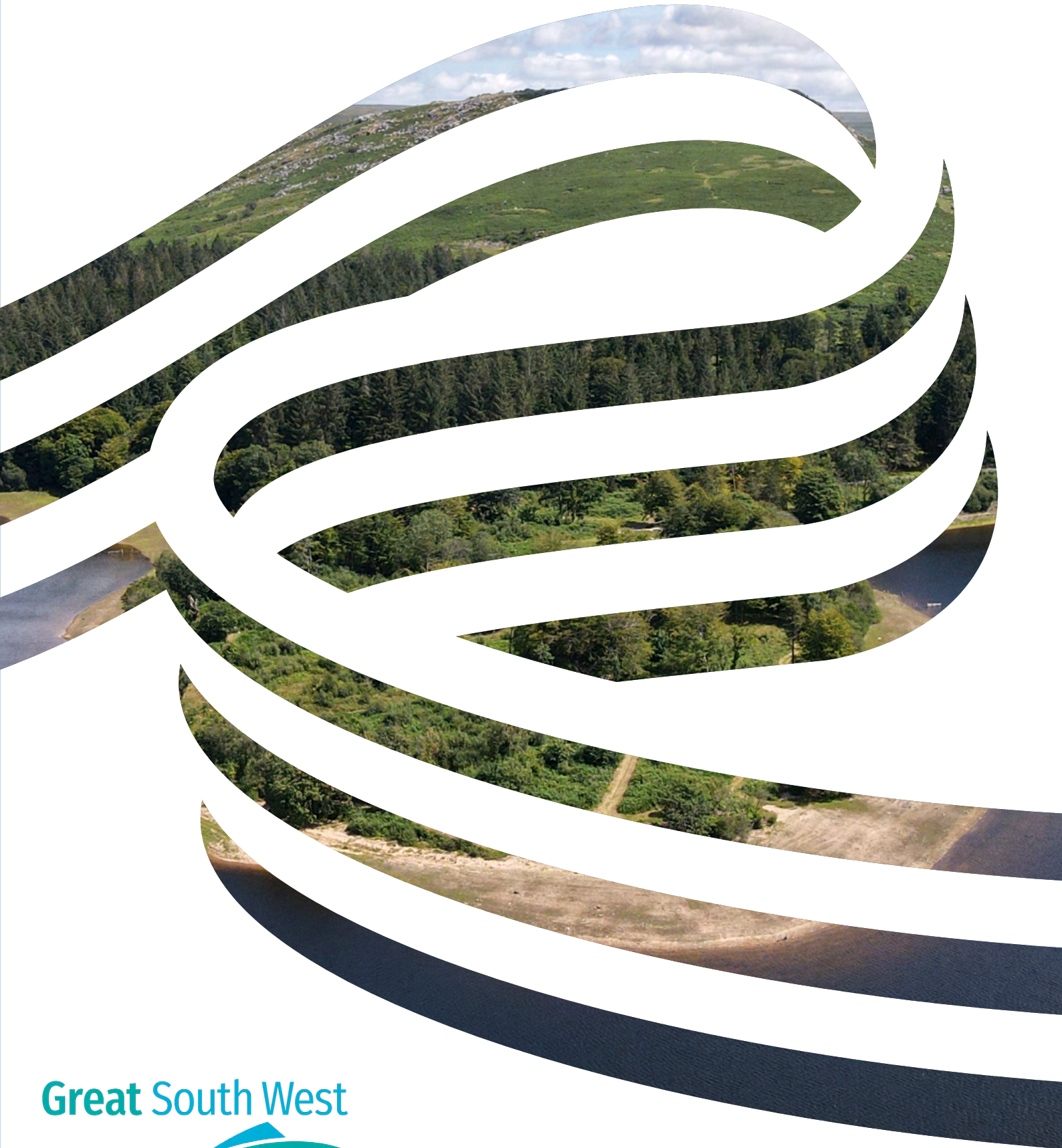


# Levelling Up the Great South West: a G7 Legacy



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# Foreword



**Susan Davy**  
CEO, Pennon

With life in Britain gradually returning to normal, the political conversation is turning to the Government's main policy priority: levelling up. Over the next few months there will be lots of competing voices attempting to define what the policy means and what it should look like.

This report is Pennon's contribution to that debate, commissioned on behalf of the Great South West. By analysing all parliamentary constituencies in Devon and Cornwall on six key indicators of social and economic wellbeing, we have shown the unique challenges and the major opportunities facing the South West. Our hope is that this report can be a springboard to further action — powering our region to a high-tech, high-growth, green British future.

The analysis shows that while the South West has a reputation as a relatively well-off region of the UK, and while crime is generally low and life expectancy is high, all but two of the 18 constituencies in the country's two most south-westerly counties are below the England and Wales average on spending power, a measure of productivity which takes into account employment rates and average wages.

Yet the region's potential is huge. It already has much to build on: a natural environment which is the envy of Britain; a tourism trade which makes up around a quarter of regional GVA per year; the second highest regional employment in the creative industries outside London and the South East; a thriving aerospace and manufacturing sector; huge opportunities for sustainable energy generation; and an increasingly innovative agri-food industry.

This vision is one shared by Pennon, the largest private sector employer in the region. We have 2,000 colleagues and support another 5,300 through our supply chain. We have a unique role to play in supporting the lives of people and the places they love. Now that the Government is embarking on radical plans to reduce regional inequality across Britain, that means ensuring the South West secures the vital investment it needs.

Our recommendation is clear: levelling up cannot focus only on the North and Midlands. We must transform levelling up into an integrated national project, with economic growth plans for every region incorporated into a central framework.

We're backing up our calls with action. Our Green Recovery Initiative is focused on opportunities to make an even bigger and better societal contribution, with projects focused on improving public health, protecting the environment and addressing climate change. It will provide much needed investment and support the creation of up to 500 regional jobs up to 2025. It's an example of a private sector driven plan which will benefit the wider supply chain and provide opportunities for South West Water's existing workforce to gain new green skills.

That's on top of the work we're doing on our jobs and skills programmes: we were one of the first companies to sign up to the Government's Kickstart scheme; our apprenticeship programme has a target of 500 apprenticeships over the next five years; and we are very proud of our newly launched graduate programme which intends to offer 100 roles by 2025.

These kinds of initiatives are Pennon's contribution to what should be a huge joint effort between national and local government, the private sector, and the third sector to transform our connectivity infrastructure, release investment into our high-growth sectors, and boost the skills of the entire region. The post-Covid moment could be a once in a generation opportunity to level up our region: here in the South West, we stand ready to deliver.

# Executive Summary

The aim of this report is to demonstrate the levelling up needs of the Great South West, looking primarily at the two counties of Devon and Cornwall; to outline the specific challenges affecting the region; to analyse the disparities existing within both counties; and to put forward policy recommendations which could support their economic development.

