

Launch Event 20th September 2021 - Speaker Biographies

In order of appearance

Paul Howell MP, MP for Sedgefield and Co-Chair of the APPG for Left Behind Neighbourhoods. Paul was elected as MP for Sedgefield in the 2019 General Election, a seat Labour had held for over 60 years and where Paul was born and grew up. Working as an accountant for local companies and then a chartered accountant, Paul became involved in local politics from 2010 and then more active from 2016 following the threatened closure of a local library. He has experience as a County Councillor in Durham and as spent time as a Cabinet Member on Darlington Borough Council before being elected as an MP.

Paul is a member of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy select committee and Co-Chairs the APPG for Left Behind Neighbourhoods. Twitter: @PaulHowellMP.

Vidhya Alakeson, CEO of Power to Change. Vidhya is the CEO of Power to Change, an independent trust supporting the growth of prosperous and cohesive communities through community businesses. Power to Change has invested £100 million into the sector through targeted grants and support programmes. In 2021 Vidhya received an OBE for services to Social Equality.

Vidhya is a board member of the Resolution Foundation, More in Common, and the Young Foundation; and regularly advises government on community regeneration. Twitter: [@vidhyaalakeson](https://twitter.com/vidhyaalakeson).

Mark Pepper, Development Manager, Ambition Lawrence Weston. Mark is a lifelong resident of Lawrence Weston, a housing estate on the outskirts of North Bristol that is home to 7,000 residents and suffers from high levels of deprivation and a historic lack of investment and funding.

Mark is a father of 4 and grandfather of 5, who all reside in the Lawrence Weston area. He has over 30 years of experience working in Lawrence Weston, including in community development, youth work and Social Care and his current role is Development Manager for Ambition Lawrence Weston, a Development Trust set up and managed by local residents in 2012. Lawrence Weston is currently benefiting from the Lottery's Big Local programme. Website: www.ambitionlw.org.uk. Twitter: @ambitionlw.

Ann Potts, resident, Karbon Homes. Ann lives in Chester le Street, Durham and has been a Karbon Homes resident for ten years. She is Vice Chair of Karbon Homes' Strategic Residents Group, where she is involved in helping shape Karbon services and strategy. Ann is also a member of the Karbon Grants Panel, making decisions on which community projects Karbon will invest in, is secretary of South Pelaw Residents Association and a member of the North East Tenants' Voice, which brings together social housing residents from across the North East to shape policymaking.

Ann believes strongly that residents are best placed to make decisions about their homes, their communities and their neighbourhoods and have a key role to play in holding decision-makers to account.

Maria Billington, Director, Acts of Random Caring CIC. Maria has lived and worked in Wolverhampton since 1999. She is the Director of Acts of Random Caring CIC, which began in 2013 as Gatis Gardeners, a group of volunteers helping to maintain Gatis Street Adventure Playground, a local authority-owned green space in the Whitmore Reans area of Wolverhampton, including a community centre, play area and woodland. When the facility faced closure in 2015, Maria brought together a group of local people interested in saving it for community use. Fast forward 6 years and the centre, Gatis Community Space, is now run by Acts of Random Caring CIC and involves a range of different projects and activities. Maria leads on developing the centre with a particular focus on asset based community development and allowing under represented peoples voices to be heard. The centre received the Queens Award for Voluntary Service in 2019 and continues to go from strength to strength.

Toby Lloyd, Chair, No Place Left Behind: the Commission into Prosperity and Community Placemaking. Toby is the Chair of No Place Left Behind: the Commission into Prosperity and Community Placemaking, set up by the Create Streets Foundation to explore the potential for community empowerment and placemaking to improve lives and neighbourhoods in left behind places.

