

# What is it that makes a place attractive to live in?

Published: January 13, 2026, 9:44 am

---

As [the FT notes](#) this morning:

*The income gap between Londoners and the rest of the UK population has hit a record high, according to the latest statistics that reveal the challenges facing the government in implementing its flagship “levelling up” agenda.*

This resonates with an article in The Guardian, which notes:

*More than four in five 16- to 18-year-olds say they need to move from their areas for better opportunities, including more than 90% of those surveyed in the north-east, Yorkshire and the east of England.*

*A survey of 2,000 people carried out by the Social Mobility Foundation found that on average more than 85% felt they needed to leave. In the east of England 95% felt that way and the figure was 91% in the north-east, 90% in Yorkshire and 88% in the north-west.*

This quote from that Guardian article was personally recognisable for me:

*Tom Brennan, 18, who lives in Ipswich, said: “To be honest, the biggest thing going for the town is its proximity to London. There’s not many opportunities or events happening here.”*

*He wants to be a programmer after he finishes his studies. “There’s not that many computer science roles available here. I’ll probably move to London,” Brennan said. “I would miss my family but other than that there isn’t much I would miss about Ipswich.”*

I left Ipswich at 18 and never went back, even if I did return to East Anglia in the end.

This does, however, beg three questions.

The first is, why is London so rich? The answer is twofold. Partly it is because it extracts value from everywhere else - mainly via the financial services sector that leaches off all

of society and sends the proceeds to London. Then there is the fact that it enjoys by far the highest level of state investment. These are issues that could be addressed, but are not.

Second, how is the disappointment of those who cannot move to be handled, because many will be unable to do so?

Third, income apart, what is it that people like Tom in Ipswich are looking for? Is it just nightclubs and the related hedonism that has always been most associated with bigger cities, or is there something more to it than that?

I left because of the intellectual dullness of Ipswich in the 70s. The theatre was limited. Concerts were not good. There was no university there then. It seemed like a backwater. I suspect people have their own, differing, reasons. They also change during life. As a parent I wanted very different things to those I hoped for until children arrived. My return to East Anglia and being a new parent was not a coincidence.

The question is, how do we reconcile these goals?

To put it another way, do we have an adequate theory of what a place should be to make it attractive as a broadly based community? Or are we destined to live in siloed locations serving particular interests, with London the epicentre of youth?

Answers on the back of a postcard (you have to be old enough to get that one) or in the comments section, please.