



# Scrutiny Review of Welcoming and Safe Town Centres

Community Safety Select Committee  
Final Report

March 2025

Community Safety Select Committee  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Municipal Buildings  
Church Road  
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# Select Committee – Membership

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Councillor Mrs Ann McCoy (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor John Coulson  
Councillor Richard Eglington  
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Councillor Shakeel Hussain  
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## Acknowledgements

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- Councillor Norma Stephenson OBE (Cabinet Member for Access, Communities and Community Safety) – Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC)
- Councillor Lynn Hall (Committee Substitute) – SBC
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- Andy Evans (Acting Chief Inspector for Stockton) – Cleveland Police
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- Councillor Helen Atkinson (Chair) – Billingham Town Council
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- Joanne McGeeney (Town Clerk) – Ingleby Barwick Town Council
- Councillor Mark Fairbairn – Thornaby Town Council
- Councillor Phil Genery – Thornaby Town Council
- Pamela Danks (Town Clerk) – Thornaby Town Council
- Juliet Johnson (Town Clerk) – Yarm Town Council
- Jason Maxwell (Manager) – Stockton Business Improvement District (BID)
- Paddy Morton (Manager) – Yarm Business Forum
- Lucy Owens (Chief Executive) – Catalyst
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- Young people from the SBC Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF) initiative who gave their thoughts

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# Foreword

On behalf of the Community Safety Select Committee, we are pleased to present the final report and recommendations following our review of Welcoming and Safe Town Centres.

This scrutiny topic has been a very challenging one for the Committee, pulling us in numerous directions as contributors provided a range of information and viewpoints in relation to what makes town centre spaces attractive, and what helps provide confidence to those accessing / wanting to access these environments.

Whilst seeking to use this piece of work as a means to identify and build upon the positive efforts already taking place by the Council and its various partners, the Committee is not blind to the concerns (real and perceived) that local people have in relation to the Borough's town centres which, like many up and down the country, have well-established issues that can be difficult to resolve. However, as our report concludes, contrary to some who prefer to perpetuate only negative views of the Borough, Stockton-on-Tees town centres have a lot to offer and also have the potential for even more, and all local people have a stake (and potential benefit) in making these spaces the best they can be.

The Committee is grateful, as always, for the information provided by all who were called upon during the evidence-gathering for this review, and for their contributions to the detailed discussions which often followed. We hope that our recommendations will help them in the pursuit of making our six town centres places which everyone can be proud of and want to be a part of, be they resident, business or visitor.



**Cllr Paul Rowling**

Chair  
Community Safety Select Committee



**Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy**

Vice-Chair  
Community Safety Select Committee



# Original Brief

## Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

The review will contribute to all three of the Council Plan 2023-2026 key objectives:

- *A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm*
- *A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed*
- *A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive*

## What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

For several years now, debate has ensued over the future purpose and provision of town centres across the UK, with Local Authorities and their numerous partners considering the ways in which they can make these locations as appealing as possible within the context of a tough financial landscape. In related matters, the issue of town centre safety has drawn recent national attention, with significant concerns raised around reported increases in shoplifting, rising incidences of violence and abuse of shop staff, and police / community support officer numbers ([UK Parliament - Town Centre Safety](#) (Dec 23)).

As Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) progresses with the redevelopment of its six town centres, fostering feelings of safety and creating welcoming spaces are crucial for several reasons. A safe environment encourages residents and visitors to engage in activities, boosting economic vitality through increased footfall and business opportunities. A welcoming town centre also promotes community cohesion and pride, attracting investment but also encouraging a sense of belonging amongst residents. Cultivating and developing a positive perception of the Borough's town centres is an essential component of the Council's regeneration strategy.

Over recent years, a significant amount of work has gone into supporting Stockton-on-Tees town centres, both from a regeneration investment perspective and a community safety standpoint. A substantial amount of investment has been made in community safety measures such as new CCTV cameras and the provision of additional Civic Enforcement Officers to patrol and work with key stakeholders to problem-solve issues. Furthermore, last year saw the introduction of the Council's first Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) to tackle aggressive begging and street drinking in both Stockton Town Centre and Norton Village.

These measures, alongside additional support from SBC's strategic partners, have resulted in sustained reductions in key areas of crime and disorder. Despite this, however, the public perception of town centre safety continues to be poor amongst prospective visitors and also commercial investors.

This review provides an opportunity to scrutinise what is currently in place in terms of promoting safety in town centres and how effective the measures are in addressing crime and disorder, whilst also further exploring what more can be done to positively promote the Borough's town centre spaces to address negative perceptions and improve feelings of safety.

The main aims for this review will be to:

- Establish the key issues within each of the Borough's six town centres with regards safety.
- Understand the measures already in place to address these issues and ascertain any gaps in future plans.
- Identify any potential learning from other parts of the UK.

**The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:**

- What is meant by the term 'welcoming' in relation to the Borough's town centres?
- What has the Council and its partners done to make its town centres more welcoming and safer (inc. impact of recent PSPO implementation)? How effective have these been?
- What safety issues (real or perceived) are specific to the six town centres across the Borough; what is stopping residents / visitors wanting to access these locations? What data is available to support / contradict these concerns?
- Do town centre businesses consider their location as welcoming and safe? What issues, if any, do they feel need addressing; could they assist with any of these themselves?
- How is the grant funding allocated to the Cleveland PCC area as part of the latest Safer Streets Fund (round five) being used to improve safety within the Borough?
- What is the role of the Stockton Safety Partnership (SSP) in relation to this scrutiny topic?
- How can this review contribute to / complement the ongoing SBC *Powering Our Future* Community Safety and Regulated Services project?
- How does / can the Council utilise the local voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector to support welcoming and safe town centres?
- What can the Council learn from the approach of other Local Authorities?

**Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and / or transformation:**

An assessment of the effectiveness of local community safety measures and recommendations on what more could potentially be done to address public concerns (whether real or perceived).

# 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Community Safety Select Committee's scrutiny review of Welcoming and Safe Town Centres.
- 1.2. For several years now, debate has ensued over the future purpose and provision of town centres across the UK, with Local Authorities and their numerous partners considering the ways in which they can make these locations as appealing as possible within the context of a tough financial landscape. In related matters, the issue of town centre safety has also drawn national attention, with significant concerns raised during a December 2023 UK Parliament debate around reported increases in shoplifting, rising incidences of violence and abuse of shop staff, and police / community support officer numbers. More recently, another UK Parliament debate took place in October 2024 where the regeneration of city and town centres was discussed.
- 1.3. As Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) progresses with the redevelopment of its six town centres, fostering feelings of safety and creating welcoming spaces are crucial for several reasons. A safe environment encourages residents and visitors to engage in activities, boosting economic vitality through increased footfall and business opportunities. A welcoming town centre also promotes community cohesion and pride, attracting investment but also encouraging a sense of belonging amongst residents. Cultivating and developing a positive perception of the Borough's town centres is an essential component of the Council's regeneration strategy.
- 1.4. Over recent years, a significant amount of work has gone into supporting Stockton-on-Tees town centres, both from a regeneration investment perspective and a community safety standpoint. A substantial level of investment has been made in community safety measures such as new CCTV cameras and the provision of additional Civic Enforcement Officers to patrol and work with key stakeholders to problem-solve issues. Furthermore, 2023 saw the introduction of the Council's first Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) to tackle aggressive begging and street drinking in both Stockton Town Centre and Norton Village.
- 1.5. These measures, alongside additional support from SBC's strategic partners, have resulted in sustained reductions in key areas of crime and disorder. Despite this, however, the public perception of town centre safety continues to be poor amongst prospective visitors and commercial investors, something which is acknowledged within the current SBC Community Safety Strategy 2022-2025 document.
- 1.6. This review provided an opportunity to scrutinise what was currently in place in terms of promoting safety in town centres and how effective the measures were in addressing crime and disorder, whilst also further exploring what more could be done to positively promote the Borough's town centre spaces to address negative perceptions and improve feelings of safety.
- 1.7. The main aims for this review were, firstly, to establish the key factors within each of the Borough's six town centres in relation to the overarching themes of 'welcoming' and 'safe'. Understanding the measures already in place to address these issues, and then ascertaining any gaps in future plans, was another important element of this work. The Committee also sought to identify any potential learning from other parts of the UK.
- 1.8. The Committee found that, whilst 'safe' and feelings of safety can be more easily defined, what makes a space 'welcoming' can mean multiple things to different people. That said, creating an attractive location, where people feel comfortable, secure, and willing to spend time, was a clear overarching theme.



- 1.9. Over the last six years, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) has engaged in various consultations and engagement regarding town centre developments. The last Residents Survey (2023) missed a further opportunity to ascertain specific views on town centre spaces and barriers to their use, and future Borough-wide surveys of those living in Stockton-on-Tees should include a dedicated section to capture these critical insights. The Council should also ensure that a summary of the information gathered is relayed back to the public to enhance transparency and demonstrate community involvement.
- 1.10. The decrease in recorded crime / anti-social behaviour (ASB) incidents is welcomed, and whilst there is confidence that this reflects a genuine drop, the Committee remains cautious that this could also reflect the fact that a proportion of the public may be unwilling to report crime, believing that little will be done (something the police and partners also remain alive to). Both SBC and the police should continue to emphasise the importance of raising any concerns which will contribute towards addressing identified problems (even if this means the person making the report does not receive a direct response). The ASB hot-spot patrol initiative shows promise, and the Committee looks forward to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Cleveland evaluation of this and whether there is scope to extend it to other town centres within the Borough.
- 1.11. Shoplifting has become an increasingly high-profile concern in the national media, but local police data indicates a decrease in four of the Borough's six town centre spaces in the last 12 months. Stockton and Thornaby are the exceptions, with Cleveland Police acknowledging that there is work to do in the former around shoplifting, with measures to be put in place to prevent this happening and strengthen confidence within premises. The retail theft initiative in Norton has delivered promising results – consideration should be given to implementing this in Stockton and Thornaby to further enhance safety and confidence.
- 1.12. A range of Council-related activity supports the Borough's town centres to be welcoming and safe. Departments including Community Safety and Regulated Services (Licensing, Trading Standards, Environmental Health), Public Health, and Town Centres Development all play crucial roles, with links to Planning, Legal, Highways and Care For Your Area (e.g. street cleaning), as well as cross-directorate input into regular town centre audits. The Committee continues to highlight that any consultation with 'partners' around town centre design concepts (whether new or proposed changes to existing spaces) needs to ensure the right SBC departments (and, where appropriate, SBC Ward Councillors) are involved in conversations / developments, particularly regarding future maintenance requirements / responsibilities.
- 1.13. As acknowledged by the SBC Town Centres Management department, first impressions count. Ensuring and maintaining a robust programme for street cleansing, litter collection, and other aspects such as horticultural services is essential to presenting the towns in their most welcoming light (this includes the visual state of infrastructure, and the Committee commends officers for working with building-owners to address structures which have become a blot on the landscape).
- 1.14. The introduction of a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in 2023 was a significant development, though the Committee notes the comments from Stockton Business Improvement District (BID) about the apparent dilution of impact since its implementation. Feedback on the SBC Community Safety and Regulated Services evaluation and review of the PSPO would therefore be timely and should help refine and enhance its effectiveness.
- 1.15. The stated intentions to establish a Town Centres Management Group offers a further opportunity to involve all relevant partners / stakeholders (including relevant Ward / Town Councillor representation) in the identification of town centre issues, the formulation of solutions to tackle ongoing and future challenges in these spaces, and the exchange of ideas which could potentially be implemented across any of the Borough's six town centres.

