

PLACE SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Place Scrutiny Panel was held on Monday 27 October 2025.

PRESENT: Councillors D Branson (Chair), D Coupe, J Ewan, D Jackson and T Mohan

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Matthew Gibbons and Lee Walker

OFFICERS: J McNally, C Jones and R Horniman

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors B Hubbard, A Romaine and J Kabuye

25/23 **WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, introductions were made and the Fire Evacuation Procedure explained.

25/24 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

25/25 **MINUTES - PLACE SCRUTINY PANEL - 29 SEPTEMBER 2025**

The minutes of the Place Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 29 September 2025 were submitted a Member requested an amendment to the minutes as follows:

A Member suggested a survey being sent to colleges and the university, to gain feedback to see if people who had come from different places across the country and now studied in Middlesbrough could suggest ways of improving Middlesbrough, from their own life experiences from where they were born. Members agreed to this suggestion.

25/26 **BARRIERS TO REGENERATION SCRUTINY REVIEW**

The Director of Regeneration introduced the Representatives from Locus who were in attendance to provide Members with an overview of the initial findings of the latest economic assessment on Middlesbrough. The economic assessment focused on Middlesbrough's current position including emerging trends and how Middlesbrough is responding to those. Members were advised that the presentation they were to receive was on the initial findings of the assessment and a full report would be produced in the future.

Members were advised that an economic assessment on Middlesbrough had previously been carried out in 2017/2018. Findings from that assessment included:

- Shift Middlesbrough's focus away from a 'need-based' retail model toward a 'want-based' experience economy
- Prioritises leisure, culture, events and unique offerings that cannot be replicated online
- Increase use of transport links and improve signage
- Investment in public realm and safety
- Strategies to reduce vacancies through alternative uses

Members heard that since 2018 some of the work that had been carried out included:

- Redevelopment (Centre Square and Gresham)
- Focus on Anti-Social Behaviour
- High Street Heritage Action Zone
- Town Centre Masterplan
- Shift towards increased office space

- Train station redevelopment

The Panel heard that there were 157 less retail units in Middlesbrough compared to 2017. There had been a shift in location of units with less premises in locations such as Linthorpe Road and Borough Rd with a shift towards Railway Station. Office space in 2017 was based around the university but again had shifted to Centre Square and the Railway Station area.

It was advised that 14.6% of Middlesbrough's units were currently vacant compared to 17.85% in 2018. It was highlighted that Middlesbrough was marginally above the UK average of 14% and Middlesbrough was noticeably below the Northeast average of 17%.

In terms of population, it was advised there had been a slight growth of 6% in resident population since 2018 from 140,600 to 148,284. There had been no change in employee numbers however the demographic had shifted to younger people and there had been an increase in the 25–34-year-old demographic. In terms of employment strength had maintained in sectors such as healthcare, education and construction related jobs.

Members were advised that 2024 showed the highest amount of footfall in the town centre in 5 years, if the footfall numbers for 2025 continued it should have a similar footfall to 2024. The majority of visitors to the town centre concentrated on Thursday/Fridays and Saturdays which was consistent with patterns across the country. Visitors tended to be younger in age 18-35 years leading to Middlesbrough outperforming significantly against the Northeast average on younger visitors.

In relation to spending Members were advised that money spent in the town centre was down due to shoppers making online purchases this was a trend across the whole of the UK. Visitors are spending less but they were making more smaller purchases across several businesses such as coffee shops, cinemas and different stores. Spending on eating out and retail was identified as being slightly below regional and national averages however it had not significantly decreased.

It was also reported that the spending power of visitors to the town was lower than average compared to other towns and cities.