- ‘Levelling up’ is now the central commitment of the Government’s policy agenda. Much of the political conversation around levelling up has focused on the so-called ‘Red Wall’ of formerly Labour-held seats in the north and midlands of England. In reality, however, all regions of Britain have specific socio-economic challenges which can be addressed by Government policy interventions.
- Devon and Cornwall is South West Water’s primary coverage area, and the two counties have their own set of challenges and opportunities to be solved and unlocked by Government policy. However, policies that benefit them will ultimately benefit the whole Great South West region. Despite strong and nationally-leading sectors across the two counties there are also major challenges on productivity, low pay, and pockets of deprivation, particularly in urban and coastal areas.
- In order to better understand these challenges, we have created a levelling up analysis of both counties at a parliamentary constituency level.
- The data shows two major patterns:
  - The first is a clear divide between Devon and Cornwall and the rest of the UK in terms of productivity. This divide cannot be overstated. Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly has the lowest productivity of any UK subregion — and by a long way — 32% below the national average and an outlier even amongst the bottom quartile. Devon, while better, is still the seventh lowest productivity area in the UK.
  - Using historical productivity data, our analysis finds that on a ranking of all parliamentary constituencies by productivity 13 out of 18 Devon and Cornwall constituencies are in the highest priority category.
  - This is in contrast to the Government’s own levelling up categorisation, which includes only three South West local authority areas in its priority group. Put simply: many places in Devon and Cornwall rank consistently among the lowest growth areas in Britain.
  - The second pattern is the gap between constituencies within Devon and Cornwall. The findings point to a general rule with a major exception: Cornwall is

more in need of levelling up than Devon, but both Plymouth seats and Torbay are more in need than anywhere else.

- We find that the rural factor is a major cause of the low productivity levels in the region. Despite promising clusters in a diverse advanced manufacturing sector, Devon and Cornwall tend not to benefit from the agglomeration effects present in other counties with large conurbations or with better transport connectivity.
- Our analysis shows that what has happened to many areas in the South West is very similar to much of the northern ‘Red Wall’. There are pockets of deprivation across both parts of the two counties: low productivity areas with low wages and a fragmented employment market, many still dealing with the effects of deindustrialisation and low levels of both private and public investment. Looked at on socio-economic indicators alone it would be difficult to tell apart many ‘Red Wall’ towns from those in coastal areas of the South West.
- However, there are plenty of opportunities for boosting growth, including an exciting array of sectors making up a high-potential advanced manufacturing cluster.
- The combination of the natural environment and environmental science specialisms in the region means Devon, Cornwall and the wider South West could set its sights on becoming Britain’s greenest regional economy, turning global concerns over sustainability into locally-led economic growth.
- Devon is home to one of the fastest-growing IT clusters in the UK, with the number of sectors in the cluster having grown by 36% since 2010, creating over 2,000 jobs. Agri-tech contributes over £750 million to Devon’s economy each year and the county has seen a 367% increase in environmental consultancies and businesses since 2010.
- Cornwall is similar: 27% of the county is recognised as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the county has a higher proportion of energy, geo-resources, and marine businesses than the rest of the UK, all high-productivity sectors which rely on the natural assets of the region.
- Pennon is backing the South West with

concrete plans: our Green Recovery Initiative will support the creation of up to 500 additional jobs across our regions over the next four years and provide further opportunities for South West Water’s existing workforce to gain new green skills. We are also bringing young people into the business through the Kickstart, apprenticeship, and newly launched graduate scheme.

- As we move into a post-pandemic recovery, Government and the private sector will have to work closely together to create the conditions in which new and established sectors can thrive sustainably while protecting the natural environment. Transforming levelling up into a truly national project with a long-term strategy integrating economic thinking from every nation and region of Britain could have a real impact. Outlined below is our five-step policy programme for central Government to support the economic development of Devon and Cornwall and leave a lasting legacy for the wider Great South West region:
  - 1. Transform levelling up into an integrated national project, with economic growth plans for every British region incorporated into a central framework. These plans should be delivered by regional leaders with regional accountability.**
  - 2. Establish a Transport for the South West body with similar powers to Transport for the North, able to champion transport infrastructure projects across the region.**
  - 3. Deliver ultra-fast South West 5G mobile, fibre and wireless broadband through to 90% of the population by 2030.**
  - 4. Expand the now-doubled public RD&I budget in every British region, prioritising the South West’s portion in the advanced manufacturing and environmental science clusters.**
  - 5. Commit to opening up more STEM pathways for students in higher and further education. The Government’s current pledge to increase the number of students taking STEM subjects is very welcome and should be accelerated.**



# Chapter 1: Devon and Cornwall in the Great South West — challenges and opportunities

## Live local and prosper

On 11 May 2021, Her Majesty the Queen set out the Government's domestic policy agenda at the state opening of Parliament. Central to the speech was a plan to level up the country, allowing British people to “live local and prosper”, no longer being forced to move out of their hometowns to find decent jobs with high pay.

Levelling up is now the central commitment of the Government's policy agenda. While it doesn't have an official definition it is nevertheless aimed squarely at reducing regional inequality and boosting productivity outside London and the South East.

If the principles of this agenda were important before Covid-19, they are now essential. While much of the conversation around levelling up has focused on the so-called ‘Red Wall’ of formerly Labour-held seats in the north and midlands of England, in reality all regions outside London have specific socio-economic challenges impeding their economic growth which can be addressed by Government policy and all have been impacted by the pandemic.

The counties of Devon and Cornwall are no exception. Historic government investment decisions based on national GVA (Gross

Value Added) have meant both counties being overlooked for investment for a number of years. Over time, this has led to a widening and well-documented economic gap between Devon and Cornwall and London. Despite a strong sectoral base across the two counties there are also major challenges on productivity, low pay, and pockets of deprivation, particularly in urban and coastal areas.

Thankfully, the region's strategic economic plans show the action and intent necessary to rectify disparities and build on the strong foundations created by the joint working of local government and regional business. But there is always more to do. After the pandemic, central government also has a real opportunity to deliver lasting change and economic growth in partnership with the people of Devon and Cornwall and all others in the Great South West region. .

Over the next few months, the Government will be setting out in clearer detail its plans to level up Britain. This report is a major part of Pennon's contribution to that conversation and to the plans to ensure the G7 Summit taking place in June creates a lasting legacy for the region.

If we are to tackle regional inequality, then we will have to address low economic growth in the rural South West. The good news is that we already have a firm foundation on which to build: a natural environment which is the envy of Britain; a tourism trade which makes up around a quarter of regional GVA per year; the second highest regional employment in the creative industries outside London and the South East; a thriving aerospace and manufacturing sector; huge opportunities for sustainable energy generation; and an increasingly innovative agri-food industry. But all of this potential will require unlocking through persistent and large-scale investment, as well as the freeing up of supply side constraints.

If the Government's levelling up agenda is to have the impact necessary to transform economic growth and productivity in every nation and region of Britain then it cannot focus solely on post-industrial areas of the North and Midlands. What is necessary is a comprehensive industrial and economic plan which caters as much for Devon and Cornwall as for places like West Yorkshire and the Tees Valley. This report argues for such an expanded definition of levelling up and gives Government the tools to implement it in our region.

