



## ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY PANEL

### SUMMARY OF THE REVIEW OF THE NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

**Purpose of the Review** - The overall aim of the Scrutiny investigation was to establish how the Council could develop the night time economy to include a range and diversity of activities which compliments the future strategy for the development of the town centre.

**Findings** - The panel wanted to understand the economic implications for developing the night time economy, what factors could influence the current, and indeed, any proposed development of the night time economy. In particular, the panel concentrated on how a strategy could be developed to ensure the continued provision of more diverse activities that were in the best interests of the town and its residents and which would encourage people from all over the Tees Valley to visit Middlesbrough. It is important to add that although the panel recognised the debate about the impact of the Licensing Act the panel did not want to focus the review solely on the issue of binge drinking and its consequences. The panel therefore considered the economic impact of any potential development on the town as a whole. What became clear was that any strategy needed support from officers and external organisations working together to ensure its success.

The panel was keen to ascertain a variety of perspectives from all parts of the community. In undertaking the review the panel received detailed officer presentations, met with the Board of the Town Centre Company, debated key issues with officers, the police and local business interests, visited officers and councillors at Hartlepool Borough Council and commissioned a survey of resident's views.

Briefly, the results of the survey confirmed that people were supportive of a more diverse night time economy. 67% of people disagreed that there were currently sufficient activities for all age groups. 79% of people supported the statement that developing the evening and night time economy in the town centre was a good idea and 54% of people agreed that they would visit the town on an evening if there was a wider variety of activities. For example people wanted to come into the town for concerts, theatre, swimming, a wider range of restaurants including family orientated restaurants and longer shop opening hours. **Full details can be found at Appendix 1** of the report.

In order to develop a night time economy that grows and diversifies to provide leisure, cultural and residential facilities that compliment the ambitions of the town there are a number of issues that must be considered as prerequisites to achieving the ambition

- i) Need for alternative and diverse provision for all age groups;
- ii) Creating a pleasant place to be;
- iii) Ensuring a safe environment for all; and
- iv) Achieving good accessibility.

The panel considered the issues associated with the key drivers listed above and how they currently influence the present night time economy and its future developments.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on evidence given throughout the investigation the Panel concluded:

1. There is a clear need to develop and diversify the range of leisure uses and opportunities available in Middlesbrough town centre during the evening. This development is necessary because there is a need to:
  - i) Provide opportunities for new businesses and the further development of existing businesses that create more employment opportunities and further enhance the role of the town centre as the engine room of the town's economy;
  - ii) Counter the perception that the town centre is a place where drinking to excess is the main leisure activity and that this attracts, in the main, only young people; and
  - iii) Build Middlesbrough's reputation as the sub regional centre which is dependant upon the town centre being widely perceived as a place where people come in the evenings for entertainment and leisure that includes theatre, art, music of all kinds, cinema, sport and physical activity, shopping, dining and meeting people.
2. It is clear from the survey and other evidence provided to the panel that, whilst there is general agreement that this is desirable, the current position is a long way from this goal and there is some degree of scepticism in some quarters that this can be achieved. The view that Middlesbrough will never develop a café culture was put to the panel. This view is rejected by the panel.
3. The panel was presented with evidence that the town centre is beginning to change and develop in the desired direction. For example:
  - i) The UGC Cinema has been very successful, attracting nearly one million people a year and other leisure facilities, especially restaurants have flourished at this end of the town centre;
  - ii) Linthorpe Road south is successfully supporting increasing numbers of restaurants and cafes;
  - iii) Planning consent has been given to develop two town centre office blocks into accommodation that will attract young professional to live in the town centre;
  - iv) Town centre businesses reported to the panel that they wish to diversify and develop their activities;
  - v) The Middlesbrough Institute for Modern Art (MIMA) and the new Civic square will be open in 2006 and will provide a new focal point for activities; and
  - vi) The Council has ambitions to develop the concert facilities at the town hall and to provide a town centre theatre.
4. There are a number of key areas which require further investigation and policy development. These include:
  - i) The need for secure evening parking for people visiting town centre venues;
  - ii) The need for improved evening public transport services to and from the town centre;
  - iii) The need to encourage retailers to provide early evening shopping opportunities;
  - iv) The need to address the public concern about personal security in the town centre in the evenings;
  - v) The need to ban drinking in public spaces in the town centre; and
  - vi) A recognition that there is a need to build confidence and work incrementally towards a changing and diversifying the town centre leisure offer.

5. Whilst the developments at Middlehaven are to be welcomed, we cannot afford to await developments here, nor is it desirable that this should be seen as the answer to diversification. It is the existing town centre that needs to diversify its evening economy.
6. There is a need for the Council to develop a town centre diversification strategy and there is a need to establish a partnership body, led the Council, which owns and implements this strategy. The key elements of this strategy are likely to be:
  - i) Encouraging and facilitating the development of a range of leisure and entertainment activities that will attract the public to the town centre during the evenings;
  - ii) The development of living accommodation in and around the town centre that will attract a diverse range of people to live in the town centre;
  - iii) Encouraging retailers to provide evening shopping opportunities;
  - iv) Dealing with security and transport issues;
  - v) Discouraging the further development of the kinds of pubs and clubs that currently exist within the town; and
  - vi) Encouraging the development of restaurants, cafes and non alcohol related leisure activities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel recommends to the Executive:

1. That the Council accept the conclusions of this report and resolves to develop a town centre strategy that will lead to a diversification of the evening economy in Middlesbrough Town Centre
2. That the Council establish a town centre diversification partnership which promotes co-operation between the private an public sector in developing and implementing these proposals.
3. As part of this overall strategy that the Council pursues the provision of a town centre Theatre and the improvement of the Town Hall Concert facilities with vigour.
4. That the Council considers banning the consumption of alcohol outside of licence premises and their forecourts throughout the whole of the town centre area.