

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Final Report of the Place Scrutiny Panel

BARRIERS TO REGENERATION

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THE AIM OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW

1. The aim of the review was to identify the barriers to regeneration in Middlesbrough and investigate how more businesses can be attracted to the town.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

2. The terms of reference, for the scrutiny panel's review, are as follows:
 - A) To establish what the Barriers to Regeneration are in Middlesbrough
 - B) To identify good practice from other local authorities in relation to attracting businesses to the area
 - C) To investigate what measures are in place to make people feel safer in our town centre and neighbourhoods
 - D) To gain an understanding of current legislation available to local authorities to tackle anti-social behaviour

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. The mainstay of UK high streets for much of the 20th century, retail is now in structural decline. The growth of e-commerce means councils and communities are now nursing an increasing number of vacant shops in town centres.
4. Around one in seven shops and one in five shopping centres units are now empty. Some town centres are now caught in a vicious cycle of boarded-up shops, declining attractiveness and falling footfall.
5. Already under pressure from online sales, the pandemic triggered a wave of retailer insolvencies in 2020. Some retailers like M&S and Next decided to relocate to out-of-town retail parks. Rents and service charges on retail parks are generally lower than in town centres. Internal store layouts are typically more efficient, while easy car parking and often longer opening hours add to the retail park appeal for shoppers. Higher energy costs and interest rates are squeezing households and businesses alike.
6. Although all towns across the UK have been affected by the decline in high street shopping, poorer towns have generally been hit harder than more prosperous towns. While there are exceptions to the rule, in general more deprived towns have a higher proportion of empty shops than relatively prosperous towns. One obvious explanation for this relationship is that people in more affluent towns have more disposable income.
7. An economic assessment on Middlesbrough had been carried out in 2017/18¹ it was recognised in the assessment that Middlesbrough needed to shift its focus away from a 'need based' retail model toward a 'want based' experience economy.
8. The assessment identified that Middlesbrough should prioritise; leisure, culture, events and unique offerings that cannot be replicated online.

¹ [Middlesbrough Town Centre Economic Assessment 2017/18 – Report to Middlesbrough Council](#)

9. Additional recommendations from the assessment included, increase use of transport links and improve signage, investment in public realm and safety and strategies to reduce vacancies through alternative uses.
10. A further economic assessment on Middlesbrough was carried out in 2025 which focused on Middlesbrough's current position including emerging trends and how Middlesbrough was responding to those.
11. Key points summarised from the initial findings of the latest assessment included:
12. **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.
13. **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%).
14. **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.
15. **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, although bus travel in Middlesbrough was down by 56.6% in 2023 when compared with 2011 levels.² Middlesbrough needs a transport system that is up to date and fit for purpose.
16. **Crime and Safety:** Crime and ASB 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.
17. **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.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE:

Term of Reference A - To establish what the Barriers to Regeneration are in Middlesbrough.

18. In relation to global economic conditions, the UK was currently in a difficult period and a lot of investment decisions are on hold. Middlesbrough was affected by the uncertainty due to a lot of companies and investments being based in other countries or London. During times of buoyant activity Middlesbrough benefited but was equally impacted when economic conditions were not so good.

² Friends of the Earth [Transport Map 2023-10](#) & data [bustrip-trends-by-authority_0.xlsx](#)