# Chapter 2: Our Levelling Up Analysis

## A complex picture

While much of the Great South West may have a reputation as a well-off region of Britain, in reality the picture is far more complex. We have decided to focus on Devon and Cornwall, the counties which make up South West Water's primary coverage area. The figures speak for themselves. Productivity in Cornwall is the lowest out of all regions in England,<sup>1</sup> aggravated by low wages despite high employment levels. Devon has its own problems: productivity here lags well behind the national average and the county has poor transport connectivity. Across Devon, the population as a whole is growing, but the working age population is declining as a share of the total.<sup>2</sup> On top of all this, both counties are experiencing an exodus of young people to larger urban areas, particularly London, with 70% of 15-17 year olds in Cornwall saying they will need to leave the county in order to obtain a good job.<sup>3</sup>

The Covid-19 pandemic has complexified and complicated these trends. The rural South West is a regional economy heavily reliant on sectors including aerospace and tourism, both of which have been severely impacted by shutdowns. In January 2021 it was revealed that unemployment in Devon and Cornwall had increased by 138% in just twelve months.<sup>4</sup> And despite having the second-lowest rate of Covid-19 of any English county, Devon's increase in JSA claimants has been far higher than elsewhere, increasing by 180% compared to a national average of 117% in August 2020.<sup>5</sup> Numerous think tank reports throughout the past year have predicted that of all areas in Britain, Devon and Cornwall will be particularly hard hit by the economic impacts of the pandemic over the long-term.<sup>6</sup>

The furlough figures show this most clearly: the chart below shows the number of people furloughed by South West local authority with Devon County Council and Cornwall Unitary Authority first and third highest respectively, furloughing 158,000 people between them.

## Giving Government the tools to level up

However, while the pandemic has had an outsized negative impact on the economies of Devon and Cornwall, it did so partly due to the underlying weaknesses already present. In order to better understand these socio-economic challenges, we have created a levelling up analysis of both Devon and Cornwall at a parliamentary constituency level. This comprehensive socio-economic breakdown allows us to take a deep dive into the specific challenges facing the region and to paint a nuanced picture of where specific policy interventions could lead to substantial and lasting change.

We have compared all eighteen parliamentary constituencies in Devon and Cornwall against the England and Wales average (EWA) on six indicators which aim to show the social and economic strength of an area.

- **Spending power** – combines employment rate and average salary to show consumer and economic strength (a higher score is better on this indicator).
- **Financial dependency** – combines Job Seekers' Allowance rate, Universal Credit rate and educational attainment rates to show an area's current and likely dependence on state support (a lower score is better on this indicator).
- **Deprivation** – deprivation score based on the English Index of Multiple Deprivation

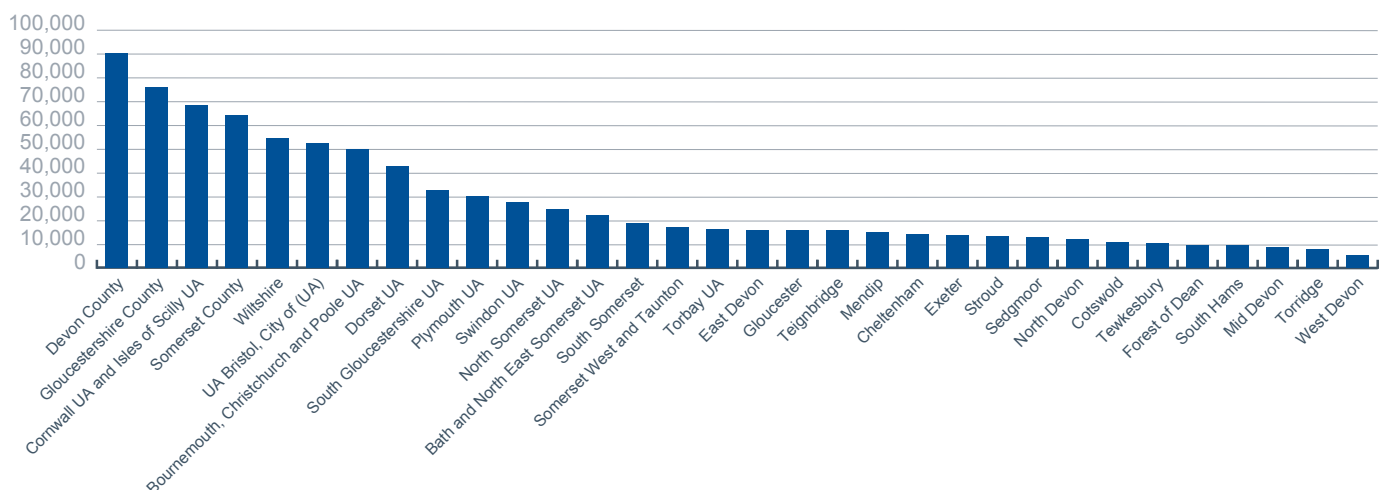
(IMD) (a lower score is better on this indicator).

- **Crime** – the crime rate for each area (a lower score is better on this indicator).
- **Health** – based on both number of GPs per 1,000 patients and life expectancy for each area (a higher score is better on this indicator).
- **Empty commercial properties** – based on commercial vacancy rates (a lower score is better on this indicator).

In weighting the indicators priority should be given to the first two, spending power and financial dependency. The first of these, spending power, can be interpreted as productivity and gives a sense of the economic growth prospects for an area. High or low productivity is particularly important when considering a region as opposed to a city or town; it is likely to have causes which go beyond local conditions and to which regional economic strategies are an important solution. Financial dependency shows an area's dependence on state benefits and gives a sense of the likely employment challenges and the resources available to local areas to rectify them.

Our analysis aimed to bring out this complex picture of a region in clear need of levelling up but also facing unique challenges. In our summary below we have pulled out the key regional insights for each indicator and then proceed to give a high-level analysis of the region as a whole.

Figure 1: Number of people furloughed by South West local authority



Source: ONS June 2020

## Regional Insights

**Spending Power:** This is where we see the largest gap between Devon and Cornwall and the EWA. There are 18 constituencies in both counties and all but two of them are below the EWA, some by a considerable margin. St Ives, the seat where the G7 Summit will be held in June, is 32% below the EWA with an average salary of just £18,465 despite an employment rate above the national average. As spending power is the most important of the indicators, and can be seen as a proxy for productivity, these numbers are concerning.

**Financial dependency:** Two thirds of Cornish seats have a dependency figure higher than the EWA, while three seats in Devon – Torbay and both Plymouth constituencies – are close to the very top. Torbay, among the most deprived local authority areas in England,<sup>7</sup> has a benefit dependency figure of 7.5%, 50% above the England and Wales average. The inclusion of the Plymouth seats in this top bracket points to a national phenomenon of high benefit dependency and low wages in many coastal areas, particularly those formerly reliant on fishing and tourism.

**Deprivation:** Relatively high levels of deprivation affect much of Cornwall and the urban areas of Devon. All but one Cornish seat has higher deprivation than the England average, including Camborne and Redruth which is 23% higher, and the coastal constituencies of St Austell & Newquay and St Ives, both of which – despite their popularity

as tourist destinations – have pockets of quite severe poverty.