- 1.16. Services are in place to support individuals affected by substance misuse and are key to ensuring that town centres remain welcoming and safe. The Council and its partners should assess the impact of these services on the attractiveness of town centres, and identify gaps in provision with a view to addressing these (e.g. street drinking / addiction).
- 1.17. The Committee welcomes the OPCC focus on retail crime and would encourage the continued concentration on this moving forward to ensure perpetrators are identified and then brought to justice for their actions (frustratingly, ongoing issues within the overarching criminal justice system does not always support this). Businesses have a critical role in safeguarding themselves and should be encouraged to think about how they can prevent / deter would-be shoplifters (this may involve a level of investment to minimise potentially larger losses of stock).
- 1.18. In wider safety matters, the Committee is pleased to learn of a variety of measures that have been initiated to address issues such as ASB, neighbourhood crime, and violence against women and girls, as well as challenges associated with the night-time economy (particularly for Norton, Stockton and Yarm). The ASB hot-spot patrols are of particular interest and demonstrate the value of a uniformed presence in deterring problem behaviour. Insufficient police / enforcement visibility was a theme which emerged throughout this review – mindful of recent Government announcements around strengthening the neighbourhood policing model (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/200-million-boost-to-transform-neighbourhood-policing>), it is to be hoped that the Cleveland area receives a greater allocation of overall national funding than it has in the past, and that opportunities to increase patrols are not missed.
- 1.19. A strong sense of partnership-working pervaded through the evidence received, but it is interesting to hear involved parties call for local stakeholders to be held to account more within existing Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) arrangements. Whilst it is important to work together to address issues, challenging each other and ensuring each entity is playing its full part is just as key.
- 1.20. Communication of initiatives and success stories pertinent to town centre spaces was another theme (and indeed required improvement) which emerged. The sense from some that nothing will be, or is being, done to address problem behaviour has been identified by the Committee in previous reviews, therefore further development in this area is still required.
- 1.21. Town Councils provide a valuable source of information and intelligence, and relayed several issues pertinent to their own town centre space. Acknowledging that high streets were now viewed and used very differently compared to previous times, the need to identify a town centre's 'unique selling point' (be that a retail, services, or leisure offer) and capitalise on this was emphasised – Town Councils can, and should, play a part in realising this. The subjects of prohibitive business rates, lighting, building décor, and police visibility were also highlighted, as was the importance of good signage, floral displays, and incorporating heritage into these environments – all relevant elements which provide further proof of the extremely wide-ranging nature of this scrutiny topic.
- 1.22. The business community are crucial to the success of town centres, and whilst shopping habits have undoubtedly changed, they continue to offer a means with which to bring people into these spaces. Evidence from Stockton BID demonstrated ongoing concerns about problem behaviour within Stockton town centre, with businesses reporting 651 incidents in 2024 alone. The stated lack of a formal link between intelligence from the business community and police systems requires attention (though the Committee notes the force's trial in engaging with this), as does the sense that the Borough (and therefore local businesses) no longer benefits from as many events – the potential for a more varied / specialised markets programme should also be explored. Whilst the situation in Yarm is different to that in Stockton, the positive relationship between Yarm Business Forum and SBC representatives is encouraging, though the feeling that communication with the Council as a whole had reduced in the last 18 months should be addressed.

- 1.23. Acknowledging the wide-ranging contribution of the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector into making town centres attractive and appealing, the Committee welcomes the volunteer driver scheme, an innovative initiative which helps address a theme which was raised a number of times during this review – namely, the challenges that some people had in accessing town centre spaces. Support with transport to enable use of services / locations is an issue that emerges in numerous scrutiny topics, and it is therefore hoped that this initiative can be extended. In other VCSE-related matters, the strong interest in people becoming a ‘Stockton Street Angel’ is encouraging – organisers will need to ensure this cohort receives appropriate support / training to carry out the role.
- 1.24. The Committee welcomed input from both young people involved in the Council’s Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF) initiative and a number of SBC Ward Councillors who responded to the survey issued as part of this review, much of which reinforced town centre-related themes that had emerged from other contributors. Young people are the future users of the Borough’s assets and need to be encouraged into town centre spaces by offers which are relevant and appealing to them. Leisure opportunities can be an enticing factor, and the Borough appears in a good place to capitalise on existing (e.g Billingham Forum / Stockton Splash) and proposed (e.g. Thornaby swimming pool and gym) sites – however, these must be accessible (with associated public transport links) and safe spaces.
- 1.25. A range of town centre-related measures from around the UK was brought to the Committee’s attention, and there remains much value from being conscious of what is going on elsewhere in places which are often experiencing similar issues and challenges to Stockton-on-Tees. Council officers demonstrated their openness to learning from others and should continue to give due consideration to implementing alternative approaches to make the Borough’s town centres more appealing. Barnsley’s multi-agency hub concept is an interesting approach that could increase the presence of relevant organisations in town centres and thereby improve public perceptions of feeling welcomed and safe.
- 1.26. Despite attempts to consider existing issues across all six Stockton-on-Tees town centres, contributor submissions and subsequent discussions were often drawn to Stockton town centre. However, residents and businesses in (and visitors to) the Borough’s other five town centre spaces must not be overlooked by the (some would say understandable) tendency to direct a greater proportion of available resources into Stockton high street. The people of Billingham, Ingleby Barwick, Norton, Thornaby and Yarm deserve to be heard and need to feel they are being listened to when it comes to tackling town centre-related issues. Indeed, initiatives which have been implemented within Stockton may well be transferable to other towns experiencing similar challenges – this should be considered and facilitated where possible.
- 1.27. Much emphasis was put on the question of reality versus perception. Despite reductions in reported crime and ASB, it is clear (particularly from online commentary) that some negative perceptions of the Borough’s town centre spaces persist. We live in an age of numerous platforms which enable any individual to amplify negativity and, in some cases, distort the truth with impunity, yet the Committee cannot pretend that there are not factors within these spaces which discourage people to access them. There is a small number of individuals (a cohort acknowledged by SBC) who are having an adverse impact on other town centre-users. This group has vulnerabilities, but whilst they have as much right to access these spaces as anyone else, SBC has a duty to the wider public including residents, businesses and visitors to the town centres. SBC and its partners continue to explore options and opportunities to address these issues in a compassionate and pragmatic way, and the Committee looks forward to this work progressing.

- 1.28. All contributors to this review demonstrated a strong willingness to both individually and collectively strive to make spaces safer and in turn more welcoming. Words are powerful, but action is even more impactful, and pooled resources need to visibly show (and be effectively communicated) that efforts are being made to increase the attractiveness of the Borough's town centres. The Council has made a number of significant announcements about the regeneration of its six towns, emphasising a commitment to vibrant and thriving communities – the success of these initiatives will be much dependent on whether the public feel confident in accessing these spaces. As York's vision emphasises, *'people, or footfall, is the key to a successful place'* – it is essential for people of all demographics to engage with these areas and become advocates for their success. Contrary to some who prefer to perpetuate only negative views of the Borough, Stockton-on-Tees town centres have a lot to offer and also have the potential for even more, and all local people have a stake (and potential benefit) in making these spaces the best they can be.

## **Recommendations**

The Committee recommend that:

### **Strategy**

- 1) **Future refreshed versions of relevant Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) long-term strategies (e.g. Stockton-on-Tees Plan, Community Safety Strategy, Inclusive Growth Strategy) identify and reflect the unique nature of each of the Borough's six town centres, and outline how SBC and its partners will maximise a sense of 'welcoming' and 'safe' within these spaces (acknowledging the key findings of this review).**
- 2) **Utilising existing partnerships (including engagement with local business forums / groups), consideration be given over how to maximise the annual events and markets programme to provide further opportunities for increased footfall / exposure to town centre environments.**
- 3) **As far as possible, SBC ensures the ongoing and future development of the Borough's town centres maximises accessibility, with appropriate amenities (e.g. seating / toilets) to support the experience of those using these spaces, and the promotion of existing public transport options into these areas.**

### **Communications / marketing**

- 4) **There should be a specific 'town centres' element to the SBC Communications Strategy which reflects greater and more consistent use of communication platforms (online and print media) to proactively market the Borough's town centres (including periodic marketing campaigns) and promote positive developments, ensuring this reflects all six town centre spaces (not just Stockton).**
- 5) **SBC engages with the Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF) initiative to establish effective ways in which to publicise / promote the Borough's town centre offers to young people.**

*(continued overleaf...)*

## **Recommendations (continued)**

The Committee recommend that:

### **Data / Evaluation**

- 6) SBC provides the Committee with an evaluation of the 2023 implementation of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) in Stockton and Norton town centres, including details of how this was / is resourced, and whether such an approach may be suitable for other town centre spaces within the Borough.**
- 7) Within 12 months, SBC provides the Committee with an assessment of how the 2025 implementation of new / increased parking charges in Stockton and Yarm had impacted access (footfall / dwell time) to these town centre spaces, clearly demonstrating views from / experiences of local businesses.**
- 8) The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Cleveland provides the Committee with the outcomes of its evaluation of the recent anti-social behaviour (ASB) hot-spot patrols in Billingham, Stockton and Thornaby.**
- 9) Cleveland Police ensures incidents reported to them by the business community are captured and reflected within its own crime / ASB recording systems.**

### **Town centre presence**

- 10) Cleveland Police and SBC consider further ways in which greater police / enforcement visibility can be achieved within the Borough's town centres, particularly around identified hot-spot areas for crime / ASB / congregations of groups of individuals with addiction issues, as well as anticipated new developments (e.g. new Stockton waterfront).**
- 11) Where appropriate, consideration be given to the introduction of multi-agency, co-located hubs within town centre spaces to provide sanctuary, support and signposting for those with addiction needs.**
- 12) SBC and its relevant partners formulate an agreed plan for managing and supporting highly visible street drinkers / drug-users (who may or may not be ready for recovery).**



## 2.0 Introduction

- 2.1. This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Community Safety Select Committee's scrutiny review of Welcoming and Safe Town Centres.
- 2.2. The main aims for this review were, firstly, to establish the key factors within each of the Borough's six town centres in relation to the overarching themes of 'welcoming' and 'safe'. Understanding the measures already in place to address these issues, and then ascertaining any gaps in future plans, was another important element of this work. The Committee also sought to identify any potential learning from other parts of the UK.
- 2.3. The Committee identified the following key lines of enquiry:
  - What is meant by the term 'welcoming' in relation to the Borough's town centres?
  - What has Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) and its partners done to make its town centres more welcoming and safer (including the impact of the recent Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) implementation)? How effective have these been?
  - What safety issues (real or perceived) are specific to the six town centres across the Borough; what is stopping residents / visitors wanting to access these locations? What data is available to support / contradict these concerns?
  - Do town centre businesses consider their location as welcoming and safe? What issues, if any, do they feel need addressing; could they assist with any of these themselves?
  - How is the grant funding allocated to the Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) area as part of the latest Safer Streets Fund (round five) being used to improve safety within the Borough?
  - What is the role of the Stockton Safety Partnership (SSP) in relation to this scrutiny topic?
  - How can this review contribute to / complement the ongoing SBC *Powering Our Future* Community Safety and Regulated Services project?
  - How does / can the Council utilise the local voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector to support welcoming and safe town centres?
  - What can the Council learn from the approach of other Local Authorities?
- 2.4. The Committee took evidence from several SBC departments (Community Safety and Regulated Services; Town Centres Development; Public Health; Social Care), the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Cleveland, Cleveland Police, and Cleveland Fire Brigade. Further contributions were received from Town Councils, local business forums / groups, the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector (via Catalyst), and Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF). Responses to a SBC Ward Councillor survey were considered, as were examples of town centre promotion / safety within other areas of the UK.