19. The market for office accommodation had not only been impacted by global economic conditions but also by the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of people hybrid-working had increased, and this had reduced the requirement for office space. Although this was changing again, and companies were now looking at bigger floorspace, they were not at the size required pre-Covid-19.
20. Retail is in decline and in the two years before the pandemic there was approximately 1 million square feet of floor space in Middlesbrough which needed to be reduced by one third. Post-pandemic, at least half of that space needed to be removed. Not all this retail space is owned by Middlesbrough Council, there are four shopping malls in the town centre. If all the current retail could be moved into one place, the town centre would be thriving.
21. In terms of the political arena, the Middlesbrough Development Corporation (MDC) is also operating within Middlesbrough and charged with achieving regeneration. Due to the change in Government in 2024 there has been some confusion around the MDC and how the proposed asset transfer from Middlesbrough Council would take place. Senior staff have now been appointed to the MDC and Middlesbrough Council staff will be working with them.
22. Middlesbrough has grown up into an area that has performed a city centre function for the wider Tees Valley. However, the city centre function has evolved due to the decline of its role as the primary hub for retail and office work, driven by changes in technology, consumer habits and post-pandemic working arrangements. The problem is getting more and more acute as time goes on. If Middlesbrough was to be built from scratch the town centre would need to be a third or a quarter of the size that it was currently.
23. The key issues for Middlesbrough are the perception of ASB and crime impacting on regeneration objectives and decreased footfall exacerbated by poor transport links.
24. The issue of ASB was identified frequently by potential investors in Middlesbrough, highlighting issues with how the town centre is perceived.
25. Due to the lack of natural footfall in the town centre ASB is more visible. Even though there are crime statistics to evidence that Middlesbrough is no less safe than other town, there are often day drinkers and drug users visible in Centre Square where the Council owns premium accommodation.
26. Middlesbrough Council carried out a consultation of local stakeholders³ between December 2024 and February 2025 whereby a simple questionnaire had been sent to stakeholders and partners asking them to highlight areas of critical importance to their organisation and how Middlesbrough could collectively work towards addressing those issues and boost Middlesbrough's economic prospects.

27. The five top challenges that were identified from the consultation⁴ were:

- ASB and crime
- Empty Properties in specific areas
- Reduced funding from central government
- Poor perception of the town

³ [Middlesbrough Council Regeneration Strategy Questionnaire](#)

⁴ [Middlesbrough Council Regeneration Strategy Consultation Responses February 2025](#)

- Footfall and working patterns

28. In addition, the Stakeholders identified that the following changes needed to be made to improve Middlesbrough:

- Safer environment – additional lighting, policing and street security
- Improve the physical environment
- High profile and consistent policing
- Animation and events are key to rejuvenating the town centre, people need a reason to come into town
- Diversity – repurpose vacant units and blight sites

29. Stakeholders felt that Middlesbrough need to collectively concentrate investment or apply for funding to:

- Make the town centre feel safe and increase police and security presence
- Focus attractions and events in the town centre
- Rebalance/diversify Middlesbrough's economy
- Improve the physical environment

Term of Reference B – To identify good practice from other local authorities in relation to attracting businesses to the area

30. Town centre decline is a national issue and local authorities across the country are undergoing regeneration projects to adapt to the changing face of retail and the pressures that town centres face.

31. Media⁵⁶ showing examples of successful regeneration in Grimsby and Barnsley had been shared with the Panel as they are both northern industrial towns, that shared some similarities with Middlesbrough.

32. Grimsby regeneration focused on safety and reducing ASB and crime in the town centre. Safer Streets 5 is an initiative run by North East Lincolnshire Council and its partners to reduce crime and ASB and Safer Streets Ambassadors had been implemented to assist the vulnerable and people in need of assistance. Crime had reduced by more than 10 percent over the last 12 months in Grimsby Town Centre.

33. A community-focused initiative dedicated to enhancing the local environment, fostering community engagement and addressing societal changes had also been implemented in Grimsby. Grimsby in Bloom had relandscaped Grimsby's Riverhead Square development after a refit and was currently leading the Victoria Street Project which aimed to introduce a variety of new planters filled with colourful flowers, shrubs, and greenery, creating a more welcoming and visually appealing environment for shoppers and visitors.

34. Barnsley's regeneration focused on their Glassworks redevelopment that connects retail, culture, leisure, learning and health. The development will include a state-of-the-art library,

⁵ [The transformation of Barnsley town centre](#) Youtube Video

⁶ [GRIMSBY TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION | The story so far...](#) Youtube Video

flagship NHS diagnostic centre and rolling programme of immersive free events embracing arts, crafts, sport, food and music.

