

**REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL**

A meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel was held on Wednesday 20 March 2024.

**PRESENT:** Councillors I Blades (Chair), J Ewan, S Hill, L Hurst, D Jackson, J Kabuye and I Morrish

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** M Peagam

**OFFICERS:** S Lightwing, P Clarke and G Kirby

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** were submitted on behalf of Councillors N Hussain and J Ryles

23/53 **WELCOME AND EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and read out the Building Evacuation Procedure.

23/54 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

<b>Name of Member</b>	<b>Type of Interest</b>	<b>Item/Nature of Interest</b>
Councillor Hill	Non pecuniary	Agenda Item 5 – Member of Captain Cook Birthplace Trust
Councillor Kabuye	Non pecuniary	Agenda Item 5 – Member of Town Board

23/55 **MINUTES - REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL - 21 FEBRUARY 2024**

The minutes of the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 21 February 2024 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

23/56 **HOW MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL CAN FUND CULTURE IN THE FUTURE: SCRUTINY REVIEW**

The Chair of the Captain Cook Birthplace Trust and the Council's Creative Programmes and Partnerships Manager were in attendance to provide information in relation to the Captain Cook Birthplace Museum.

The Chair of the Trust gave his presentation as follows:

The funding of culture and museums was a hot topic and a nationwide issue at the current time. The Captain Cook Birthplace Museum opened on 27 October 1978, to celebrate Middlesbrough's most famous son and provide a place where people could be educated about Captain James Cook and his legacy. Education had become critical in recent years in respect of debates about colonialism and climate change, which the Trust had engaged in.

The Trust was established on 16 January 1978 in partnership with Middlesbrough Borough Council, with a specific remit to secure funding to provide the Museum. From the outset the partnership existed for the advancement of education about the life and work of Cook and the countries he discovered. After the Museum opened the Trust was dormant for some time.

In 2018, the Trust's Constitution was revised and the Trust became more independent of Middlesbrough Council. The name was changed to the Captain Cook Birthplace Trust with the aim of being able to bid for funding or grants that the Council was unable to access. There were currently 11 Trustees and Membership was open to anyone who had an interest. There were 12 places on the Trust and 3 were nominated by Middlesbrough Council.

Over the last few years, the Trust had delivered talks, and other events including a tea dance, annual celebration of Cook's birthday, facilitated talks and hosted the Cook Island Rugby team. The Trust had also developed new signage to promote the museum and liaised with tour operators and Tees valley Tourism regarding reviving the Cook Trail. Unfortunately during the covid pandemic some of that work had become a little stagnated.

Since the announcement of the potential budget cuts by the Council in December 2023, the Trust had issued a press release explaining why the Museum must continue to operate. A petition opened by the Trust had gathered over 8000 signatures in support of keeping the Museum open. There had been local, national and social media coverage and debate had opened up on the subject.

In January, Members of the Trust had met twice with Middlesbrough's Mayor and Council Officers and had presented a proposal paper, detailing why the Museum should be maintained. There were some queries still to be answered regarding financial matters. The Trust was happy to participate in the operation of the Museum and ready to engage in discussion. The Museum could continue to be in the Council's ownership or it could be transferred to a new owner, either a commercial or voluntary body.

Currently the Trust's Constitution did not permit it to own assets and therefore was not in a position to take over the Museum. However, it would not be impossible as the Constitution could be amended and many other Museums were operated by charitable trusts. Clarity on the staffing, running costs, legal responsibilities, building conditions and cafe would be needed if the Trust were to consider a take-over. Footfall to the Museum would need to increase and the Trust would need to know if the Council were prepared to engage with volunteers.

One idea was to offer a 12 month membership – similar to other local venues such as Preston Hall in Stockton. This would encourage people to make return visits. School visits were another source of income. The Museum also had the potential for earning income from room rental to community groups.

The new signage that the Trust had developed needed to be put in place and this should be straightforward as none of the sites identified had presented a problem when discussed previously.

With regard to volunteers, around 33 people had expressed an interest – some offering half a day a week and others a full day. Even in the Museum was opened with reduced hours, it might be possible to operate with volunteers.

The Café was operated on a rolling lease and was due to be offered a new contract – although this had not happened as yet due to the Council's budget pressures. The Café currently paid rent and a service charge to a maximum of £20K per annum.

The Trust had also explored sponsorship and the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) had expressed some interest in providing grand funding. There was also a potential donor from the private sector who was interested in retaining the Museum.

The 27 October 2028 would be the 300th anniversary of Cook's birth and the Trust was already planning for this occasion. Groups in Australia, New Zealand and the USA were planning to be in Middlesbrough on that date, including descendants of the Cook family. The Maritime Museum in Australia housed a replica of The Endeavour and there was potential for that to return to the UK for the anniversary. There would be commercial potential for hotels, restaurants and other local facilities for events to mark the occasion.

The possibility of a new purpose-built museum at the entrance to Stewart's Park was also mentioned.