In relation to crime and anti-social behaviour Members heard that 11,381 crimes had been reported in 2018 down to 6491 in 2025. Crime had essentially halved since 2018 but remained a significant concern as it was still higher than other comparative areas. Anti-social behaviour was an issue with a 20% difference to near neighbouring towns. The core message was that if people didn't feel safe, they would not visit town centres. A Member stated that one of the problems was the misconception of crime and how could this be addressed. It was suggested that a robust presence or campaign would be the best route to tackle this, with strong communications that crime was dropping.

The Locus representatives summarised the following key points:-

Commercial Change:

Total commercial premises in the town centre had decreased, primarily due to a substantial reduction in retail units. Retail now accounted for a smaller share of total space, reflecting diversification into hospitality, leisure, and office uses.

Vacancy and Performance:

Vacancy rates had fallen to around **14.6%**, slightly below the national town centre average (14%) and outperforming comparable centres in the Northeast (17%).

Demographic and Residential Growth:

Middlesbrough's population had grown from **140,600 (2018)** to **148,285 (2022)**, driven by increased student numbers, infrastructure investment, and inward migration. The population was more diverse, younger, and increasingly skilled, presenting opportunities to broaden the visitor and consumer base.

Transport and Accessibility:

Public transport use had recovered strongly post-pandemic. Rail passenger numbers had risen above 2018 levels, supported by a £35m station redevelopment. Car parking use had declined, indicating a gradual modal shift toward sustainable transport.

Crime and Safety:

Crime and anti-social behaviour had reduced significantly despite staying above national and regional averages, with total recorded crimes down nearly 7% in 2024/25 and ASB incidents halved since 2019. Collaborative policing and place-based initiatives had improved perceptions of safety and confidence.

Spending and Economic Activity:

Transaction volumes were up despite lower average spend per transaction, suggesting broader engagement with a more varied town centre offer. Retail leakage remained high (44%), particularly to Teesside Park, underlining the need for continued place enhancement and loyalty retention.

Initial recommendations from the assessments were: -

- Target the younger age demographic (18-35)
- Additional security presence/further work to reduce ASB
- Business Crime Reduction Partnership
- Continue with framework set out in the Town Masterplan.

The Chair queried whether Locus could provide further comparators for the panel to consider which Locus agreed to provide.

The Chair thanked the representatives from Locus for attending the meeting.

Members had several questions for the Director of Regeneration

- Are we looking at leisure to increase footfall? In response the Director advised that we would see less retail than now but concentrated towards Hillstreet Centre. Cleveland Centre may see education and health.
- A Member questioned if buildings would be turned into homes, it was advised that it would not work. Due to size and structure, the infrastructure around was not conducive and the infrastructure in Middlesbrough does not assist town centre living.
- A Member suggested changing units to student accommodation, it was advised that there was an oversupply of accommodation but low supply of good quality student accommodation.
- What should we do to attract people into Middlesbrough? The Director of Regeneration agreed to bring forward a report on the direction we should be moving in. It was stated that Middlesbrough town centre was a dated 1970s set of builds set up for a function no longer required, the town centre needed to be looked at as a 'centre of a town' and not a town centre and look at what would attract young people as young people would be the conduit to bring older people in (e.g., children's play and leisure)

The Director of Regeneration advised the Panel that a Place Leaders Partnership had been established which included key organisations such as Police, college and university. It was agreed that the Director would attend the next meeting of the Place Scrutiny Panel to provide an update on the work of the partnership.

The Chair thanked the Director of Regeneration for attending and providing additional information.

AGREED as follows:

1. The information provided was received and noted
2. The presentation would be circulated to Members
3. Locus to provide comparator information
4. The Director of Regeneration to provide an update on the work of the Place Leaders Partnership at the meeting on 17 November 2025

25/27 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE**

The Chair provided an update on items discussed at the recent Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 22 October 2025 which included:

- Scrutiny Chairs Update
- Executive Member Update – Children's Services
- Executive Forward Work Programme
- Forward Plan Actions Update

25/28 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Place Scrutiny Panel was scheduled for 17 November 2025 at 1.30pm.

25/29 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**

None