35. Stockton Borough Council (SBC) is currently undertaking a large-scale initiative to regenerate Stockton town centre and surrounding areas. Much like Middlesbrough, SBC has identified that retail space in Stockton town centre was too vast and no longer sustainable in the modern landscape of online shopping and retail parks. The Council has created a more compact retail core with most shops now being located in Wellington Square and the northern part of the High Street.
36. The layout of the town centre is also no longer in keeping with SBC's vision and the river, once heavily industrial in the 1960s when the shopping centre was first built, has since been cleaned up. An urban riverside park is now being developed which will connect the waterfront and High Street.
37. A key focus for SBC is the organisation of events held in the town centre to drive footfall and SBC has installed anchor points and a power supply in the High Street to support this. The Globe Theatre, originally built in 1935, has been majorly refurbished and reopened as a live venue in 2021 maintaining its cultural heritage while adapting to modern times. An evolved version of Stockton market also continues to take place twice a week maintaining its role in local identity and community gathering.
38. Diversification is also important to SBC when transforming the town centre. A former two-storey retail unit has been transformed into repurposed retail units for smaller businesses on the ground floor and an employment training hub on the first floor which has supported 1750 people into work since it opened in 2021. An NHS Community Diagnostic Centre has been built on the High Street, bringing health provision back to the town centre and creating an accessible site for residents. The re-establishment of the residential market is also a priority for SBC with the contemporary trend of 'city centre living' becoming increasingly popular. These type of additions serve their own important purpose but also help to improve town centre footfall.
39. The Globe Theatre, originally built in 1935 is also key to drawing visitors to Stockton town centre. The theatre has been majorly refurbished and reopened as a live venue in 2021 maintaining its cultural heritage while adapting to modern times. The town also benefits from two smaller venues The Arc and Georgian Theatre. Middlesbrough's main entertainment venue is the Town Hall which could potentially be enhanced to offer a more user-friendly experience and serve as a dual-purpose space, functioning as a tourist information centre as it currently only opens three days a week plus show nights. Middlesbrough Theatre also provides a more intimate entertainment venue but is located slightly further outside the town centre.

Term of Reference C – To investigate what measures are in place to make people feel safer in our town centre and neighbourhoods

40. Middlesbrough Council has Neighbourhood Safety Teams based within each of its localities (North, East, South and West).

41. The Neighbourhood Safety Team works with other Council services, Police, other statutory organisations, the voluntary sector, community groups and individuals to prevent and reduce crime and ASB including:

- Vandalism, graffiti, and deliberate damage to property or vehicles
- Groups of teenagers hanging around on streets
- Fly tipping or littering
- Drug use and dealing
- Drunk or rowdy behaviour
- Chaotic families
- Begging/rough sleeping

42. The Neighbourhood Safety Teams approach to ASB includes both support and enforcement.

The support offered includes:

- Work with youth service providers and the Youth Justice Service to offer diversionary activities
- Outreach work with the Rough Sleeper Team
- Outreach work with Treatment Services
- Outreach in the Nighttime Economy

43. Enforcement that can be carried out by the Neighbourhood Safety Teams includes:

- Issue warnings
- Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABC's)
- Community Protection Warning and Notices
- Civil Injunctions
- Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBO)

44. Prior to the end of 2023, Middlesbrough Council had taken a Civil Injunction approach to ASB but were now using Community Protection Notices (CPN) to tackle it. Where an individual's behaviours were persistent and having a detrimental effect on the area, a warning could be issued. If individuals do not engage with the support offered this can be followed by a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN). If behaviour did not improve a Criminal Behaviour Order could be issued which made the ASB an arrestable offence.

45. Requests for license reviews on commercial premises can also be requested by the Neighbourhood Safety Team if it is felt a business is operating inappropriately. – it would be great to have out of premises drinking areas where people can sit outside but this would need to be controlled.

46. The Neighbourhood Safety Team liaise with other local authorities to identify individuals causing ASB in particular begging who may move from one area to another. Whilst people begging in the town centre could be banned, they could then move elsewhere.

