



# There was a great appetite among Fellows to challenge existing thinking and explore radical approaches

The RSA has recently launched its Change Stories project, which showcases the ways in which Fellows are making change happen across the country

by Andrew Staines

Norfolk County Council's Further Afield project looks at the trends and drivers of change that could have an impact on Norfolk over the next 20 years. We want to make sure the council is in the best place to support our county in the face of complex, interrelated challenges such as automation, low social mobility and an ageing population. If we do not understand these changes and the impact they may have, we cannot respond.

My personal motivation for the project is to make Norfolk a sustainable place to live, so that when my children grow up, they feel there are opportunities for them if they remain in the area, rather than feeling they have to move away, as I did 20 years ago.

I have also been inspired by the RSA's Future of Work programme, and by its ideas for a 21st century enlightenment. The RSA fundamentally changed the project for me by being so open to my ask for help so early on in my Fellowship. The Fellowship team gave me the space and time to explore ideas and the opportunity to work with local Fellows who provide brilliant cross-sector input and insights, which we would not get so easily in other forums.

I worked with the RSA Norwich and Norfolk network to test out our ideas. There was great appetite among Fellows to challenge existing thinking and explore radical approaches such as universal basic income, new models of affordable housing, four-day working weeks, deliberative democracy, and how to harness tech and support young people's aspirations.

Fellows also pointed us to the value of presenting more people-focused narratives and stories, rather than just hard data.

The input of Fellows and RSA staff prompted us to look to other sectors and develop our systems

thinking. By using our findings in day-to-day projects, we are bringing future planning into our everyday actions, which is essential for longevity. Every finding has an action, from basing our new business plan around inclusive growth, to developing innovative e-democracy projects.

Our work has shown that county councils can be equal to other bodies in their ability to think and act strategically. We are not helpless. We are showing that rural areas can thrive even in the face of significant change and challenge.

RSA Fellows remain integral to the project, and I am in conversation with Fellows, our local network and the Action and Research Centre on the next steps. Being a Fellow has shown me how diverse groups of people can get together to discuss common challenges with respect. It gives me great hope for collective action in the future.

I would love to see if the RSA could use Norfolk as a test bed for its work on the future of democratic approaches and, more generally, if the organisation can consider rural settings as much as urban in its thinking.

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## Top tips

- At a local level, people are up for change and for a debate about it. You should give it a go – you might be surprised.
- Good evidence and good intentions lead to positive results.
- Don't be afraid to start small: we can make tangible differences using small building blocks for bigger changes.
- Bringing people on board can be tough; be prepared for initial cynicism. As projects start to show results, the way becomes smoother.
- Make your project a learning journey; allow yourself time to make mistakes and learn from them along the way.