The Creative Programmes and Partnerships Manager explained that the Council operated the Dorman and the Cook Museums and the challenge was to operate two museum sites and find a 100K saving. The service was reviewed last year and a number of posts were on hold. The team was doing a good job without a full staffing structure in place. The Council was exploring how to make the two sites operate and make the saving, or, generating income to cover the gap. More front of house staff would be required to run both Museums and the

Council would be liaising with the Trust regarding volunteers and staff resource to manage a programme and embed into the structure across both museums. This might be an interim arrangement.

In the longer term, the Council had been working closely with TVCA to undertake a heritage study for the whole of the Tees Valley – looking at the assets and links in terms of heritage. The idea was to develop a plan and be in a position to advocate for the investment the Museum service needed.

The Museums Service had had a successful year in 2023 in terms of generating income through temporary and touring exhibitions such as the Lego and Titanic exhibitions, for which there had been a charge to visit.

In terms of visitor figures to the Captain Cook Birthplace Museum, the following information was presented:

5360 paying visitors from April 2023 until January 2024.  
2431 school visits.

The current fee for museum entry was £4.50 which would increase from 1 April £4.70. There were also concessions. Tickets permitted access for one year but it was unclear how many visitors made repeat visits.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and the information provided.

**AGREED** that the information provided was received and noted.

23/57

## **PLANNING CAPACITY - FINAL REPORT**

A copy of the Draft Final Report on Planning Capacity had been circulated with the agenda.

Members discussed the information provided and suggested conclusions and recommendations for inclusion in the Final Report.

**AGREED** that:

1. the following conclusions were approved for inclusion in the report:

- The Panel examined the findings of the quick review of Development Management carried out by the Planning Advisory Service in September 2023 and notes their recommendations to improve the speed of decision-making in line with government requirements.
- It is acknowledged that the review did not include Planning and Development Committee, Planning Enforcement or the Appeals Process and that performance of these areas can also potentially be improved.
- Middlesbrough Council currently has two Officers, based within the Environment Directorate, available to provide advice on highways and drainage and other planning powers. There is a lack of skilled personnel in areas such as design, ecology and arboriculture. Having to seek external advice can add delay to decision-making on planning applications.
- The increase in the number of enforcement cases is of great concern to the Panel. The two posts that support the Enforcement Officer have been vacant for a considerable length of time. The Panel also notes that due to the current high volume of work, the timescales listed in paragraphs 2.9 and 2.10 of the planning enforcement manual will not apply for the foreseeable future. With the limited available resources, the Council currently prioritises enforcement activities in relation to Article 4 and conservation in Linthorpe in order to protect Middlesbrough's heritage.
- The Panel is pleased to note the recent award of funding from the Government's Planning Skills Fund that will assist in addressing the backlog in enforcement support, planning support, highways and flooding input into the planning process and also used to

develop new Design Codes as required by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

- In relation to shared services it was apparent that there can be efficiencies not only with regard reduced costs but that having a larger team naturally provides more resilience and expertise.

2. the following recommendations were approved for inclusion in the report:

- The Council should ensure that the recommendations of the Planning Advisory Service's Development Management Review are implemented in full to ensure that the Planning Service continues to be able to meet government performance targets in relation to decision-making.

- Implementation of the PAS recommendations in relation to the following should be prioritised and enhanced:

- The Development Control Team should work together from the office in Fountains Court for a minimum of one day each week. Practical barriers to team working, for example, "block booking" space in the shared office should be addressed without delay.

- Continue to embed the Agile Planning system and recently acquired Power BI system into the DM process, make time to provide (and maintain) a practical guide to the system for case officers.

- Dedicated training is provided for staff to enable them to use the relevant specialist IT systems to their full potential.

- Consideration be given to inviting the Planning Advisory Service to undertake a full review of the Planning Service to include Planning and Development Committee, Planning Enforcement or the Appeals Process.

- Create a new Highways Officer post within the Planning Services Structure to provide a dedicated resource and as far as possible, eliminate delay in the planning application process.

- Investigate with the other Tees Valley Local Authorities whether there is potential to create a shared pool of statutory consultees who have expertise in the relevant disciplines such as highways, drainage, design, ecology and arboriculture.

- Explore with the Council's Human Resources Service whether, in addition to current recruitment practice, there are any further opportunities to more widely promote vacant posts, such as the enforcement posts, in the Planning Service.

- Give consideration to establishing a pooled enforcement team of specialist officers to work together to address all areas of enforcement that fall within the Council's remit. This could be particularly helpful where multiple issues of non-compliance related to the same individual or property.

- In conjunction with the Council's Digital Team review whether the information provided on the Council's website in relation to the town's conservation areas can be given a higher profile and/or made more user-friendly, to better inform residents who might be considering alterations to their properties and potentially reduce the numbers of enforcement cases.

3. a final version of the report would be circulated to all Panel Members for any further amendments/comments, with final approval delegated to the Chair of the Panel.

4. the final report would be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Board for consideration.

23/59 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

Having concluded the current scrutiny review today, the Chair suggested that the final meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel for Municipal Year 2023/2024, currently scheduled for 17 April 2024, should be cancelled.

**AGREED** that the next scheduled meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel would be cancelled.

23/60 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED**

None.