47. These individuals could be issued with a CBO within the CBO there would be an exclusion zone, where the begging was most prolific, and a second condition would be imposed that they could not beg in England and Wales. So, wherever that person chose to go and beg would qualify as a breach of the CBO and they could be arrested. Rather than push the

problem onto another area, the CBO would attempt to address the behaviour. A record of CBOs are held by the Police.

48. During the period June 2024 to April 2025 the following enforcement outcomes had taken place.

- 14 Criminal Behaviour Orders - active, Council led 9, Police led 5
- 22 Criminal Protection Notices – active
- 52 Community Protection Warnings (CPW) – active
- 5 First warnings to young people
- 3 Second warnings to young people
- 44 Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) – The Council has taken a zero approach within the Town Centre
- 8 ABC breaches
- 1 Civil Injunction
- 1 Youth Criminal Behaviour Order
- 2 Licence Reviews on commercial premises

49. A vital part of the Neighbourhood Safety Team is the Neighbourhood Safety Wardens service. As of November 2025, Middlesbrough Council has 35 Street Wardens and 3 vacancies.

50. Neighbourhood Safety Wardens provide a reassuring presence to residents and help to build confidence in neighbourhoods.

51. The role of the Neighbourhood Safety Wardens is varied. They carry out a wide range of roles which can include:

- Responding to and reporting ASB incidents
- Reporting crime to the police
- Issuing FPN's for litter, graffitiing and dog fouling
- Supporting older and vulnerable people in the community
- Helping the homeless
- Getting involved in neighbourhood activities, visiting schools, attending community and resident meetings

52. Middlesbrough Council is implementing Safe Walking Routes to popular visitor attractions in the town centre. The routes will benefit from increased lighting, better signage, shrubbery removal and additional CCTV.

53. A Night-Time Economy Pilot Project is being funded by the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioners Cleveland Unit for Reducing Violence (CURV) until March 2026. This includes the introduction of Street Marshals that will provide an authoritative and trustworthy presence from 8pm until 4am on Fridays and Saturdays (increasing over the festive period and Bank Holidays). Night-time economy clinic pilot sessions are also beginning in January 2026 which will provide an outreach treatment service for the homeless and beggars located at the Depaul Centre.

54. Multiple other resources are in place as part of the Night-Time Economy Pilot Project:

- Safe Haven – mobile service & physical centre on Albert Road
- Boro Angels – a group of volunteers working in Middlesbrough Town Centre helping the vulnerable every Saturday night from 10pm until 2am
- CCTV
- Police
- Door staff

55. CURV also funded other invaluable initiatives:

- Bleed kits
- Apex Radios – for doorstaff
- NTE safety campaign
- Anti-spiking materials
- Promotion of Ask Angela
- eLearning platform for staff in licensed premises

56. The Creative Factory is also carrying out several placemaking projects in the town centre to transform public spaces. ‘Most Creative Train Station’ and ‘We Shall Be’ are not just about creating new artworks but also about taking action to improve how Middlesbrough looks and feels.

57. The Creative Factory’s first Community Action Day brought people together to refresh the Historic Quarter. Volunteers filled bags of rubbish, cleaned and weeded planters in Exchange Square, and worked alongside Middlesbrough Council, STACK and TransPennine Express, to clean and repaint public spaces. These collective efforts transformed how the area looked and reminded everyone that Middlesbrough is a place worth taking pride in.

58. Small, practical changes like these raise the standards of Middlesbrough’s public spaces and completely shift how people experience Middlesbrough as soon as they arrive. Although they do not directly enhance safety levels, they contribute to a more welcoming town centre environment and people may be less likely to vandalise or litter where an area is well kept.

Term of Reference D - To gain an understanding of current legislation available to local authorities to tackle anti-social behaviour

59. Anti-social behaviour (ASB) encompasses criminal and nuisance behaviour that causes distress to others. Typical examples include: noisy neighbours, vandalism, graffiti, public drunkenness, littering, fly tipping and street drug dealing.