**Crime:** Many of the constituencies in our analysis are rural and the crime figure is relatively low. Plymouth and Torbay again are the exceptions — and with the latter being the most deprived area in Devon that isn't too surprising. Overall though the crime rate in both counties is well below the EWA.

**Health:** The health indicator is made up of both access to a GP and higher life expectancy. Rural areas tend to do relatively well on both of these scores and that's the case with both Devon and Cornwall. Plymouth, again, performs relatively poorly, below the EWA, as does St Austell and Newquay which is slightly below the EWA and which also didn't perform well on either deprivation or financial dependency.

**Empty commercial properties:** This indicator is really about the strength of the local high street. On this indicator there were highly divergent scores within both counties. In many of the places struggling with high levels of benefit dependency and deprivation, the rate of empty shops was also higher, reflecting low spending levels and lack of investment. In Camborne and Redruth, for example, the rate is 38% higher, in Torbay 30% higher, and in Plymouth, Sutton, and Devonport 43% higher.

## The main challenges facing Devon and Cornwall

### A widening gap

The data show a number of important patterns. The first is a clear divide between Devon and Cornwall and the rest of the UK in terms of productivity. This divide cannot be overstated. Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly has the lowest productivity of any UK subregion — and by a long way – 32% below the national average and is an outlier even amongst the bottom quartile. Devon, while certainly better, is still the seventh lowest productivity area in the UK.<sup>8</sup>

While this can partly be explained by the fact that both Devon and Cornwall are rural counties, it isn't the whole story. Part of the problem is an unusually concentrated level of low paying jobs throughout the rural South West. Much of this is caused by the make-up and the type of businesses in the region. As Glenn Caplin, Chair of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP has made clear, "in the UK, sole proprietors have the highest levels of low pay (56% are paid below the Real Living Wage of £9 per hour outside London), followed by partnerships (40%) and then private companies (28%)." Cornwall is particularly impacted by the structure of its labour market in which sole proprietors and partnerships make up 48% of all businesses, compared to just 25% nationally.<sup>9</sup> Devon faces similar problems. Parts of the county are among the lowest paid areas of the UK, with high

Table 1: Levelling Up Data Chart

Constituency	County	Spending power	Financial dependency	Crime	Deprivation	Health	Empty commercial properties
Camborne and Redruth	Cornwall	91	85	72	123	102	138
Central Devon	Devon	86	70	41	75	121	74
East Devon	Devon	108	75	47	54	130	69
Exeter	Devon	95	61	78	79	119	93
Newton Abbot	Devon	85	90	62	78	124	77
North Cornwall	Cornwall	73	115	52	109	106	67
North Devon	Devon	89	70	59	95	119	115
Plymouth, Moor View	Devon	102	120	89	139	89	69
Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport	Devon	85	121	127	143	104	143
South East Cornwall	Cornwall	72	116	60	100	112	82
South West Devon	Devon	91	62	46	52	111	57
St Austell and Newquay	Cornwall	79	104	68	111	99	76
St Ives	Cornwall	68	109	61	112	124	113
Tiverton and Honiton	Devon	85	96	49	72	130	105
Torbay	Devon	73	134	114	136	104	129
Torridge and West Devon	Devon	69	90	48	98	118	90
Totnes	Devon	76	93	56	90	115	70
Truro and Falmouth	Cornwall	84	88	59	85	119	96
<b>Average of English &amp; Welsh PCs</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Cornwall		71	103	64	101	110	88
Devon		77	75	57	73	123	88

Devon and Cornwall (all indicators) Scores are compared to an England and Wales average of 100. A score of 110 is 10% above the England and Wales average. A score of 90 is 10% below. A higher score is better for Spending Power and Health. A lower score is better for the other four indicators.

levels of self-employment exacerbating this trend. Entrepreneurship, of course, is to be commended and encouraged, but a fragmented employment market is in no one's interests.

The level of part-time work in both counties is also very high, particularly in Cornwall, which has the highest rate of part-time workers of any LEP area in England at 32.2%,<sup>10</sup> compared to a UK average of 24.9%. The problem Cornwall faces is even starker than that facing many communities in the north and midlands: simply too many low paid jobs, often part-time, in smaller businesses.

The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP already understands this challenge, writing that

“the productivity challenge in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly is multi-faceted, requiring orchestrated and long-term action across the foundations of productivity. Therefore, the focus for recovery should not only be on national priorities for certain specific sectors but on the challenges, goals and vision for the future economy at a local level.”<sup>21</sup>

If levelling up is to be a truly national project then it must take into account the problems and challenges affecting the rural South West as much as it tackles deindustrialised parts of the north and midlands. Integrating the economic strategies of every region into a coherent whole, backed by substantial investment and a forward-looking industrial strategy.

Unfortunately, the Government's own levelling

up methodology passes over Cornwall, Devon and much of the rest of the South West. Out of the 123 local authorities placed in the highest priority category only Torbay, the Isles of Scilly, and Torrridge are in Devon and Cornwall, and beyond these only Gloucester is in the wider South West.<sup>11</sup>

Our data, however, tells a completely different story. Using historical productivity data, we find that on a ranking of all parliamentary constituencies by productivity, 13 out of 18 Devon and Cornwall constituencies are in the highest priority category: St Ives, Torrridge & West Devon, South East Cornwall, North Cornwall, Torbay, Totnes, St Austell & Newquay, Truro & Falmouth, Tiverton & Honiton, Plymouth, Sutton & Devonport, Newton Abbott, Central Devon, and North Devon. The first five of these are in the top 25 most in need in the whole of England and Wales.

Similarly, ranked by deprivation, six constituencies fall into the highest priority category: Plymouth Sutton & Devonport, Plymouth Moor View, Torbay, Camborne & Redruth, St Ives, and St Austell & Newquay.

It is clear, on our analysis, that many places in Devon and Cornwall rank consistently among the lowest growth areas in Britain. This handicap, persistent for decades and – as we will see – set to be made worse by current demographic trends, needs a focused Government policy intervention, targeted at areas of particular need. Levelling up interventions, in other words, cannot be aimed only at a select group of constituencies with severe problems on almost all socio-economic indicators. Instead, it should be recognised that every nation and region of Britain has specific, localised challenges.

### South West divisions

A second pattern to be found in the data is the gap between constituencies *within* Devon and Cornwall, as shown above. By averaging out the indicators we are able to rank Devon and Cornwall's constituencies against each other. The findings point to a general rule with a major exception: Cornwall is more in need of levelling up than Devon, but both Plymouth seats and Torbay are more in need than anywhere else.