## 3.0 Background

- 3.1 For several years now, debate has ensued over the future purpose and provision of town centres across the UK, with Local Authorities and their numerous partners considering the ways in which they can make these locations as appealing as possible within the context of a tough financial landscape.
- 3.2 In related matters, the issue of town centre safety has also drawn national attention, with significant concerns raised during a December 2023 UK Parliament debate around reported increases in shoplifting, rising incidences of violence and abuse of shop staff, and police / community support officer numbers ([UK Parliament - Town Centre Safety](#)). More recently, another UK Parliament debate took place in October 2024 where the regeneration of city and town centres was discussed ([UK Parliament - City and Town Centres: Regeneration](#)).
- 3.3 Numerous resources have been published in the past to assist in making town centre spaces welcoming and safe. Some examples include:

- **BRE Trust:** Safe and Secure Town Centres at Night Toolkit (2008)  
[https://files.bregroup.com/bre-co-uk-file-library-copy/filelibrary/pdf/rpts/safe\\_secure\\_town\\_centres\\_at\\_night.pdf](https://files.bregroup.com/bre-co-uk-file-library-copy/filelibrary/pdf/rpts/safe_secure_town_centres_at_night.pdf)

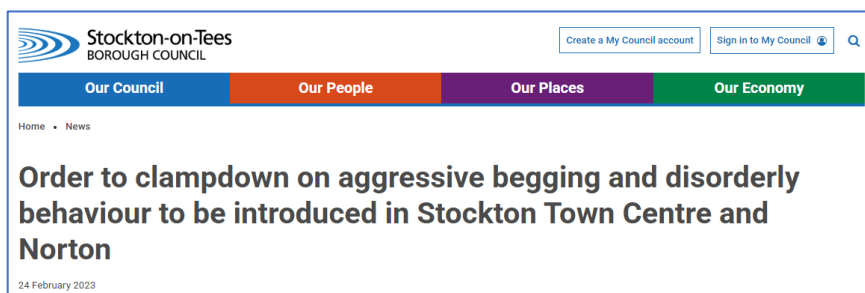
- **BRE Trust:** Reducing Crime Hotspots in City Centres (2015)  
<https://files.bregroup.com/bre-co-uk-file-library-copy/filelibrary/Briefing%20papers/102417-Crime-Hotspots-Briefing-Paper-v4.pdf>



- **Local Government Association:** Revitalising Town Centres – A Handbook for Council Leadership (2018)  
[https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/5.33%20Town%20Centre\\_04\\_web.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/5.33%20Town%20Centre_04_web.pdf)
- **Local Government Association:** Revitalising town centres: a toolkit for councils  
<https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/economic-growth/revitalising-town-centres-toolkit-councils>

- 3.4 As Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) progresses with the redevelopment of its six town centres (see <https://www.stockton.gov.uk/regeneration>), fostering feelings of safety and creating welcoming spaces are crucial for several reasons. A safe environment encourages residents and visitors to engage in activities, boosting economic vitality through increased footfall and business opportunities. A welcoming town centre also promotes community cohesion and pride, attracting investment but also encouraging a sense of belonging amongst residents. Cultivating and developing a positive perception of the Borough's town centres is an essential component of the Council's regeneration strategy.

- 3.5 Over recent years, a significant amount of work has gone into supporting Stockton-on-Tees town centres, both from a regeneration investment perspective and a community safety standpoint. A substantial level of investment has been made in community safety measures such as new CCTV cameras and the provision of additional Civic Enforcement Officers to patrol and work with key stakeholders to problem-solve issues. Furthermore, 2023 saw the introduction of the Council's first Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) to tackle aggressive begging and street drinking in both Stockton Town Centre and Norton Village (see



[Order to clampdown on aggressive begging and disorderly behaviour to be introduced in Stockton Town Centre and Norton](#)).

- 3.6 These measures, alongside additional support from SBCs strategic partners, have resulted in sustained reductions in key areas of crime and disorder. Despite this, however, the public perception of town centre safety continues to be poor amongst prospective visitors and commercial investors, something which is acknowledged within the current [SBC Community Safety Strategy 2022-2025](#) document.
- 3.7 This review provided an opportunity to scrutinise what was currently in place in terms of promoting safety in town centres and how effective the measures were in addressing crime and disorder, whilst also further exploring what more could be done to positively promote the Borough's town centre spaces to address negative perceptions and improve feelings of safety.

## 4.0 Findings

### Defining 'Welcoming' and 'Safe'

- 4.1. Each of the Borough's six town centres (Billingham, Ingleby Barwick, Norton, Stockton, Thornaby, and Yarm) had unique characteristics, with different opportunities and challenges. A late-2023 Parliament debate on town centre safety ([UK Parliament - Town Centre Safety](#)) experienced its own difficulties in narrowing down what 'welcoming' actually meant, principally as it impacted all who lived, worked or visited these locations.
- 4.2. An example of another Local Authority (York) which had outlined a vision for its town centres was shared with the Committee:

*'We want to create safe and welcoming town centres that are vibrant and can adapt to change. The most important aspect of this is people. People create the noise, soul and life of a town, and, crucially, the captive audience for businesses to thrive. People, or footfall, is the key to a successful place. When footfall and vibrancy drop, fewer services and shops can be supported, vacancies rise, and employment falls. A vibrant and popular place will attract people and support shops and services for our residents. By influencing how and when the town centres are used, and adapting key spaces, we can manage this better and optimise the benefits for all.'*

A potential definition for Stockton-on-Tees was provided at the beginning of this review which could be adapted / refined as the Committee progressed with its evidence-gathering phase:

*'Welcoming and safe town centres foster a sense of community, inclusivity and vibrancy. Visitors feel comfortable, respected and valued and the areas are a thriving environment for businesses, cultural events and social interactions. Through collaboration with local stakeholders, including the business community and residents, we can enhance quality of life and wellbeing for residents and visitors alike, making our six town centres an attractive destination for all.'*

- 4.3. Drawing attention to a recent survey on the Council Plan which elicited concerns about people and towns within the Borough, the Committee suggested that the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) vision for its town centres should include references to 'hospitable' and 'access to and from safely' (the latter being a particular issue for some following past changes to public transport routes which had inhibited / discouraged visits to town centre locations).

### Existing town centre issues (including reported incident data)

- 4.4. For each of the Borough's six town centre spaces, the following key stakeholders presented their recorded data (green brackets indicates the month this was provided to the Committee):
  - [SBC \(Community Safety and Regulated Services\)](#) (July 2024): Information since 2022-2023.
  - [Cleveland Police](#) (October 2024): Changes in recorded crime / disorder over the last 12 months covering the November 2023 to October 2024 period (*note: robbery cases were small, so the percentage change was higher*).
  - [Cleveland Fire Brigade](#) (November 2024): Recorded incidences of deliberate primary and secondary fires for the current 2024-2025 year (up to 30 September 2024) as well as the previous five-year period (covering 2019-2020 to 2023-2024).

Billingham	
<b>SBC</b> (since 2022-2023)	Anti-social behaviour (ASB) reports were around half of that in Thornaby. Off-road bikes were often a cause for concern. Billingham was in the ASB hot-spot patrol routes which were delivering reductions in ASB reports (outcomes from an evaluation of these patrols by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Cleveland were awaited).
<b>Cleveland Police</b> (over last 12 months (Nov 23 to Oct 24))	Overall crime in 'Billingham Central' down 24.4%, with incidences of violence with injury (-29.4%), shoplifting (-4.7%) and robbery (-47.6%) all falling.
<b>Cleveland Fire Brigade</b> (2019-2020 to 2023-2024, and 2024-2025 (up to 30 Sept 24))	Between 7.00pm and 9.00pm was the time where most fires occurred, with Thursdays being the most prevalent day for incidents.

Ingleby Barwick	
<b>SBC</b> (since 2022-2023)	ASB issues remained low at around 50-60 reports a year. Vehicle issues around schools did feature, either through direct reports or via Elected Members. Demand due to reports was low but perceptions, including fear of ASB, were poor.
<b>Cleveland Police</b> (over last 12 months (Nov 23 to Oct 24))	Overall crime in 'Ingleby Barwick Town Centre (Ingleby Barwick West)' down 22.9%, with incidences of violence with injury (10%) increasing, but shoplifting (-9.4%) and robbery (-66.7%) both falling.
<b>Cleveland Fire Brigade</b> (2019-2020 to 2023-2024, and 2024-2025 (up to 30 Sept 24))	Early evening (6.00pm to 8.00pm) saw the highest number of incidents, with Sundays experiencing the most fires since 2019-2020.

Norton	
<b>SBC</b> (since 2022-2023)	Biggest reported issue to SBC was ASB, peaking at over 400 in 2022-2023, dropping to 150 last year (2023-2024) following the introduction of a PSPO. Concerns regarding off-road motorbikes high. ASB hot-spot patrol routes had recently been reviewed, and Norton town centre will form part of the revised coverage.
<b>Cleveland Police</b> (over last 12 months (Nov 23 to Oct 24))	Overall crime in 'Norton Central' down 34.4%, with incidences of violence with injury (-71.4%) and shoplifting (-71.4%) both falling, but robbery (100%) increasing. The decrease in shoplifting was likely a result of the retail theft initiative – the force was looking to transfer this across to other locations.
<b>Cleveland Fire Brigade</b> (2019-2020 to 2023-2024, and 2024-2025 (up to 30 Sept 24))	Wednesday was the most common day for recorded fires, though total numbers were low since 2019-2020. Again, 6.00pm to 8.00pm was the time when most incidents took place.



Stockton	
<b>SBC</b> (since 2022-2023)	Highest number of incidents of any of the Borough's town centres, with over 900 ASB reports in 2022-2023, dropping below 700 last year (2023-2024). Crime reported to SBC was over 700 last year ( <i>note: last year, SBC started including CCTV-monitored incidents in the figures, which accounted for the increases in other categories</i> ).
<b>Cleveland Police</b> (over last 12 months (Nov 23 to Oct 24))	Overall crime in 'Stockton Town Centre' down 3%, with incidences of violence with injury (-7.5%) falling, but shoplifting (6%) and robbery (11.5%) increasing. The force acknowledged that there was work to do in this location around shoplifting, with measures to be put in place to prevent this happening and strengthen confidence within premises.
<b>Cleveland Fire Brigade</b> (2019-2020 to 2023-2024, and 2024-2025 (up to 30 Sept 24))	Historically, the highest number of fire incidents were recorded in this area, with Thursdays being the most frequent day and 6.00pm to 7.00pm being the most common time.

