**Notes from Future Cities Dialogue Breakfast, March 21st, 2017 –**

**Forum for the Future, funded by Innovate UK**

This breakfast event was convened to launch a report on our future cities. The report – compiled following a one and a half-year research programme with a high level of public engagement – depicts a number of possible scenarios for our cities in the year 2040.[1] Authored by Forum for the Future[2] (with funding from Innovate UK), the event consisted of an opening address by James Goodman (Director of Futures), followed by short presentations form a panel of experts, who then took questions from the floor.

**Introductory comments**

What struck me initially about the opening comments from James Goodman was the centrality of the concept of citizenship. Having endured decades of policymaking in the Western world bounded by the market discourse of New Public Management, I was intrigued by this discursive shift. Quite what this means in practice is, of course, the key question; but a shift away from the language of consumerism I found refreshing and exciting in its potential implications (both cultural and political).

The key message from the report is that we will need to do more with less resources, if we are to secure the viability of our future cities. In addition, we will need to do these things better than we currently do. Some of the other key conclusions of the report are that, by 2040, we will witness the following:

- Greater urbanisation (London population = c11m)
- Climate change impacts
- China the biggest economy in the world

**Panel comments**

The panel of experts consisted of Nathan Koren (co-founder of Futurescaper and founder of Podaris), Sophie Thomas (Founding Director of Thomas Matthews and the former Director of Circular Economy for Royal Society of Arts), Martin McDonnell (Chairman and Founder, Soluis Group), James Goodman, and Rob Whitehead (Head of Strategy, Future Cities Catapult). Speaking for just 5 minutes each, panel members made the following comments in relation to the Future Cities report:

- Nathan Koren: Greater social and cultural – as distinct from infrastructure – integration is needed. Currently, there is too much emphasis upon physical infrastructure.
- Sophie Thomas: We need to meet challenges of high density, e.g. housing, infrastructure (c.f. London Plan).

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[1] For full details of all project outputs, including a toolkit of resources, go the Forum for the Future website – https://www.forumforthefuture.org/project/future-cities-dialogue/overview

[2] Forum for the Future is an international non-profit organisation working with business, government and civil society to solve complex sustainability challenges.

- Martin McDonnell: Augmented reality is likely to have been developed by 2040 (e.g. things built into contact lenses and glasses, to replace headsets, with a view to empowering individuals, e.g. those with disabilities).
- James Goodman: The future city will be tech-enabled, not tech-centred, and citizens need to be involved in the design of these cities, including infrastructure and services.
- Rob Whitehead: We need to manage tension between the public interest and private interest. In addition, we must not ignore nature.

**Questions and comments to panel**

A number of interesting and – in some cases, provocative – questions and comments came from the floor. These included the following:

- Do people want to be consulted about the future of cities?
- We need to address people's values, in order to encourage public participation in projects relating to future cities.
- Equity is a strong value held by the public.
- We need to be wary of designing cities for 'zombies' (people walking around and talking to computers).
- Where does work happen in future cities?
- Is there a need for a universal basic income?
- What is the role of social science (intelligence and epistemology) in systems integration in future cities?
- The role of the citizen is paramount in the circular economy of the future.
- Different cities need to develop their own visions for 2040.

**And my question to panel:**

- Are we finally moving away from the NPM-driven conceptualisation of the individual as *consumer* (rational choice) to that of *citizen*?

You can follow the Future Cities project through Twitter, at **#citiesdialogue**