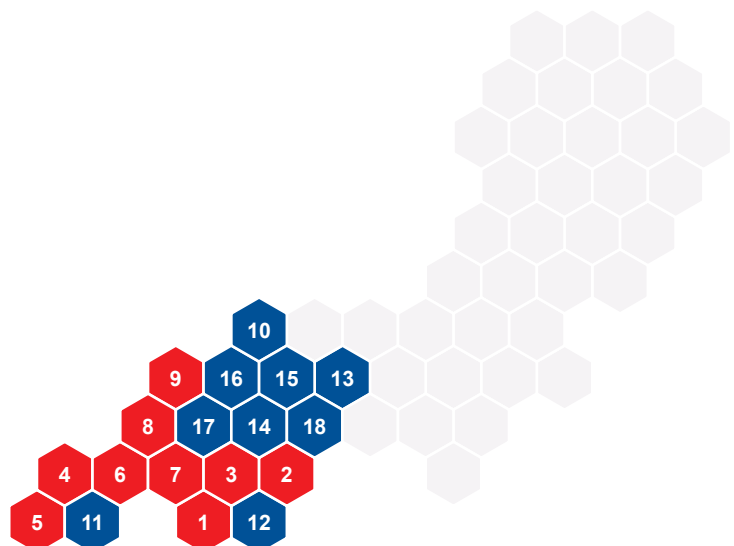
This can be seen in the five indicators other than spending power. While low productivity affects nearly all seats, the picture for the other indicators is more mixed. Financial dependency, the measure of an area's likely current and future reliance on state benefits, shows large intra-regional variation. Cornwall as a whole has higher levels of dependency than the England and Wales average while Devon is below. This is despite high levels of dependency in both Plymouth and Torbay, which are among the highest in England and Wales.

The stories of Plymouth and Torbay are worth exploring in more detail as microcosms of the experience of many places across Devon and Cornwall. Other constituencies – Camborne & Redruth, St Ives, and St Austell & Newquay – to a greater and lesser extent reflect the socio-economic problems affecting these areas.

Both are larger urban areas in Devon with pronounced problems including low productivity and high levels of dependency on state benefits. Plymouth Moor View is second only to South East Cornwall in its rate of working age population with low or no qualifications at 15.2%, compared to an EWA of 11.9%. The deprivation score of both areas

**Table 2: Levelling Up Data Chart – Constituencies in Devon and Cornwall ranked by 'levelling up' priority. Those at the top are considered most in need of levelling up.**

Ranking	County	Constituency
1	Devon	Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport
2	Devon	Torbay
3	Devon	Plymouth, Moor View
4	Cornwall	Camborne and Redruth
5	Cornwall	St Ives
6	Cornwall	St Austell and Newquay
7	Cornwall	South East Cornwall
8	Cornwall	North Cornwall
9	Devon	Torrridge and West Devon
10	Devon	North Devon
11	Cornwall	Truro and Falmouth
12	Devon	Totnes
13	Devon	Tiverton and Honiton
14	Devon	Newton Abbot
15	Devon	Exeter
16	Devon	Central Devon
17	Devon	South West Devon
18	Devon	East Devon







is also very high, at 36% higher than the England average for Torbay and 43% higher for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport.

What has happened to Plymouth and Torbay is very similar to much of the northern 'Red Wall', now a prime electoral target for both main parties. Indeed, while much of Devon is relatively prosperous there are pockets of need across both parts of the two counties: low productivity areas with low wages and a fragmented employment market, many still dealing with the effects of deindustrialisation and low levels of both private and public investment. Looked at on socio-economic indicators alone it would be difficult to tell apart many 'Red Wall' towns from those in coastal areas of the South West.

The similarity continues in the demographic structure of the populations: in Torbay 26.5% of the population are aged 65 and over compared to 18.1% across England.<sup>12</sup> As Torbay Council notes, "Torbay is ahead of the curve when it comes to having a large proportion of more senior residents. The national age profile now is similar to where Torbay was in the 1980s."<sup>13</sup> In the South West, however, the demographic pressure comes from two sides: both too many low paid jobs and difficulty for young people securing the necessary skills to get better ones. As mentioned earlier many younger people – up to 70% in Cornwall – feel they will have to move out of the county in order to find jobs, a problem which is not only unsustainable but reversible if the region has the tools to address it.

#### **The rural factor**

Yet while the urban and coastal town story in Devon and Cornwall has clear 'Red Wall' parallels, what makes it different is the rurality

of the two counties, adding unique challenges including low transport and digital connectivity, seasonal jobs, and the low investment typical of so-called 'peripheral' rural communities.

The rural factor is a major cause of the low productivity levels in the region. Despite promising clusters in a diverse advanced manufacturing sector, Devon and Cornwall tend not to benefit from the agglomeration effects present in other counties with large conurbations. There are only a few key urban areas and most of these – barring Plymouth and Exeter – are relatively small, with populations under 25,000.<sup>14</sup> Fewer people in a larger rural area means fewer opportunities for business development, high production costs, and less specialisation. In most of Devon and Cornwall this is combined with very poor transport connectivity. In the South West more broadly investment in transport per capita is £651 compared to the £1564 England average.<sup>15</sup>

The rural factor has an impact on the business population as well: Cornwall has the lowest proportion of large companies as well as the lowest level of investment into RD&I of any LEP area in England, further reducing productivity.

#### **A focus on the future**

What our analysis reveals is simple: that if there are parts of Devon and Cornwall which look, in social and economic terms, rather like the more famous "Red Wall", that is because they have much in common with them. Their residents live mostly in small and medium-sized towns, many with a proud industrial heritage which has declined in recent decades. They lack good transport connections to the larger urban areas in the region. They have a declining working age

population as a share of the total.

But the picture so far has only been half the story. Devon and Cornwall are also counties of great opportunity if local and central government can get the policy right, with an exciting array of sectors making up a high-potential advanced manufacturing cluster. These sectors stretch across both counties and are currently being supported by strong local government leadership — visionary strategic economic plans have the potential to catalyse large positive shifts in the economic dynamism of the region, of the business population, and of incomes and productivity for its 1.7 million people. On top of all this, there are several successful universities in both counties, with notable specialisms in environmental and marine science and engineering.