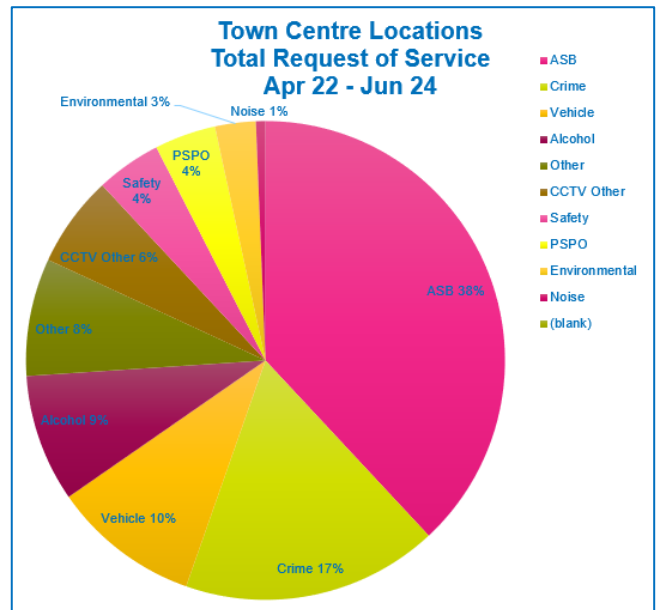
Thornaby	
<b>SBC</b> (since 2022-2023)	ASB continued to be the stand-out issue at around 200 incidents each year for the last two years (2022-2023 and 2023-2024). Recently, a group of young people (who had been causing problems around the Golden Eagle / Allensway) successfully completed the 'Making Good' programme and had not been involved in further incidents. Thornaby town centre was also covered by ASB hot-spot patrols (funded by the Home Office).
<b>Cleveland Police</b> (over last 12 months (Nov 23 to Oct 24))	Overall crime in 'Thornaby Town Centre (Stainsby Hill)' down 28.8%, with incidences of violence with injury (7.4%) and shoplifting (2%) increasing, but robbery (-28.6%) falling.
<b>Cleveland Fire Brigade</b> (2019-2020 to 2023-2024, and 2024-2025 (up to 30 Sept 24))	Like in Norton, Wednesdays saw the most incidents, with 5.00pm to 6.00pm and 8.00pm to 9.00pm providing the highest number of fires.

Yarm	
<b>SBC</b> (since 2022-2023)	Parking issues were the most reported category, with low reports of ASB each year (an average of 50 reports per year). Challenges associated with the busy night-time economy did occur but were well managed between partners, including the SBC Licensing Team.
<b>Cleveland Police</b> (over last 12 months (Nov 23 to Oct 24))	Overall crime in 'Yarm Town Centre' down 9.1%, with incidences of violence with injury (2.1%) increasing, but shoplifting (-21.7%) and robbery (-100%) both falling.
<b>Cleveland Fire Brigade</b> (2019-2020 to 2023-2024, and 2024-2025 (up to 30 Sept 24))	Recorded incidents were very low for each of the years since 2019-2020, with Sundays and Mondays seeing most fires.

## SBC (Community Safety and Regulated Services)

4.5. In terms of SBC Community Safety 'requests for service' in relation to town centre locations, ASB (38%) and crime (17%) had the largest percentages of all requests between April 2022 and June 2024.

4.6. Commenting on the statistics for reported incidents within each of the Borough's towns, the Committee noted some positive developments which did not appear consistent with negative perceptions of safety – SBC officers noted that the majority of issues within these locations were seemingly being caused by a small number of individuals. The Committee also stressed the importance of ensuring a sense of safety for those working within town centres, something which would aid recruitment and retention efforts (a well-documented area of concern for many sectors at present).



4.7. Pointing to the numerous references to alcohol within the SBC Community Safety and Regulated Services evidence submission, the Committee expressed surprise that there was no mention of drugs, a factor which continued to be a significant problem in parts of the Borough. SBC officers stated that a recording issue may be at play in this regard (with drug-related cases being coded under 'ASB' or 'addiction'), and that Cleveland Police would have more specific statistics on this element. SBC did recognise the impact of drugs on town centre environments.

4.8. Highlighting the ongoing problem of scooters / bikes within Thornaby, Members sought further information on the referenced 'Making Good' programme. The Committee heard that this was a national initiative (via the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Cleveland) and operated as a diversionary programme for those aged 12 and over. SBC could refer young people into the scheme where they completed a workbook on the impact of their behaviours and the potential consequences if this continued. Referral routes were currently being reviewed, though it was too soon to understand the effect of the initiative (the OPCC would be evaluating the programme at some point in the future). Members highlighted a similar scheme to stop fire-setting, though cautioned that some may think referral into such a programme could be viewed as a 'reward' for poor behaviour.

## Cleveland Police

4.9. Police data represented recorded cases on a ward-basis, not just town centres. It was noted that the crime of 'robbery' was sub-categorised into 'personal' and 'business' – the detection rate for the latter was around 40% which was considered good.

## Cleveland Fire Brigade

4.10. The recorded data enabled Cleveland Fire Brigade (CFB) to direct its crews to certain parts of the Borough at specific times to reduce incidents.

- 4.11. Separate analysis on the economic cost of recorded deliberate fires within the Borough across the previously completed five years (2019-2020 to 2023-2024) and the current 2024-2025 year (up to 30 September 2024) had been compiled. For the six Stockton-on-Tees town centre spaces, it was estimated that the number of incidents since April 2019 had cost the local economy around £1.8m (with Stockton high street accounting for nearly half of this amount).
- 4.12. The Committee asked how many fire incidents had been reported at nearby John Whitehead Park, Billingham, and whether the Brigade liaised with Cleveland Police when any fire-setting occurred within the park. For the former, CFB confirmed that the majority of fire incidents in and around the Billingham town centre space happened inside John Whitehead Park (further data was subsequently shared with the Committee which showed that there had been 33 incidents in the park between March 2021 and August 2024, resulting in an economic cost of £247,968). Regarding the latter, CFB requested that the police attended if the person responsible for setting the fire was known / suspected.
- 4.13. The Committee questioned if fire incidents in Ingleby Barwick had reduced since the removal of the recycling site at Tesco supermarket around five months ago – CFB confirmed that there had been a subsequent fall in incidents, though Ingleby Barwick was not a significant pressure area for the Brigade. It was noted that Ingleby Barwick Town Council had previously paid for a dedicated enforcement service which was operational all week apart from Sundays (the day which had the highest number of recorded fire incidents) – this had since changed to an ‘on call basis’ arrangement only. CFB encouraged partners to inform them of any relevant officers who may need to be contacted in the event of a fire.

### Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) services supporting town centre spaces

#### SBC Community Safety and Regulated Services

- 4.14. **Licensing:** The core functions of these services were to ensure public safety through licensing policies and documents to promote the licensing objectives throughout the Borough. Licensing Officers carried out both proactive and reactive visits, and investigated / took action against licenced and unlicenced activity to promote public safety. The team processed around 2,000 applications and 1,000 service requests per year.

Relevant town centre-related initiatives were highlighted, including Pubwatch (local, independent groups of people working in licensed premises who work together to tackle and prevent ASB / crime and promote safe drinking environments) and the introduction of trauma packs (designed to improve the chances of victims in the event of a serious accident or a violent incident) in key locations and licensed premises – see graphic right. The team’s contribution to regular audits organised by SBC Town Centres Development was also noted.




- 4.15. **Trading Standards:** Working to promote a fair and safe trading environment (to the benefit of both consumers and reputable businesses), SBC Trading Standards Officers investigated all complaints regarding the sale of such products from town centre premises and market traders. This also played a part in disrupting organised crime.


Examples of involvement in named operations to combat sales of counterfeit / illicit tobacco and illicit / non-compliant vaping products were highlighted. The service utilised the help of young volunteers to check if shops were selling age-restricted products (i.e. cigarettes, alcohol, vapes and fireworks) to children – much of this work was carried out within the Borough’s town centre

locations, often alongside police colleagues. Officers also carried out proactive food standards inspections to check that town centre premises were selling food that was correctly described and met compositional standards, as well as ensuring that the requirements around allergen controls were being implemented.

- 4.16. **Environmental Health:** The service was involved in a wide range of activity, including animal controls (joint responsibility with the police), addressing dog fouling, air quality monitoring, noise / dust / odour assessment and control (incorporating the imposition of controls around any new developments), and food safety inspections / complaints management. The Borough's positive performance in relation to air quality was documented (an area which was predominantly impacted by either vehicle movement or domestic heating sources), as was the number of noise complaints addressed during 2023-2024.
- 4.17. **Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO):** Consultation was undertaken from December 2022 which, following an encouraging 1,300 responses, identified public perceptions of feeling unsafe in Stockton and Norton town centres, and particular concerns about alcohol-related ASB and aggressive begging. A PSPO was subsequently introduced in April 2023 to tackle aggressive begging and street drinking in both Stockton Town Centre and Norton Village.



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## Public Space Protection Order

The protection of our residents is a key priority for the Council and while Stockton-on-Tees continues to have the lowest recorded crime and anti-social behaviour rate in the Cleveland Police area, we have faced challenges around our town centres.

Following a public consultation the Council has introduced a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) in Stockton Town centre and Norton Village to help prevent anti-social behaviour for aggressive begging and street drinking.

The Public Space Protection Order gives our Civic Enforcement Team and the Police greater powers to tackle these problems as breaching a PSPO is a criminal offence and can be dealt with by issuing a £100 fixed penalty notices (FPN) or prosecution.

The Public Space Protection Order came into effect on 3 April and will last for three years.

If you would like to make a report or find out more please contact the Civic Enforcement team on 01642 528439 or [civic.enforcement@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:civic.enforcement@stockton.gov.uk)

- 4.18. **Future Planning:** As part of the Council's *Powering Our Future* initiative, a review of the existing SBC Community Safety and Regulated Services offer was ongoing, with a view to presenting recommendations to Cabinet later in 2024. The review was focusing on having the correct team structures to meet future demand, improving digital innovation to maximise officer time in the community (demonstrations for potential new initiatives / technologies were scheduled), and improving customer access and experience (including reporting and updates).

Several identified priorities for the department during 2024 were listed which involved maximising the use of civil legislation to disrupt crime (particularly serious and organised crime), diverting young people away from ASB, and utilising Safer Streets 5 funding to further support town centre safety. An evaluation and review of the Stockton and Norton town centre PSPO was planned, as was the introduction of a SBC Problem Solving and Partnerships Officer to work alongside the community and internal / external partners to enhance community resilience and exploit opportunities for collaboration.

