

PLACE SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Place Scrutiny Panel was held on Monday 17 November 2025.

PRESENT: Councillors D Branson (Chair), B Hubbard, A Romaine, T Livingstone (Vice-Chair), D Coupe, J Kabuye and T Mohan

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: A Byrne

OFFICERS: R Horniman, J McNally, T Frankland and G Kirby

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors J Ewan and D Jackson

25/30 **WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the Fire Evacuation Procedure.

25/31 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

25/32 **MINUTES - PLACE SCRUTINY PANEL - 27 OCTOBER 2025**

The minutes of the Place Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 27 October 2025 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

25/33 **BARRIERS TO REGENERATION SCRUTINY REVIEW - TOWN CENTRE BOARD/PLACE LEADERS PARTNERSHIP**

The Director of Regeneration was in attendance and provided a presentation on the Town Centre Board and Place Leaders Partnership.

It was advised that the Place Leaders Partnership had been formed in collaboration with partner organisations all of whom had a stake in Middlesbrough and worked together to inform the Council's Place Strategy. The Town Centre Strategy and Investment Prospectus sat within the Place Strategy. In recent times, the space to discuss plans collectively had been lost so the Partnership had been formed to begin to develop a shared vision for the town.

It had been identified that there was a need to shift perception when planning and given the difficulty of engaging with every demographic simultaneously and the high percentage of young people in Middlesbrough, it was decided that a focus would be put on younger people and having a vision to make Middlesbrough the UK's most creative place for young people to live, learn and realise their future. It was clarified that in this instance, the term 'young people' was nuanced, as it could refer to children, young adults, those early in their careers and more. This perspective would allow the Council an opportunity to make a difference in the longer term by:

- Providing young people with as many reasons to visit our town as possible
- Providing positive multicultural and sharable experiences
- A bold, future-focused offer built on creativity, innovation and inclusivity
- Anchored in Middlesbrough's digital, engineering and cultural strengths
- Linked to the town's 2030 Bicentenary ambitions and plans.

The Director went on to explain the overarching aims of the Place Strategy which were:

- To make Middlesbrough a destination of opportunity for young people
- To connect culture, business and community for shared prosperity
- To build experiences that are accessible, affordable and transformative
- To foster pride, belonging and empowerment through opportunity.

Members also heard the intended outcomes of the Place Strategy:

- Inspire youth engagement and ambition
- Boost Middlesbrough's reputation and visitor economy
- Strengthen community pride and cohesion
- Retain graduates and attract new business investment
- Animate the town centre and heritage spaces.

The Place Leader's Partnership centred its strategic narrative around key goals that would ensure the town's long-term growth and resilience:

- Attracting young people, with a tailored offer supporting them across all areas
- Investing in housing, education, access to skills and culture experiences
- Building pathways into local employment and entrepreneurship
- Making the town centre a hub for creativity, innovation and collaboration
- Retaining local talent and attract new visitors and investors.

Members were advised that the Council intended to promote the new vision and objectives for the town by:

- Launching new place campaigns: strengthening 'Let's Go To Town' & 'Made in Middlesbrough'
- Reimagining events like Orange Pip Market, connecting our culture and events programme with our leisure food and drink businesses
- Amplifying stories and events via We Are Middlesbrough as the digital hub
- Recruiting ambassadors and influencers to champion Middlesbrough's story.

The Director concluded the presentation by noting the Council's next steps in its endeavour to transform the town centre and other key areas:

- Finalise and approve strategy
- Identify and confirm game-changing projects
- Investment Prospectus, action and engagement plans
- Begin public consultation and implementation
- Build momentum towards Middlesbrough's 2030 Bicentenary celebration (on-going).

A Member queried what barriers the Council had faced previously that had prevented other strategies from being as impactful.

Members were advised that other strategies had been too generic and lacked direction and focus. The resources were not available to address every issue so it would be more effective to focus on a few areas.

Members queried what the Director envisioned for the town's future.

The Director referenced an idea that was often discussed, that retail would return to Middlesbrough and become the main focus again; it was advised that this would not happen. The strategy would become clearer once research was completed with the residents of Middlesbrough and the Council were clear on what a town centre needed to be successful in the future and what local people want and need. The digital sector was emerging organically and Middlesbrough had the colleges and university in place to support this. It was important that the Council reached all residents for views, particularly those who were not currently engaged and in order to do this the Council was prepared to pass some control to others such as the arts and creative sector to carry out this research and engage with a wider variety of people.

Members also queried what funding was available for this work.

The Director advised that the Council was prepared to spend some money upfront for consultants to carry out research and to ensure that the research was meaningful and engaging. However, it was also planned to utilise existing networks to gather views.