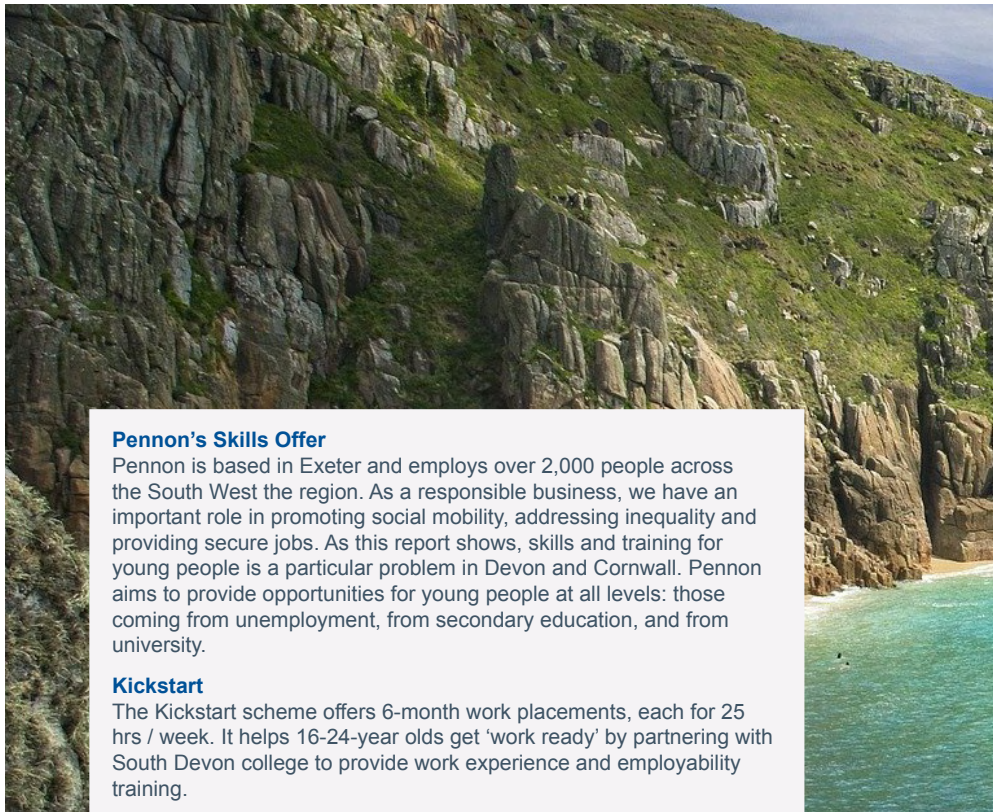
Encouraging investment – both private and public – into these already-established clusters should be an urgent priority, in turn attracting further private investment. The aerospace industry in the South West, for example, is worth £7 billion, supporting 98,000 jobs.<sup>16</sup> Many of the advanced engineering skills learned in these roles could also be turned towards advanced manufacturing in other areas, particularly space and renewable energy. In fact, the combination of the natural environment and environmental science specialisms in the region means Devon, Cornwall and the wider South West could set their sights on becoming Britain's greenest regional economy, turning global concerns over sustainability into locally-led economic growth. South West Water is making its own contribution to this with our Green Recovery Initiative, supporting the creation of up to 500 additional jobs across our regions over the next four years and provide further

opportunities for South West Water's existing workforce to gain new green skills.<sup>17</sup> This type of private sector investment – regional, green, and long-term – is exactly the kind of economic stimulus needed in Devon and Cornwall.

Indeed, the Great South West more generally, considered as a whole regional economy, has the potential to point the way to a high-tech, high-growth, green British future. Where rural areas and an innovative agri-food sector combine with hundreds of miles of pristine coastline and newly emerging larger conurbations boasting advanced manufacturing clusters employing local people in their local areas.

The figures on sectoral growth speak for themselves. Devon is home to one of the fastest-growing IT clusters in the UK, with the number of sectors in the cluster having grown by 36% since 2010, creating over 2,000 jobs.<sup>18</sup> Agri-tech contributes over £750 million to Devon's economy each year and the county has seen a 367% increase in environmental consultancies and businesses since 2010 and a 400% increase in the number of individuals working in the sector.<sup>19</sup> Cornwall is similar: 27% of the county is recognised as an Area of Outstanding National Beauty,<sup>20</sup> recent innovative green projects include Smart Islands, the Cornwall Local Energy Market and the United Downs Deep Geothermal Power project and the associated skills remain in the region. Cornwall also has a higher proportion of energy, geo-resources, and marine businesses than the rest of the UK, all high-productivity sectors which rely on the natural assets of the region. The aim of any levelling up plan must be to concentrate on these sectors and, over time, the value added within them will percolate into the wider economy.

The levelling up priorities for both counties are therefore similar and they would also apply across much of the Great South West region: boosting productivity in both should be a huge priority by creating growth sectors which build on the foundations of success: advanced manufacturing, aerospace, the natural environment, agri-food, environmental science, innovative tourism, and clean energy. All of these have the potential to improve the indicators for Devon and Cornwall. A second part of any levelling up plan should be improving connectivity, both in transport infrastructure and digital. That would allow for the gradual expansion of higher paid secure employment and the introduction of agglomeration effects currently missing from the wider region. A third part should be capitalising on the natural environment in the region by investing heavily in environmental science, marine tech, and renewable energy, linking the levelling up agenda to sustainability and the net zero agenda. And finally, any attempt to level up the Great South West should concentrate on skills, ensuring there is a skills and training pipeline for young people to be able to easily transition from higher to further education and on into high growth, high paid sectors in their local area.



#### **Pennon's Skills Offer**

Pennon is based in Exeter and employs over 2,000 people across the South West the region. As a responsible business, we have an important role in promoting social mobility, addressing inequality and providing secure jobs. As this report shows, skills and training for young people is a particular problem in Devon and Cornwall. Pennon aims to provide opportunities for young people at all levels: those coming from unemployment, from secondary education, and from university.

#### **Kickstart**

The Kickstart scheme offers 6-month work placements, each for 25 hrs / week. It helps 16-24-year olds get 'work ready' by partnering with South Devon college to provide work experience and employability training.

Only days after the scheme launched, Pennon was one of the first companies to sign up to the Kickstart scheme. We signed up to offer 50 placements and the scheme is set to run to December 2021. We have placements in Customer Service, Head Office roles in both Exeter and Bournemouth and are offering roles across all of all operations across Devon and Cornwall, offering non-office-based work experience. We offer a £500 completion bonus for Kickstarters successfully completing their 6-month placement.

#### **Apprenticeships**

We started our apprenticeship programme in 2010. The programme has been so successful and grown to offer apprenticeships in all business functions with 400 apprentices now recruited through the programme. We are ambitious and want to recruit a further 500 apprentices over the next 5 years and plan to recruit apprentices in virtually all business functions, making sure young people in the South West don't feel they have to 'get out to get on'.

#### **Graduate Programme**

Pennon is particularly proud of our newly launched graduate programme, which aims to capture top talent and keep them in the South West. We launched in March 2021 offering 20 graduate placements as part of our commitment to offer 100 roles by 2025. Graduates will start on on a 2-year structured programme and will all be offered permanent contracts from day 1 on a starting salary of £25,000 p.a



### **The Green Recovery Initiative**

The pandemic has changed the lives of everyone, whatever their personal circumstances, now and for the longer term. As a large regional employer and provider of vital public services we take our role in the community very seriously and want to support the region to build back better post pandemic.

Customers are clear that the South West and Bournemouth regions need to benefit from any investment – given the economic and social impacts. Their view is that Government cannot do this alone and that responsible businesses such as ours should step up and help build back greener and support jobs in our regions. Any investment should make a difference to all customers across the region, ensuring that the benefits are felt as widely as possible. Enhancing the local environment to support biodiversity and improve public health, as well as generating new jobs and better jobs are important goals — especially as we seek to create sustainable economic growth into the future.

Our Green Recovery Initiative is focused on opportunities to make an even bigger and better societal contribution, with six projects focused on improving public health, protecting the environment and addressing climate change.

It will provide much needed investment and supports the creation of up to 500 regional jobs up to 2025, benefits the wider supply chain, and provides opportunities for South West Water's existing workforce to gain new green skills. We intend to do this by bringing forward investment, accelerating delivery of current plans, and developing new and innovative solutions to the issues facing us today and in the future.