- 4.19. Responding to a Committee query regarding the distribution of trauma packs and whether these were accompanied by some form of training, SBC officers stated that a QR code was included within the pack which users could scan to take them to a video about how to utilise the contents, though the Council was considering whether to create its own version as the one via the QR code was quite formal. There had also been some (albeit limited) communications issued regarding the introduction of these packs (of which funding had been provided about a year ago for 50, with further talks to be held with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland to increase this number), and individual premises should be able to train their staff in using them. Members commented that the availability of these packs should not be a replacement for people calling 999 in the event of an incident necessitating the use of such kits, and also flagged concerns regarding the contents of the one in Yarm – SBC officers committed to following this up (subsequent information and assurance was shared with the Committee in July 2024).
- 4.20. The Committee asked if there was any evidence that the introduction of the Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in Stockton and Norton town centres had diverted identified problem behaviour to other areas of the Borough. In response, Members were informed that one individual did reappear in Thornaby (though this had been dealt with by authorities), with SBC officers adding that the perception from some about the implementation of the PSPOs was that certain people would be moved out of those town centre areas. However, issues only arose when individuals were not behaving appropriately.
- 4.21. The Committee felt that more needed to be done to highlight the positive work being undertaken (emphasising the success stories) to make town centres more welcoming and safer. That said, Members also acknowledged that many concerns being witnessed in these spaces were long-term issues that were not easily remedied, and therefore encouraged the Council and its partners to be persistent in tackling existing problem behaviour. SBC officers referenced continuing issues within Liverpool and Newcastle despite significant regeneration initiatives – authorities needed to find the best way to manage locally identified challenges, though matters were not helped by people commenting on the state of town centres when they themselves had not visited the areas. Members concluded that the key word for all parties (the Council, its partners, all town centre users, and the wider public) was ‘respect’.

## SBC Town Centres Development

- 4.22. The Town Centres Development Team (TCDT) had responsibility for the development and delivery of a wide range of interventions across the Borough’s six town centres. Predominantly under the financial umbrellas of the Levelling-Up Fund, Towns Fund, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and Future High Streets Fund, it oversaw and co-ordinated the development, design and delivery of capital projects. Town centre business engagement and market management was also a focus.
- 4.23. Ultimately, the role of the TCDT was to ensure town centres continued to thrive as a critical part of the Borough through the creation and development of high quality, welcoming and safe spaces that encouraged visitors and supported economic growth. The Council was building on this investment and continued to drive change forward in the six towns across the Borough to adapt to the changing face of retail and town centres in the coming years. A key and intrinsic part of its vision was to create places that were both safe and welcoming.
- 4.24. **Regeneration scheme design:** The design of plans and regeneration schemes needed to reflect the ambitions of residents, Elected Members, businesses, and a variety of wider stakeholders. A range of inputs were therefore sought from across the Local Authority and through an array of external partners and agencies to ensure that emerging concepts and designs were compliant with relevant policy, guidelines and laws, whilst continuing to meet the needs of the initial brief and end-users.



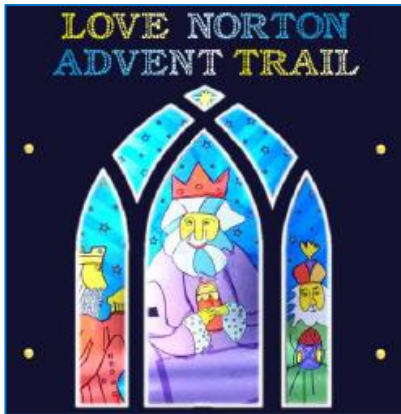
When developing spaces and places, there were many factors that required consideration to ensure that SBC were in line with legislation and other functions within the Local Authority – these included Planning, Legal, Highways, Community Services, Care For Your Area, Licensing, and Security and Surveillance. Individual workstreams for each element of a project included discussion with key stakeholders (both internal and external) to ensure understanding across all parties – this helped identify who was responsible for areas of delivery and reach collective agreement on mitigation strategies when faced with issues.

A fundamental aspect to the development of schemes was the level of public consultation and engagement. The aim when consulting was to take the public on a journey and inform and update people during the design and development of the project. With regards to the major regeneration schemes being delivered across the Borough, in 2019 and 2020, the TCDT undertook a consultation about a shared vision for the six town centres across Stockton-on-Tees (see paragraph 4.160) – this comprised an online survey as well as face-to-face sessions held within central locations (libraries and customer service points). Examples of design concepts and public consultation involving Romano Park, Norton public realm, Billingham, and Stockton waterfront were provided.



- 4.25. **Making town centres welcoming:** An instant and obvious barometer for the look and feel of the Borough's town centres was the condition of the public realm and buildings. Across these spaces, SBC had an extensive programme of street cleaning and cleansing which was done on a cyclical and programmed basis. First impressions really did count and street cleansing, litter collection and other aspects such as horticultural services were critical to providing a strong foundation when presenting the towns in their most welcoming light.

SBC was proactive in its approach to ensuring vacant properties were kept in a presentable condition via a regular audit of buildings – this allowed the Council to monitor them and, where necessary, identify issues with building owners and encourage necessary improvements when required. In addition, SBC also undertook a regular audit inspection of town centre locations, specifically at areas which attracted dumps of waste (both residential and commercial) and fly-tipping. Several examples of improvements and initiatives that helped make the Borough's town centres a welcoming place to live, work and stay were provided.



- 4.26. **Determining if interventions were successful:** Footfall / dwell time (where people were visiting, what people were doing, and where they were coming from) in town centres was continually monitored (see **Appendix 1** for examples of summary reports) and helped SBC identify areas which required more focused attention. In the past four years, the TCDT had undertaken over 10 individual public sessions to consult or engage with people on the plans and designs of regeneration schemes – this would continue, and the Council would strive to ensure all residents, visitors and businesses were proud of the town centres and saw them as secure, safe and welcoming places.
- 4.27. The Committee drew attention to the referenced smaller scale, 'soft' interventions which contributed significantly to the look and feel of town centre spaces, asking if these (including dementia-friendly initiatives which had been adopted by local businesses) were being publicised enough. SBC officers stated that developments such as these were promoted by the Council and through its partners, and that collective publicity was more effective. In terms of dementia, it was recognised that considerations around this condition (including training for staff) needed to be built into the design of spaces, though designated 'quiet hours' in Wellington Square demonstrated efforts to provide a better experience for all.
- 4.28. Stressing the importance of the small details (particularly street cleansing) with regards town centre presentation, the Committee felt that more benches / seats needed to be provided to assist town centre users who were older or less mobile. Members then queried whether there were any plans to cover Stockton's Wellington Square (as had been suggested in the past) given the Castlegate Shopping Centre (which previously offered a dry, warm space for people to visit) had now been knocked down. SBC officers replied that enclosing a shopping area was complex, involving significant costs to retrofit a large space which can increase service charges for retailers. Whilst a feasibility study had been undertaken some time ago, there were currently no plans to cover Wellington Square. The Committee highlighted the retrofitting of some of Hartlepool's town centre shopping space, with the Chair stating that this discussion around a similar proposal for Wellington Square would be raised with the relevant SBC Cabinet Member.
- 4.29. Clarity was then sought on the thought process of the TCDT when considering ongoing maintenance costs in relation to capital projects. SBC officers reported that the TCDT was very conscious of future financial requirements (e.g. planting, cutting, materials, etc.) during the design phase of projects, and that there was also the ability to capitalise a maintenance package within a development. Much was ultimately down to design and quality, with officer experience and professional advice integral to sourcing the most efficient and cost-effective materials. In response to a related Committee query, officers stated that consultation with other SBC departments which may incur increased costs because of a regeneration scheme would take place from the outset (design concept stage). Members emphasised the need to be open about future maintenance responsibilities.

- 4.30. Referencing the insight collected through visitor footfall / dwell time, the Committee asked what was done when any themes were identified. Members were informed that outcomes from such information were yet to be developed, though it was intuitively known which were the busiest days and this was built into considerations around, for example, street cleansing.
- 4.31. The Committee switched its focus onto the recently published masterplans for parts of Stockton-on-Tees and was interested in any discussions relating to one of the Borough's greatest assets, the river (arguably an under-utilised feature). Members heard that the river and its maintenance was not within the TCDT remit, though links with this space had been established through the ongoing Tees Valley Care and Health Innovation Zone initiative. Whilst the need for clarity on who was responsible for what around different parts of the river footprint was acknowledged (the case of the Canal and River Trust removing litter bins in 2023 due to the cost of emptying was highlighted by Members), the Committee felt it was important to continually keep in mind the potential for this natural asset.
- 4.32. Returning to the theme of engagement with relevant stakeholders over town centre design concepts, the Committee stressed that the TCDTs consultation with 'partners' needed to ensure the right SBC departments were also involved in conversations / developments. Members then questioned how transport matters were being factored into design plans and heard that, given these were existing geographical locations, established patterns of travel / connectivity were already in place to facilitate access. Responding to a query on whether there was a need to make it easier to bring more people into town centres, SBC officers felt that the current transport networks / options were reasonable. The Committee, however, expressed concern over the possibility that the west side of Stockton may feel cut-off as a result of the new waterfront development.
- 4.33. Questions concluded with a request for assurance on maintaining a focus on tidying-up existing town centre areas which may be giving the impression of a less welcoming and cared-for environment. SBC officers commented that whilst maintenance regimes were not within the remit of the TCDT, there was a desire to improve the identification of areas which required attention through closer working with other SBC departments.

## Research Project

- 4.34. The SBC Town Centres Manager had recently completed a research project titled, '*Understanding the negativity, stigma, and perception attached to Stockton Town Centre*' and presented their findings to the Committee:
- 4.35. **Project Aim and Objectives:** The overarching aim was to challenge, change and improve the negative perception and stigma attached to Stockton town centre through collaboration and communication. Objectives were to:
- 1) Gain in-depth understanding of the issues that created the negative perception of Stockton town centre.
  - 2) Use the research data to develop a Town Centre Strategic and Operational Delivery Plan that fitted in with, and aligned to, the SBC *Powering Our Future* programme.
  - 3) Create a collaborative communication network across Stockton town centre businesses and the key stakeholders.
  - 4) Develop a communication plan that enhanced the reputation of the town centre.
  - 5) Research town centre place marketing and place management academic literature to determine best practice that aligned with this research project.
  - 6) Provide recommendations to help improve the perception that people had of Stockton town centre.



- 4.36. **Project Overview:** Starting in July 2024, a focus group (consisting of five managers with specialism and involvement in town centres) and interviews with senior managers and town centres specialists were used to collect information. Analysis was completed in early-November 2024, with recommendations and an Action Plan split into seven main headings (and aligned to SBC *Powering Our Future*) as follows:
- General Town Centre Operations and Events
  - Community-Focused Activities
  - Communications and Positive Promotion of the Town Centre
  - Stakeholders and Partnerships
  - Engaging and Involving Young People
  - Regeneration
  - Crime, Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), Intervention and Support
- 4.37. **Project Outcomes:** Several recommendations were identified for each of the above main headings and were listed within the presentation. Specific attention was drawn to the need for a town centre business audit and the continued delivery of an annual event programme (General Town Centre Operations and Events), creating a ‘warm welcome’ social group and providing opportunities for sports groups / organisations to use the town centre as an activity hub (Community Focused Activities), and the development of brand guidelines that enhanced the town centre space (Communications and Positive Promotion of the Town Centre). Proposals for the creation of a town centre crime and ASB problem-solving group, and the development of a structured rota with police and town centre enforcement to combat issues around the fountain area (Crime, Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), Intervention and Support) were also noted.
- 4.38. Supporting visuals were shown to the Committee regarding town centre management – these provided examples of the work undertaken in Stockton following town centre audit (including buildings) inspections and responses to general issues affecting the town centre, as well as positive promotion of the town centre space via views, interactions and followers on social media.