Toby has worked as an advisor on housing and regeneration to local councils, housing associations, developers and the Mayor of London, before spending seven years as head of policy for Shelter. In 2014 he led a cross-industry proposal for a new garden city that was the runner-up for the Wolfson Economics Prize. He then moved to No 10 Downing Street as Special Adviser on housing and local government to Prime Minister Theresa May. His book, *Rethinking the Economics of Land and Housing*, co-authored with two UCL economists, was published in 2017. Twitter: @tobylyd.

The Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Kwasi was appointed Secretary of State at the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in January 2021. He was previously Minister of State at the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Kwasi read classics and history at Trinity College, Cambridge, and then attended Harvard University on a Kennedy Scholarship. He earned a PhD in economic history from the University of Cambridge in 2000. Before becoming a Member of Parliament, Kwasi worked as an analyst in financial services.

Kwasi was elected the Conservative MP for Spelthorne in 2010. From 2010 until 2013 he was a member of the Transport Select Committee, and in 2013 he joined the Work and Pensions Select Committee where he was a member until 2015. In October 2016 Kwasi joined the Public Accounts Committee, where he was a member until May 2017. In 2015 Kwasi was appointed as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Leader of the House of Lords, and in 2017 he became Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Twitter: @KwasiKwarteng.

Rachel Wolf, Founding Partner, Public First. Rachel is a Founding Partner at Public First. Rachel's career has spanned business, charities, politics and Government. Previously education and innovation adviser to the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street, she was also co-author of the Conservatives winning 2019 General Election manifesto. She has been Senior Vice President for technology company Amplify in New York City, running one of their main product divisions. She founded and ran the New Schools Network – the charity that helped develop and implement the Government's free schools programme. Twitter: @racheljanewolf.

Jo Gideon MP, MP for Stoke-on-Trent Central. Jo was elected the MP for Stoke-on-Trent Central, a traditional 'red wall' seat at the 2019 General Election on a pledge to 'level-up' historically underfunded regions. Jo served as Parliamentary Private Secretary within the Business Energy and Industrial Strategy Department from February 2020 to July 2021.

Jo has spent her time in Parliament championing the ceramics industry, promoting opportunities for young people, and speaking out about local health inequalities, environmental challenges and community placemaking.

Jo has a small business background including ten years as an importer and wholesaler of handmade papers, running award-winning social enterprises, working in university innovation and enterprise centres and mentoring business leaders in peer support networks. Twitter: @jogideon.

Karin Smyth MP, MP for Bristol South. Karin was born in London to Irish parents, attended a local FE College and graduated with a degree in Economics and Social Studies from the University of East Anglia in 1988. She subsequently studied for an MBA at the University of Bath in 1995. Before her election as Labour MP for Bristol South in May 2015, Karin had worked in several managerial roles in the NHS and was Office Manager for former Bristol West MP Val Davey. She has also served as non-Executive Director of an NHS Trust.

Since taking her seat in Parliament, Karin has been a member of the Public Accounts Committee and Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee and currently sits on the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. She was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the then Shadow Brexit Secretary, Sir Keir Starmer MP and is the British Vice-Chair of the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly. Her main interests in Parliament are focused on reducing inequality and ensuring opportunity for people in Bristol South and centre on healthcare, apprenticeships, education and devolution.

Karin is Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Mobility.

Councillor Tim Swift, Leader of Calderdale Council. Tim has been a councillor in Calderdale for 16 years. He became leader of the Labour group in 2007 and Deputy Leader of the Council in 2010, before taking over as Leader in May 2012 to July 2014 and from May 2015 to date. Tim represents Calderdale Council on the Leeds City Region Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (where he is vice- chair). He is also actively involved in the Local Government Association. He currently chairs the Leeds City Region Place Panel and the West and North Yorkshire Business Rates Pool and the West Yorkshire and Harrogate Health and Care Partnership Board.

Tim started his working life in research engineering in the private sector. He then spent more than twenty years in non profit roles, becoming the Chief Executive of Age Concern Calderdale, and later Age Concern Calderdale and Kirklees. He has a strong interest in community organisations and regeneration. Twitter: @TimSwift