A Member noted that young people generally had less money than before due to economic factors so cost would need to be a major consideration. It was also queried whether anything

was being done to attract older generations to the town.

The Director advised that in terms of the Place Strategy, the Council was looking into a long-term shift and changing the fabric of the town however it remained a priority to implement things to encourage people to the town in the here and now. By putting a focus on the young, this could also indirectly attract older generations for example, those who are parents or grandparents.

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BARRIERS TO REGENERATION - THE ROLE OF CULTURE AND THE CREATIVE FACTORY PROJECT

The Head of Culture and Director of Creative Factory were in attendance and provided a presentation on the work of the Creative Factory.

They began by noting that the Middlesbrough Cultural Partnership (MCP) was founded in 2018 followed by the Culture Capital Prospectus in 2021 which gathered ideas for capital investment. The Cultural Development Fund bid was successful in 2022, with £4.25m investment from ACE/DCMS. The Creative Vision and Masterplan (2023-33) set out Middlesbrough's ambition to be the most creative town by developing a sector that is four things: Valuable; Secure; Resourced; and Thriving. Middlesbrough Cultural Partnership then secured £2 million in Levelling Up Funds from Middlesbrough Council in 2024 and Creative Factory was established.

The Creative Factory's guiding principle was to create long-term sustainability and investment for the cultural and creative sector and substantial progress had been made to date, supported by property acquisition, a dedicated Project Director and Operation Team, community-led governance, solid strategic foundations and a shared mission.

The Creative Land Trust had been established to anchor creative economies in Middlesbrough by developing 50,000 sq ft of creative space for artists and businesses and surplus would be reinvested in the creative sector and be used to sustain long-term operations.

Members heard that the former H.Samuel site on Linthorpe Road was set to become an art gallery with a space that could be hired out for events and workshops. They had also acquired four one-bed apartments, three of which would be used for long-term tenants and the other for visiting artists to stay and act as a community space.

A Member queried timescales for the apartments and commercial space to be in use.

Members were advised that it was planned that tenants would occupy the residential units by March 2026. Regarding the commercial space on Linthorpe Road, renovations would start between January and March next year and were set to last three to four months.

Creative Factory were also carrying out several placemaking projects as follows:

- **Most Creative Train Station** – 9 artist installations and 1 artist residency explored the station's heritage and the experience of commuter's today.
- **We Shall Be** - groundbreaking community-led commissioning programme to transform public spaces around Middlesbrough's historic quarter
- **Parking Day** – transformed a parking space on Albert Road on 19 September into a temporary public area for creativity, music, and conversation.
- **Forged** – Supported the delivery of a vibrant programme of public art in the Tees Valley, with the aim to tour nationally.

In terms of next steps for the Creative Factory, the legal set up would be completed and there would be a focus on developing a brand that people were able to get behind. The Creative Factory also intended to develop a process that would allow them to measure their impact.

There was a variety of events planned for 2026, including:

- MIMA hosts Turner Prize and New Contemporaries
- 150th anniversary of Middlesbrough Football Club
- 10th anniversary of Orange Pip

- Launch of Storytelling Festival
- Develop a philanthropy programme for culture
- Expression of Interest for UK City of Culture

The 10th anniversary of Middlesbrough Art Week was coming up in 2027, the 300th anniversary of the birth of Captain Cook (100 years of Stewart Park) in 2028 and Boro 200: Celebration of Middlesbrough's Bicentenary, Teesside University's Centenary and Middlesbrough Mela's 40th Anniversary in 2030.

To conclude, the desired outcomes of the Creative Factory's work in Middlesbrough were explained to Members:

- More creative spaces/clusters across the town
- More artists, makers and innovators worked here
- Increase in jobs and investment contributing to economic growth
- The town centre felt more welcoming and had a distinctive, experiential offer which increased footfall
- Vacant/forgotten spaces were animated
- Local graduate talent was retained and outside talent moved in
- Public perceptions of Middlesbrough had improved
- Levels of ASB in the town centre were reduced

A Member queried how the Creative Factory could be utilised in the town through the lens of a young person.

The Director of the Creative Factory noted that the digital sector, although quite prominent in Middlesbrough, was not very public facing so there was opportunity for growth there. The Creative Factory was also exploring upgrades to equipment at the Town Hall and Middlesbrough Theatre to attract more high-profile acts. There was lots of competition locally in regard to entertainment venues.

Members raised the importance of publicity and advertising positive projects like this around the town. It was suggested that an information desk located within the art gallery could be useful to promote similar events and projects as well as digital advertisements.

25/35 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Place Scrutiny Panel was scheduled for Monday 22 December 2025 at 1.30 pm.

25/36 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**

None.