building Council (UKGBC) and Build UK, and was named in The UK's Top 100 Best Mid-Sized Companies to Work For list for 2024 by Best Companies.

For more information, visit www.scape.co.uk



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