# Chapter 3: Case Studies

If Devon and Cornwall are to truly benefit from the levelling up agenda then the regional economic plans will have to be built into an integrated national framework. Understanding the places which need to be levelled up will be a crucial part of this policy intervention. Over the next few pages we have created ‘pen portraits’ of six constituencies: revealing the challenges they face as well as the opportunities on offer.



## Plymouth Sutton and Devonport

Plymouth Sutton and Devonport, which covers the southern part of the city of Plymouth, is the home of the largest naval base in Western Europe, the Royal Navy's Devonport dockyard, which covers 650 acres, employs 2,500 service personnel and generates around 10 per cent of Plymouth's income. It also has a large student population, attending the University of Plymouth. But the city's proud status as the hub of Britain's shipbuilding and maritime industry is not what it was. It once built aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines but today construction of new ships has ceased completely, although the city is still home to a high concentration of defence suppliers, as well as being a global centre of excellence for marine science and technology with one of the largest clusters of expertise in Europe.

The decline of shipbuilding contributes to Plymouth Sutton and Devonport's spending power being 15 per cent below the England and Wales average: an indication that the constituency is suffering from relatively low levels of output and value-adding activity. But Plymouth has other strengths, notably manufacturing: it has the highest concentration of manufacturing employment on the south coast, with 13,000 manufacturing jobs in the city as a whole, 12 per cent of the city's total jobs.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, the constituency overall has low

levels of employment and high dependency on state support, with a financial dependency rating (a measure that incorporates Job Seekers' Allowance rate, Universal Credit rate and educational attainment rates) 21 per cent higher than the England and Wales average. Plymouth Sutton and Devonport also has the highest crime rate of any constituency in Devon or Cornwall, 33 per cent higher than the England and Wales average. Like most places, Plymouth has been severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with employment rates falling 6.8 per cent between Q4 2019 and Q4 2020.<sup>23</sup>

All of these indicators paint a picture of a city with a complex set of problems: most strikingly, the constituency's deprivation score, which is 43 per cent higher than the England and Wales average, puts it in the top 10 per cent most deprived areas in the country.

The good news is that the Government has recently named Plymouth as one of eight new freeports, where businesses will benefit from tax breaks and wider government support. This is intended to bring investment, trade and jobs to the whole region and, if successful, could play a key role in improving livelihoods and reducing deprivation in the constituency.

## Camborne and Redruth

Camborne and Redruth constituency was formerly the heartland of the Cornish mining industry, focused around tin and copper

extraction: for a period in the 19th century it was the richest mining area in the world. The area was also home to a wide range of related engineering and manufacturing businesses, with residents benefiting from stable high-skilled work. But the last working tin mine in Europe, which was located in Camborne, closed in 1998. Following the closure of the mines and departure of associated businesses, jobs in the constituency have shifted toward low-pay and low-skill work, often on a seasonal or part-time basis. The area still sees less tourism than much of the rest of the county. The consequences of this can be seen all over the constituency, with the number of empty commercial properties being 38 per cent higher than the England and Wales average, the worst rate anywhere in Cornwall, and spending power – a productivity measure which combines employment rate and average salary – being significantly lower.

Camborne and Redruth face a level of deprivation that is 23 per cent higher than the England and Wales average. High levels of deprivation are common across Cornwall, but this constituency is particularly affected, with four of the five most deprived neighbourhoods in Cornwall being located in Camborne.<sup>24</sup>

However, there is no doubt that Camborne and Redruth has the potential to become a flourishing area housing some of the country's most innovative industries. The Government has already recognised that potential, and

Camborne received £750,000 from the Towns Fund to invest in key infrastructure and skills. The area also benefits from rich lithium deposits, with research by Cornish Lithium finding remarkably high concentrations in geothermal waters. With demand for lithium, used in mobile phones and electric cars, increasing significantly, the potential for a new industry to emerge is strong. The extraction in the region would be low carbon, offering the potential for green job creation and fuelling the UK's transition to electric vehicles.

While not often thought of in those terms, partly because it has been a Conservative-held constituency since 2010 and not a recent high profile "red wall" gain from Labour, Camborne and Redruth could benefit immensely from the government's levelling up agenda and play a role in delivering the UK's transition to a net zero economy.

### St Ives

When world leaders arrive in St Ives for the G7 summit in June, they will see what draws hundreds of thousands of tourists to the area every year. St Ives boasts spectacular beaches and scenery, a picturesque fishing harbour, and what has been described as "the most beautiful light in Britain". The town has long been a haven for artists and is the home of Tate St Ives and the Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden. The St Ives constituency as a whole takes in the most southerly and westerly points in England, both of its mainland or islands, incorporating the Isles of Scilly as well as Land's End and the Lizard peninsula, the town of Penzance and the tidal island St Michael's Mount with its castle and chapel. But while the constituency's position at the extreme South West tip of the UK is part of its attraction to visitors, its geographical isolation also brings with it significant economic challenges.

That is especially the case during the Covid-19 pandemic, which has hit tourist-dependent areas all over the world. By

July 2020, St Ives had received the highest value of business support grants per 1,000 enterprises of any constituency in England.<sup>25</sup> In January this year the BBC reported that demand for the St Ives foodbank had risen by four times since March 2020, with incomes from renting property, cleaning and other tourism-related jobs all collapsing. Local community volunteer Gill Scott Anderson said that poverty in St Ives was "alive and kicking", and that "the real St Ives is a community where there is a lot of inequality".<sup>26</sup> While that has been exacerbated by the pandemic, inequality is present here in normal times too.

As our index shows, St Ives has the lowest spending power – a measure of the productivity of the local economy, combining the employment rate and average salary – in the whole of Devon and Cornwall, 32 per cent below the national average, as well as a high level of dependence on state support. Government figures released last year show that one area of the town of St Ives – just a few hundred yards from the harbourfront with its cobbled streets and tourist-friendly seafood restaurants – has the highest child poverty anywhere in Cornwall, with more than one third of children there estimated to be living in households with an income of less than 60 per cent of the UK average.<sup>27</sup>

That reflects the fact that the constituency also has the second worst deprivation score in Cornwall, according to a measure based on the English Index of Multiple Deprivation, 12 per cent higher than the national average. Commercial vacancy rates are also among the highest in the region, 13 per cent higher than the national average, although Penzance recently successfully bid for a £10.4 million investment from the Government's Future High Street Fund, the only Cornwall town to receive such funding.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to tourism, the constituency has a significant fishing industry. Newlyn, just south of Penzance, is the largest deep-sea fishing

port in England in terms of the value of fish landed, and home to England's biggest fishing fleet. Since Brexit many local fishers and fish merchants have complained about additional red tape making it more difficult to export their catch to Europe, while EU boats continue to be allowed to fish in Cornish waters.<sup>29</sup>

### St Austell & Newquay

Like much of Cornwall, the constituency of St Austell & Newquay is heavily reliant on tourism. The seaside resort of Newquay, in the north, is among the most visited in the county, and there are a number of popular beaches near St Austell on the constituency's south coast. The world-famous Eden Project is one of the region's top tourist attractions, with over a million visitors a year before the pandemic – but the steep drop in visitor numbers and tourist income as a result of Covid-19 has understandably hit the area hard. As of last June, St Austell & Newquay had the highest number of jobs being supported by the furlough scheme of any constituency in Cornwall, at 18,300.<sup>30</sup>

The area's significant dependence on tourism, agriculture and fishing helps to explain the constituency's relatively low productivity, with a spending power score on our index 21 per cent lower than the national average, and an above average dependence on state support. A 2019 report by End Child Poverty found that 32 per cent of children in St Austell & Newquay were living in poverty after housing costs – the joint highest in the county.<sup>31</sup> All but one of the six Cornish constituencies rate poorly on our index for deprivation, and St Austell & Newquay's deprivation score is 11 per cent higher than the national average.