The emphasis on partnership-working was recognised, with the Committee urging specific clarity on what the Council's responsibilities were.

- 4.39. Praising the work done to encourage shop-owners to improve the facades of their buildings, the Committee noted that there were a number within Stockton town centre that still looked shoddy and expressed hope that the efforts of neighbouring shops would provoke others into responding with similar action.
- 4.40. With reference to the delivery of events, the Committee considered the forthcoming Stockton and Darlington Railway bi-centenary celebrations to be a huge opportunity for the Borough – however, it appeared that plans were being managed externally despite a lot of local people

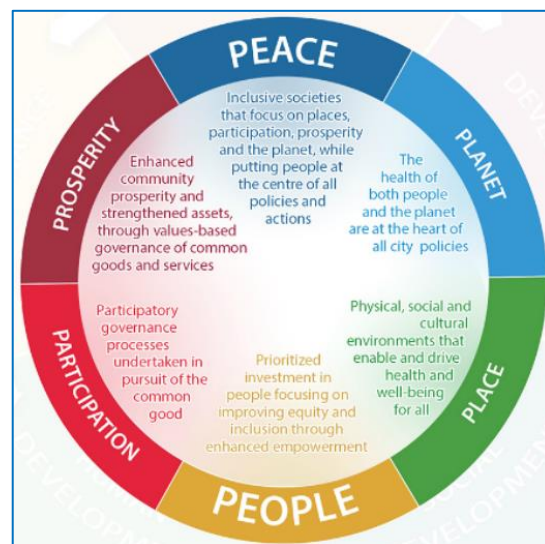
wanting to be involved. Members also pointed to the mixed messages they were receiving from the Council which needed to be clarified ahead of planned activity.

- 4.41. Attention turned to Stockton's markets, with the Committee highlighting a recent claim at a SBC Cabinet meeting that the Christmas edition was oversubscribed when it appeared that a lot of space was available. It was felt that further exploration was needed in order to offer market variety, and that the provision of cabins to facilitate markets was not a necessity (the sometimes prohibitively high prices associated with markets in Yarm was also raised by Members – it was suggested that Yarm Town Councillors may wish to pursue this issue, with potential options for a Sunday offer and / or the use of nearby Yarm School as a venue).
- 4.42. Discussion then moved to the drive for sports groups / organisations to use the town centre as an activity hub. The Committee expressed concern over the statement that such entities were not using the funding that was available to them to pursue this (e.g. 'Shape the Play' scheme).
- 4.43. Reflecting on the additional information around the promotion of Stockton town centre, the Committee asked if the increase in views / interactions / followers was a direct result of closer working with traders. The SBC officer confirmed that this was likely to be the case, and that traders now seemed to be more willing to promote themselves and their business. Markets were still a significant event (see <https://www.facebook.com/stocktononteesmarkets/> for the 'Stockton-on-Tees Markets' Facebook page), and, oddly, there appeared to be a more positive perception of the Stockton offer from those outside the Borough than those within it.
- 4.44. Welcoming the recommendations contained within the presentation, the Committee suggested that a number of these would be relevant for the other five towns across the Borough and wondered if these could be shared to improve town centres throughout Stockton-on-Tees. It was stated that the Council was looking to develop a local Town Centre Management Group – Members encouraged the sharing of future ideas with all Ward and Town Councillors.

## SBC Public Health

- 4.45. **Welcoming and safe town centres: what creates them?:** Whilst other theories had been developed and promoted, the World Health Organisation (WHO) 'Healthy Cities' model (adopted by Newcastle City Council) emphasised the critical importance of people and the creation of an environment that enabled individuals, services and businesses to flourish (see graphic right).

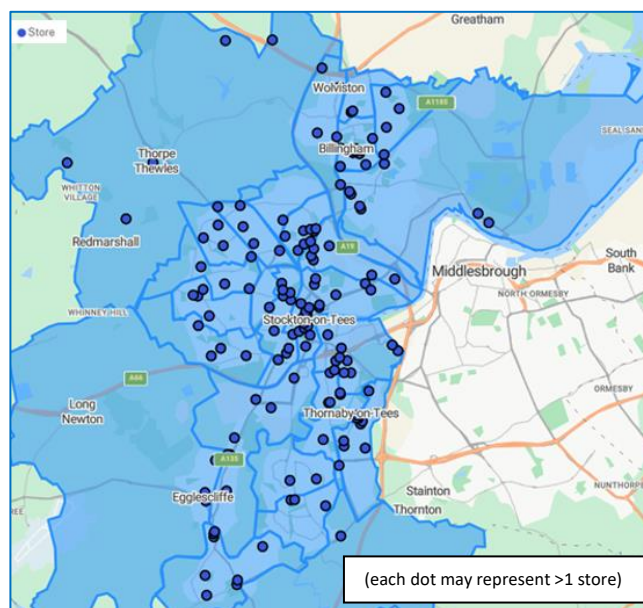
Issues involving town centre spaces were broad, and a range of data and views was needed to inform the local picture and therefore approach. A paper was considered earlier in 2024 by the SBC Cabinet regarding the work of Professor Sir Michael Marmot to address health inequalities, a key focus for the Council.



- 4.46. **Safety and perception of safety: considerations:** Several factors were noted including housing, the built environment, street lighting, nature of business, traffic, community cohesion, and anti-social behaviour (ASB). In relation to the latter, elements which could drive / contribute to ASB / violence included place design, education, and employment opportunity, as well as childhood bonding / attachment, trauma, social networks and support, mental wellbeing, and use of substances.



- 4.47. **Community safety and violence prevention: public health action:** From a strategic perspective, SBC Public Health worked with partners on prevention programmes, was involved in the Council's *Powering Our Future* initiative to add its voice to planning around communities and places, and played its part in a whole systems approach to the provision and delivery of services in relation to substance misuse. With a lead role in the collation of the Stockton-on-Tees Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (recently updated) and the delivery of its associated delivery plan, SBC Public Health was represented on the Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence (CURV), Combating Drugs Partnership, Domestic Abuse Steering Group, and Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board (TSAB), and had also provided input towards the masterplans incorporating town centre spaces (including the Tees Valley Care and Health Innovation Zone vision).
- 4.48. **Prevention:** Public health roles in relation to prevention included mental health and substance misuse support within the Community Wellbeing Hub, CURV needs assessments, public mental health awareness, the domestic abuse strategy, and targeted work to improve access to services (health-checks, employment, Tees Credit Union, etc.).
- 4.49. **Communities and places:** SBC Public Health involvement in impacting communities and places included a 'Healthy Streets' pilot (led by SBC Regeneration and Inclusive Growth colleagues), reviewing good practice and research evidence base alongside SBC Planning colleagues, informing licensing applications (it was noted that Stockton town centre was ranked within the highest deprivation scale, had the highest crime levels across the Borough, and had the highest density of off-sale premises selling alcohol (see graphic right) – future applications had to balance this data against the need for a healthy, vibrant night-time economy), and improving relationships with, and access to, support working with individuals with multiple complex needs via a peer advocacy pilot funded by the Integrated Care Board (ICB).



Stockton-on-Tees off-licence premises (as of June 2024)

- 4.50. **Substance misuse:** Reflecting its significance, a large proportion of the SBC Public Health submission covered the issue of substance misuse (alcohol and drugs). Acknowledging that community cohesion and connectedness were important in safety and perceptions of safety, the local picture was outlined which highlighted that drug use was spread across the Borough but was concentrated in and around Stockton town centre (though networks meant drug-related crime would extend beyond this space). Alcohol misuse, meanwhile, was spread across social groups, and whilst alcohol-related harm was greater in disadvantaged communities, violence linked to alcohol occurred across all socio-economic groups and may be hidden (e.g. domestic abuse). However, there were improving trends, with alcohol-related admissions decreasing and closing the gap with the England average.

Local work around substance misuse was overseen by the Health and Wellbeing Board, with the Borough's services taking a holistic approach to individual service-users, building on what was important to them and addressing need. Current ways of working would be strengthened through the SBC *Powering Our Future* 'early intervention and prevention' transformation review, with an additional focus on workforce capacity, support and training to enable brief intervention, advice and support in a range of community settings (e.g. Community Wellbeing Hub, hostels, The

Moses Project, Hebron Church Food Bank). The Alcohol Strategic Framework and approach to drug harm minimisation was also noted.

Existing services and partnerships in relation to substance misuse were outlined, some of which included various treatment and recovery outreach provision, Public Health-funded pharmacy-based services, overdose pathways, and inpatient detox. Individual placement support (IPS) aimed for sustained employment through mainstream, competitive jobs, assisting anyone of working-age engaged in structured treatment (104 individuals had been supported in the last year).

Specific attention was drawn to the work of the integrated substance misuse service, Change Grow Live (CGL) which was funded through a Public Health ring-fenced grant. Contributing to a significant increase in drug and alcohol treatment numbers over the past two years, CGL had introduced a full-time walk-in offer this year with same-day prescribing – this had improved accessibility and reduced waiting times across all substances, and enabled referral processes to other services to begin. CGLs outreach team engaged with individuals who convened within town centre spaces, and whilst its Stockton town centre site was appointment-based, CGL would always try to facilitate access even if an individual's key worker was not present. An important part of the CGL offer was an educational service for people and their families / carers / friends to increase their knowledge about substance misuse and signpost to other support services. CGL was very aware of the issues that service-users could cause and strived to assist in making spaces safe for all (e.g. a sharps team was in place to clear needles left behind in public areas).

- 4.51. **Next steps:** Principally through the Health and Wellbeing Board (via the delivery of the Joint Stockton-on-Tees Health and Wellbeing Strategy), SBC Public Health would continue to develop and evaluate work on creating healthy places, continue supporting the licensing process (specifically around the promotion, pricing and availability of alcohol), and develop data and intelligence to inform local approaches to prevention and support. The ongoing peer advocacy pilot would be monitored and evaluated, with a desire to continue to build on the good outcomes delivered through commissioned services.
- 4.52. Commending SBC officers for the depth of information provided within the submission and thanking CGL for its day-to-day work in supporting vulnerable people, the Committee asked if CGL offered set or bespoke pathways for individuals who were trying to break their addiction. Members were informed that there was a main (core) support structure in place, but that other pathways emanated from this due to the differing issues that each person was experiencing. CGL tried to maintain engagement with individuals for a longer period to avoid problems re-surfacing.
- 4.53. The Committee asked if it was possible to monitor any reductions in problem behaviour following interventions from services. SBC officers stated that information on an individuals' outcomes was held and that services were trying to improve how they could demonstrate changes in behaviour as a result of the support they had received (e.g. development of a dashboard prototype). That said, there was known evidence that interventions led to lower crime / ASB incidents.
- 4.54. Reflecting upon the impact of substance misuse, Members felt it was important to recognise that every individual was part of the local community, even if some found it easy to cast them off from mainstream society. As such, the Committee queried if the Council and its partners were doing vulnerable people a disservice by concentrating those with similar issues into one area (particularly when, for example, they left prison). Officers pointed to the shared characteristics of those experiencing drug and / or alcohol challenges which, in effect, made this a community in its own rights – whilst comfort could be found in being in the same location, it was acknowledged that this could also be a destructive environment. Dispersing people with addictions more widely across the Borough would not move these individuals away from what they were going through internally, however.