60. Parts 1-4 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014⁷ sets out six anti-social behaviour enforcement powers. These powers (summarised in the table below) are a consolidation of nineteen that existed prior to the 2014 Act.

⁷ [Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014](#)

	Power	Effect	Relevant Authority	Sanction on Breach
People	ASB Civil Injunctions	Individuals aged 10 or over conducting ASB can be issued with an ASB Injunction which prohibits them from certain activities and/or requires them to attend rehabilitative activities	Police and Local Authorities	A 'contempt of court' punishable with up to 2 years in prison
	Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBO)	Individuals with a criminal conviction can have a CBO attached to their sentence if they have behaved anti-socially. CBOs can place prohibitions or requirements on an offender designed to address their anti-social behaviour	The courts (upon application from the prosecution)	Criminal offence punishable by up to five years in prison (if tried at a Crown Court)
	Community Protection Notices	Adults or businesses responsible for environmental issues which have diminished the 'quality of life of those in the locality' can be required to remedy the problem	Police and Local Authorities	Criminal offence punishable by Fixed Penalty Notice. Remedial action.
Place	Public Space Protection Orders	Specific activities can be prohibited in a designated area.	Local authorities (in consultation with the police)	Criminal offence punishable by Fixed Penalty Notice
	Dispersal Powers	Individuals (aged ten or older) conducting anti-social behaviour in a public space can be directed to leave that specified area for up to 48 hours. Their property can be confiscated if they are using it to conduct ASB	Police	Criminal offence punishable by up to 3 months in prison.

CONCLUSIONS

61. Trying to regenerate town centres by building more retail space is now a broken model. The solution must be to improve the mix of uses in town centres bringing footfall, life and vitality back. Empty shops, department stores and even shopping centres can be replaced with green spaces, medical centres, offices, workshops, colleges and housing to help create a pleasant and welcoming environment for visitors and residents.
62. Regeneration is a major challenge. With the right investment, town centres can be simultaneously reinvigorated and made more resilient over the long-term.
63. Antisocial Behaviour is one of the main reasons investors are reluctant to invest in the town, they want to be assured that their staff are safe coming to work. Residents of the town are also reluctant to venture into the town centre as they do not feel safe.

64. The key to tackling ASB is through prevention. When the town hosted bigger events, it was easier to make areas feel safe as they are flooded with people and Police.

65. The Council's priority is to reduce the visible impact of the problem in the first instance. Prevention is very important but the resources to do that are not always available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

66. Based on the findings of the scrutiny review, the Place Scrutiny Panel recommends to the Executive that the Council should:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

67. The Place Scrutiny Panel would like to thank the following for their assistance with its work:

Richard Horniman	Director of Regeneration
Hugh McShane	Neighbourhood Officer
Stephen Wright	Neighbourhood Safety Officer
Sam Gilmore	Head of Growth
Michelle Shelton	Town Centre Manager
Matthew Gibbons	Development Manager – Locus
Lee Walker	Chief Executive Officer – Locus
Gaye Kirby	Head of Culture
Anna Byrne	Director – Creative Factory
Chris Renahan	Assistant Director – Inclusive Growth & Development – Stockton on Tees Borough Council
Judith Hedgley	Head of Public Protection
Adam Parkinson	Neighbourhood Manager
Fiona Helyer	Principal Public Protection Officer

ACRONYMS

68. A-Z listing of common acronyms used in the report:

ABC's	Acceptable Behaviour Contracts
ASB	Anti-social Behaviour
CBO	Criminal Behaviour Orders
CPN	Community Protection Notice
FPN	Fixed Penalty Notice
MDC	Middlesbrough Development Corporation
PSPO	Public Space Protection Order
SBC	Stockton on Tees Borough Council

BACKGROUND PAPERS

69. The following sources were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- Reports/presentations to, and minutes of, the Place Scrutiny Panel meetings held on 29 April 2025, 30 June 2025, 29 September 2025, 27 October 2025, 6 November 2025, 22 December 2025.

OUNCILLOR DAVID BRANSON CHAIR OF THE PLACE SCRUTINY PANEL

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