Fishing is a major industry in the constituency, particularly around Newquay in the north and Megavissey in the south. In January local MP Steve Double raised concerns that the inshore fishing fleet would not benefit from the agreement reached on fishing quotas on leaving the EU.<sup>32</sup>



The area is benefiting from new investment too, most eye-catchingly through the development of Spaceport Cornwall, based at Cornwall Airport Newquay, a horizontal launch site where, from Spring 2022, modified aircraft will be used to send small satellites into orbit. The airport is being used to accommodate the aircraft that will bring world leaders and their entourages to and from the G7 summit, and the £7.85 million upgrades funded by the Government to improve the airport ahead of the summit will also support the development of the spaceport there.<sup>33</sup>

### North Devon

North Devon is known for its sweeping scenery and dramatic coastlines. The area is home to Exmoor National Park, sandy beaches at Woolacombe and Saunton Sands, and the largest sand dune system in England – registered as a UNESCO biosphere reserve. It is no surprise that North Devon attracts an average of two million tourists per year, and the tourism industry is responsible for 19 per cent of all employment in the area.<sup>34</sup>

Its reliance on tourism comes with its own set of challenges, which have only worsened with the Covid-19 pandemic. With stringent restrictions on domestic and international travel, tourism and its related industries have declined significantly. As a result, North Devon has seen one of the highest furlough uptakes in the country, with 14 per cent of employees being furloughed.<sup>35</sup> A recent study by the Centre for Towns also found that Ilfracombe and Barnstaple ranked in the highest five per cent of towns that were economically exposed to the effects of Covid-19, due to the fragility and seasonality of their coastal economies.<sup>36</sup> As they are the two largest towns in the region, it is likely that much of North Devon has been dealing with the same problems.

However, this is only one piece of the complex puzzle that the area is facing. Our index shows that the spending power, a measure of productivity, is 11 per cent lower than the England and Wales average. The region also

faces the seventh lowest residence-based earning in the UK, out of 370 districts.<sup>37</sup>

The good news is that North Devon has been attracting attention from both the private and public sector. Barnstaple recently received £6.5 million from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government towards the transformation of its town centre.<sup>38</sup> The plans involve expanding the high street towards the river and creating a ‘market quarter’ which will house new retail stores and restaurants. South West Water has also been focusing on the region and has plans to complete a large-scale pilot programme to improve its user experience in the area. The investment would involve the installation of smart meters in all eligible homes, and the replacement of old supply pipes, including lead pipes. These measures would make it easier for customers to monitor their water consumption and relieve the financial worry of a burst pipe or other supply failure.

North Devon holds immense potential in its rich and diverse natural environment, which is already being recognised by regional business. The area is ripe for levelling-up and delivering a better productivity and standard of living for its residents.

### Newton Abbott

The constituency of Newton Abbot includes the market town after which it is named as well as the seaside towns of Teignmouth and Dawlish, both of which are popular tourist destinations. In a normal year, the population of Dawlish and nearby resort Dawlish Warren can expand by as much as 20,000 during the summer months thanks to visitors arriving to stay in local hotels, caravan and camp sites and holiday parks, but last year the tourism industry was hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. Newton Abbot recently received £9.2 million from the Government’s Future High Streets Fund for town centre regeneration plans aimed at making it “Devon’s premier market town”.<sup>39</sup>

Overall, it is a fairly affluent constituency, with low scores in our index for financial dependency and deprivation (10 per cent and 22 per cent below the England and Wales average respectively), as well as good health indicators, a low crime rate and a low level of empty commercial properties. However, there are pockets of deprivation in the area, with some neighbourhoods in Newton Abbot appearing in the top quartile of most deprived neighbourhoods nationally.<sup>40</sup> It also shares with most of the rest of the region a low spending power score, suggesting relatively low productivity showing up in low salaries.

The town had a long history of wool and leather production but grew into an industrial hub with the construction of a railway in the late 18th century. A Timber yard, iron and brass foundries, and a power station were all set up in the region. Some of these industrial businesses have stood the test of time and remain in Newton Abbott to this day. One of these is Centrax Industries, one of the largest power generation companies in the country, employing over 300 people in the area.<sup>41</sup>

The area also has relatively high skill levels, helped by the South Devon University Technical College (UTC) based in Newton Abbot. South West Water is one of the founding partners of the UTC and helped to obtain the initial £10 million from the Department for Education to help build the school, which opened in 2015. The UTC is for 14-19 year olds and offers specialist STEM programmes alongside the standard curriculum, working closely with businesses, industry and universities. Nigel Fenn MBE, who runs Pennon’s Kickstart and Apprentice and Graduate scheme, helped to define a curriculum focused on Water, Education and the Environment. South West Water supports students by providing work experience, real life challenge projects and work readiness skills. In return it gets trained, knowledgeable and engaged youngsters who are interested in working in the industry and already have some of the training they need.





## Chapter 4: Policy Recommendations

As a key stakeholder in the economies of Devon and Cornwall and the wider Great South West, Pennon is committed to delivering high levels of economic growth. As we move into a post-pandemic recovery, Government and the private sector will have to work closely together to create the conditions in which new and established sectors can thrive sustainably while protecting the natural environment.

The risks of not doing so are clear: low economic growth, lack of investment, and lagging productivity could combine with a regional 'brain drain' to condemn the Great South West to low levels of future growth. We can't risk the levelling up agenda concentrating solely on the north and midlands when other areas of the country are overlooked. But it doesn't have to be this way. Transforming levelling up into a truly national project with a long-term strategy integrating economic thinking from every nation and region of Britain could have a real impact.

Outlined below is a five-step policy programme for central Government which can support the economic development of Devon and Cornwall and the wider Great South West region:

1. Transform levelling up into an integrated national project, with economic growth plans for every British region incorporated into a central framework. These plans should be delivered by regional leaders with regional accountability.
2. Establish a Transport for the South West body with similar powers to Transport for the North, able to champion transport infrastructure projects across the region.
3. Deliver ultra-fast South West 5G mobile, fibre and wireless broadband through to 90% of the population by 2030.
4. Expand the now-doubled public RD&I budget in every British region, prioritising the South West's portion in the advanced manufacturing and environmental science clusters.
5. Commit to opening up more STEM pathways for students in higher and further education. The Government's current pledge to increase the number of students taking STEM subjects is very welcome and should be accelerated.

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