- 4.55. Discussion on the facilitation of appropriate environments to allow people to recover from their addiction continued, with officers noting that town centres brought a concentration of issues and that services were therefore positioned where engagement and impact would be maximised. Whilst much was town centre-based, hubs did exist in the wider community that could also be accessed by those seeking support.
- 4.56. Members raised the recently publicised issue of prostitution on Yarm Road, Stockton, and the associated poor impression this created for what was an entrance to the town centre space. Officers gave assurance that a specialist worker engaged with individuals involved in this practice, though pointed to the need to look at this issue from a societal point of view, not just a geographical one (or else it would simply move to another part of the Borough). The Committee asked if the specialist worker had seen an increase in the cases of prostitution in that specific area, as the perception amongst local people was that this was becoming a bigger problem – officers responded that the situation appeared reasonably stable, though it was hard to be certain as there was a reliance on individuals disclosing their involvement. Again, assurance was given that there were positive examples of people moving away from this behaviour, and that CGL linked into A Way Out (an outreach and prevention charity which aimed to engage, empower and equip vulnerable and excluded women, families and young people to live lives free from harm, abuse and exploitation) to promote better life choices.

### SBC Social Care (Dementia Hub)

- 4.57. The Committee had previously been made aware of work undertaken to make the Borough's town centres more welcoming for those with dementia and their families / carers. Representatives from the SBC Adults, Health and Wellbeing directorate were therefore invited to provide further details, and a report outlining the Dementia-Friendly Plus project was subsequently submitted for consideration. Summarised by the SBC Community Link Worker, information included:
- 4.58. Originally a joint-initiative between SBC and Stockton BID (which had subsequently been widened to other parts of the Borough by the Council), there were now over 200 businesses accredited as dementia-friendly involving a vast range of organisations and traders across public, private and voluntary sectors. Each business underwent an annual / bi-annual review to show its sustainability – the initial application form was reviewed by various groups of people with lived experience, and feedback was delivered to the business verbally by the SBC Community Link Worker at the review (or before if possible).
- 4.59. Examples of support or pledges given back to the community by businesses for those living with dementia and their loved ones included various drop-ins hosted by businesses / groups (with Council and often police representatives present to relay relevant information), music and dance events across all six of the Borough's towns (providing further networking opportunities), and dementia-friendly accredited sporting facilities / clubs (supporting physical and mental health) and care homes (with care at home providers now embarking on this using Skills for Care guidelines).
- 4.60. Feedback provided to businesses often reinforced their good practice but also explained why an issue may have arisen. It was allowing traders to maintain their customer base for longer and encouraging people to remain shopping or being entertained / dined with them for longer, too (emphasising the benefits of getting more people into town centre spaces, and for a greater length of time, rather than businesses viewing each other as competition, was also a key point to get across). Feedback was very evident from people living with this condition that welcoming spaces and a variety of activities, accessible shops and a good customer service was being created, with an increased understanding of dementia and customer needs.



- 4.61. Groups involving and representing those living with dementia had discussed plans for the ongoing Stockton waterfront developments, with comments relayed to the SBC Town Centres Improvement Manager – these were provided for the Committee's information and drew attention to issues such as visual considerations (contrast, colour, font size, etc.) within design concepts, signage requirements (and where this was not needed), and perceptions for those with dementia which can differ from how the general population sees their surroundings.
- 4.62. Transport had always been voiced as a problem. Working with the SBC Licensing Team, there was now a mandatory requirement for licensed drivers to be a 'dementia friend'. Efforts to work with bus-provider, Arriva were also being made, though they were proving harder to engage.
- 4.63. The dementia-friendly Stockton sticker was seen as a safe place – when observed on shop windows, or on licensed drivers' cabs and police cars, there was a degree of comfort. Work was undertaken with the Borough's 'warm welcome' initiative to try to make all spaces dementia-friendly.
- 4.64. In conclusion, from the point of view of people living with dementia, their carers, and local businesses, the Borough was certainly welcoming, although some places were better than others. Staff awareness sessions enabled businesses to look at what people with dementia could do rather than what they could not, and it was soon recognised that change did not always carry a cost (small adjustments often being the most beneficial).
- 4.65. Praising the work undertaken in relation to this initiative, the Committee encouraged the promotion of what had been achieved, and the benefits it had brought, across all six of the Borough's town centres. Continuing to educate businesses was a key element in improving town centre experiences for people with dementia and their families / carers.

### Partners supporting town centre spaces

#### Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Cleveland

- 4.66. In October 2024, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Cleveland addressed the Committee to respond to several of its key lines of enquiry. Information submitted included:
- 4.67. **Tackling Shoplifting:** A Retail Crime Summit was held in October 2023, an event which was followed-up earlier in October 2024 and gave similar assurance that Cleveland Police was doing what it could to address this issue (work which was bucking the national trend around shoplifting – see [https://news.sky.com/story/we-need-help-workers-say-shoplifting-is-out-of-control-as-brazen-thefts-explode-13256656?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://news.sky.com/story/we-need-help-workers-say-shoplifting-is-out-of-control-as-brazen-thefts-explode-13256656?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)). Further engagement with the force via its bi-monthly retail crime meetings and through the OPCCs scrutiny work on the topic had also provided assurance on the ongoing approach, with key areas of concern raised around police communication, sentencing (not something the force could influence but an important element which caused significant public alarm), difficulties in passing evidence (e.g. transferring CCTV coverage from older systems), and wider issues such as anti-social behaviour (ASB) and addiction (which required Public Health solutions / support).

The development of a cross-Cleveland Retail Crime Action Plan had aided the identification of single points of contact within each Local Authority area, as well as the availability of data (via a dashboard) showing business premises experiencing six or more offences of shoplifting. Problem-solving plans were in place for the top five shoplifting-affected settings within each Local Authority boundary, with use of Police National Computer (PNC) facial recognition checks also being worked upon.



- 4.68. **Safer Streets Funding (Round 5):** With £331,000 funding (over 18 months) received from the Home Office as part of this ongoing national initiative, the focus was on tackling ASB, neighbourhood crime, and violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Stockton Town Centre (Portrack and Tilery area) and Ropner wards. Within the former, tangible developments using this funding included the distribution of target hardening packs (e.g. locks to make homes more secure) to vulnerable residents and repeat victims, the installation of kick rails to prevent anti-social use of motorcycles, the installation of integrated CCTV / lighting columns, and the launch of a 'Power of Women' project focusing on developing skills, confidence and empowerment. *Operation Nightfall* (a joint venture between Cleveland Police and A Way Out which involved safeguarding night patrols to target those who go into the area to exploit sex workers) was the continuing focus within Ropner.

Work undertaken off the back of the Safer Streets Fund was significantly reducing incidents of ASB across the Borough, with residents starting to report positive messages on the difference this was making.

- 4.69. **ASB Hotspots:** Funding was made available from the Home Office to pilot an 'ASB Hotspots' programme in Cleveland – this was allocated to the four district Councils in Cleveland after agreeing a delivery model. In Stockton-on-Tees, a total of £135,633 was spent from October 2023 to March 2024 in setting-up the scheme and delivering the patrols – an additional £263,000 was allocated for the April 2024 to March 2025 period. Focusing on town centre locations in Billingham, Stockton and Thornaby, patrols provided a uniformed presence in the hotspot areas to act as a deterrent to those who may engage in acts of ASB or crime, and to provide reassurance to the public using these spaces. Funding had been used to employ an additional six Enforcement Officers within SBC for the duration of the project.

To evaluate the programme, the OPCC was collecting information on engagement and other activity carried out within the hotspots. Between August 2023 and June 2024, the three town centre hotspot locations across the Borough had seen over 1,000 patrol hours (involving over 1,000 patrols), 428 resident engagements, and 813 business engagements. Activity included information-sharing with partners, Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO) enforcement, and interventions and warning letters issued in relation to ASB.

- 4.70. **Overall Outcomes in the Hotspot and Safer Streets Lower Super Output Area (LSOA):**

Location	Crime / Incident Type	Number of incidents / crimes		Difference	% increase/ decrease	% inc / dec for all stockton
		Jul 22 - Jun 23	Jul 23 - Jun 24			
<b>Billingham Town Centre</b> (LSOA 002E)						
	Antisocial behaviour	134	119	-15	-11%	-3%
	Criminal damage and arson	89	53	-36	-40%	-14%
	Public Order	71	37	-34	-48%	-32%
	Violence and sexual offences	175	117	-58	-33%	-15%
	Burglary	47	9	-38	-81%	-14%
	Shop lifting	111	71	-40	-36%	-5%
	Drugs	9	5	-4	-44%	-3%
	Robbery	7	12	5	71%	-22%
<b>Thornaby Town Centre</b> (LSOA 020C)						
	Antisocial behaviour	211	96	-115	-55%	-3%
	Criminal damage and arson	94	36	-58	-62%	-14%
	Public Order	61	51	-10	-16%	-32%
	Violence and sexual offences	134	126	-8	-6%	-15%
	Burglary	44	13	-31	-70%	-14%
	Shop lifting	72	104	32	44%	-5%
	Drugs	2	9	7	350%	-3%
	Robbery	6	4	-2	-33%	-22%
<b>Stockton Town Centre</b> LSOA(025A, 025B, 025C, 025D, 026A) Old LSOA (014E, 014F, 014G)						
	Antisocial behaviour	709	629	-80	-11%	-3%
	Criminal damage and arson	331	361	30	9%	-14%
	Public Order	565	392	-173	-31%	-32%
	Violence and sexual offences	1626	1466	-160	-10%	-15%
	Burglary	212	186	-26	-12%	-14%
	Shop lifting	372	411	39	10%	-5%
	Drugs	196	184	-12	-6%	-3%
	Robbery	70	63	-7	-10%	-22%

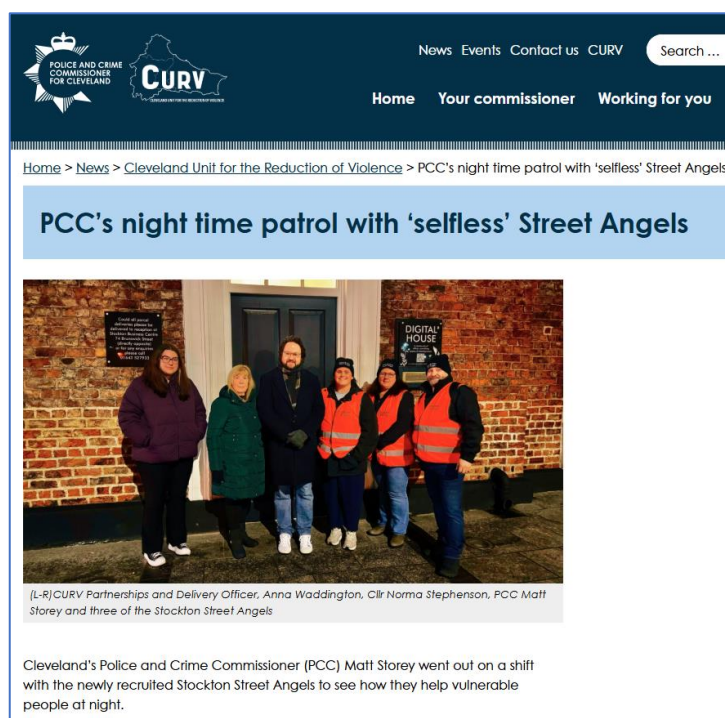


As seen in the previous graphic, the impact of the ASB Hotspots programme had seen a significant decrease in the rate of reported ASB incidents within each of the three hotspot areas during July 2023 to June 2024 when compared to the previous year (July 2022 to June 2023). Publicly available Police.UK datasets showed an 11% (Billingham), 55% (Thornaby) and 11% (Stockton) decrease in recorded ASB incidents – these reductions were set against an overall 3% fall in ASB-related cases that were recorded for the whole of the Borough between these reporting periods.

In related matters, the OPCC had recently finished consulting on the latest Police and Crime Plan for Cleveland (subsequently published in January 2025 – further details can be found at: <https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/commissioner/cleveland-police-and-crime-plan/>). Linked to this was the need to see ASB treated with the same importance as crime, as the impact of ASB on the local population could be just as significant.

- 4.71. **NTE Action Plan:** Stockton-on-Tees was awarded over £40,000 in night-time economy (NTE) funding for 2022-2023 which was spent on pubs and clubs within the Borough's town centre spaces – this facilitated the provision of 'Ask for Angela' training, metal detector wands, bleed kits (which the OPCC was encouraging North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (NEAS) to map in the same way as defibrillators), anti-spiking resources for licensed premises, and an additional CCTV operator for peak NTE times to improve incident detection and management.

In relation to the Serious Violence Duty, Stockton-on-Tees was allocated over £20,000 following the co-production of the NTE Action Plan with partners across Cleveland – this funded the distribution of bleed cabinets across three district areas, the setting-up of 'Stockton Street Angels' (via collaboration with Stockton Business Improvement District (BID) – see <https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/news/pccs-night-time-patrol-with-selfless-street-angels/>), child sexual exploitation (CSE) training to hotel staff, Scannet (identification technology), and radios for licensed premises. It was noted that businesses were able to access funding to assist with safety.



- 4.72. **Next Steps:** Further to the NTE-related developments referenced, the intention was to expand radio systems to increase coverage in Yarm, as well as introduce training in the use of bleed kits / cabinets. A media campaign focused on perpetrator behaviour was also envisaged.
- 4.73. **Areas of Concern:** In addition to the reliance on licensed premises maintaining their commitment to the measures which had been put in place / were planned, there was uncertainty around the sustainability of NTE-related resources, and a lack of clarity on the future of violence reduction units and whether the Serious Violence Duty would continue. Other elements to consider were the outcomes of the new Government's forthcoming Budget announcements and the completion of the subsequent comprehensive Spending Review. The PCC for Cleveland had written to the Home Secretary to call for a fairer allocation of funding for Cleveland Police (something the current funding formula prohibited – for example, Wiltshire had received around 20% additional

finance since 2010 despite having a much lower need than the Cleveland area), which, in his opinion, was doing excellent work within very challenging circumstances.

- 4.74. **How can the OPCC and partners address negative perceptions of town centre spaces?:** The promotion of successes around joint operations, effective use of enforcement tools (e.g. PSPOs), and identification of public perceptions on what made people feel unsafe were highlighted. In terms of retail crime, the delivery of the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme for shopping centre personnel could provide additional public confidence and would reduce the existing pressures on the police in having to deal with lower-level incidents.

It was acknowledged that how individuals 'feel' was often the hardest aspect to address (regardless of decreasing crime / ASB data), and that part of the PCCs role was to be visible within communities and provide assurance to the local population.

- 4.75. The Committee highlighted the ongoing problem around perceptions of safety despite the encouraging fall in recorded crime / ASB (specifically in Billingham town centre), with comments from residents continuing to be relayed to Members about a lack of police visibility. In response to a query around the focus of activity, the PCC stated that funding to support and improve safety had been targeted across all areas of the Borough, and that the examples within the OPCC submission were by no means an exhaustive list. Regarding police presence, it was acknowledged that an increase in the number of officers was key in promoting a stronger sense of safety within local communities, though Cleveland's share of the anticipated 13,000 national uplift in police personnel was currently unknown.
- 4.76. Continuing with the theme of force visibility, the importance of an effective neighbourhood policing model was emphasised. Rather than be seen to simply walk up and down streets, the PCC stressed the need for officers to work with local people to solve problems specific to each community. However, a current concern was that neighbourhood police personnel were getting dragged out of their patch to deal with 'response' work, thereby further reducing their visibility in the areas they were assigned to – this situation had been taken up with the Chief Constable of Cleveland Police, with the PCC only partially assured that this was being addressed.
- 4.77. Although the Committee's review was focusing on town centres, Members asked if the concentration of funds towards these spaces was pushing issues further afield. The PCC recognised the potential for this to occur, though also noted the prevalence of greater pressures within urban environments which needed to be tackled through preventative (education / diversionary) measures as well as any response tactics.
- 4.78. Heartened to hear that residents were voicing positivity around the Safer Streets Fund-related activity, the Committee questioned if the OPCC and SBC worked closely enough to communicate the successes associated with initiatives to improve safety across the Borough. The PCC drew attention to the effectiveness of local community partnerships, though also expressed his wish for Cleveland Police to highlight more about what it did and ensure the public were more aware of its positive achievements. From a personal point of view, the PCC observed that much of the local population would not be familiar with his role or understand its value – it was therefore important that he himself was publicly visible to demonstrate and promote what was happening to make Cleveland safer.
- 4.79. Turning to incidences of shoplifting, the Committee relayed claims that some shops told their staff not to challenge individuals who committed such offences. In response to a query on whether challenge towards shoplifters would be encouraged, the PCC stressed that shop-worker safety was extremely important and that, consequently, he would never advise staff to tackle individuals themselves but instead ensure all incidents were reported (without worrying about potential reprisals). It was noted that if shop staff endured a traumatic experience as a result of an

incident, they had to return to the scene of the crime every day in order to carry out their role, something many victims were not required to face.

- 4.80. The Committee pursued the issue of communication and highlighted public complaints over the difficulties in getting through when dialling the '101' phone number (for reporting minor crime / incidents). The PCC commented that Cleveland Police response times for people contacting 101 were good (though felt this could be better still), and stated that the 101 number was one of a number of ways in which concerns could be reported – the Cleveland Online Policing App (COPA) remained available (with investment being considered to make this a multi-language function to better serve diverse communities), as was the anonymous reporting route, Crimestoppers. The PCC emphasised the importance of reporting incidents as, even if the police did not subsequently respond, this helped build intelligence for future intervention.
- 4.81. Further discussion around addressing perceptions of safety included the need to boost public confidence in the police. To this end, the OPCC was creating a public scrutiny panel which would be chaired by the PCC and would aim to be a diverse, representative public-facing forum which held Cleveland Police to account. The Committee welcomed this development and encouraged the OPCC to share plans with all Councillors as they may be aware of community leaders who would be interested in getting involved. Correspondence was subsequently received in February 2025 from the OPCC Head of Standards, Scrutiny and Accountability stating that the OPCC was currently working on the finer details of the panel and, as such, had not yet launched the initiative. A press release would be issued when the time was right, and the Committee could be kept informed if it wished.

## Cleveland Police

- 4.82. Led by Cleveland Police's Stockton District Commander and supported by the Acting Chief Inspector for Stockton, a report was presented to the Committee in October 2024 which covered the following:
- 4.83. **Safety-related issues (real or perceived) being highlighted for each of the Borough's six town centres:** ASB, off-road bikes, and drugs had been identified as the biggest priority areas for the local community following consultation, survey and general feedback to the force. Whilst these issues were more visible, the police often had to tackle less obvious activity (including hidden harm factors that were associated with the three priority areas outlined) – as such, this presented a challenge.

Shop theft remained a focus for town centre retailers, and whilst individuals were arrested and charged, breaking the cycle of offending, often driven by substance addiction, was a challenge for the full criminal justice system (it was noted that although rehabilitation orders were useful, it was hard to remove individuals from their environments). From a night-time economy perspective, related violence and disorder was a challenge and occurred in periods of wider peak demand (i.e. Friday / Saturday evenings).

- 4.84. **Safety initiatives implemented by the force and the impact of these:** A number of interventions were listed, including *Operation Artemis* (runs periodically, with the purpose of making strong visible statements to show work undertaken and promote successes), Clear Hold Build (CHB) / *Operation Harmony* (which had led to significant reductions in crime), *Operation Nightfall* (supported by SBC and with funding from the PCC), a knife crime initiative (October campaign), night-time economy-related Christmas patrols and problem-solving plans (with specific focus on premises with high levels of shop theft), and *Operation Deterrence* (serious violence hotspot patrols). There had also been significant investment in the Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence (CURV) which relied on partners to achieve its aims.

- 4.85. **Future initiatives planned by the force to make the Borough's town centres more welcoming / safe:**  
Deployment and targeted proactivity was largely guided by local tasking and co-ordination groups (TCGs). Cleveland Police could not service each area to the same degree and therefore prioritised areas of greatest harm – *Operation Deterrence* was an example of this, with targeted visible patrols in key areas at key times based on careful analysis (this included Norton and Stockton town centre as identified hotspot locations).

Stockton town centre often featured in the district TCG and examples of activity within this area were highlighted, including a dedicated Police Constable (PC) (in addition to two existing Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs)), market day patrols alongside SBC, a proactive team supporting retail patrols, response officers assigned to those shops experiencing the highest thefts, involvement in Stockton BIDs regular retail crime / operation meetings, and information-sharing around top offenders / risks. The force (a partner in its early concept) also remained committed to supporting the implementation of 'street pastors' (see graphic right).

#### Areas of activity in Stockton town centre

- A dedicated PC for Stockton town centre (in addition to two PCSOs already there)
- Discovery shop access as a police base (staff do not have to leave during patrols)
- Continued market day patrols with SBC
- SentrySIS: team trained up and have a single point of contact (SPOC)
- Shop intelligence system trial which is governed and operated by businesses
- Proactive team of one Sergeant and six PCs to support retail patrols
- Response officers now assigned to top shops who are seeing the highest thefts
- Life-sized cardboard cut-out police officers purchased which are put in shops
- Police part of Stockton BIDs regular retail crime / ops meetings with businesses
- Police signed up to Wellington Square information-sharing document highlighting top offenders and risk
- PCSOs do a town centre coffee drop-in
- Dedicated to specific operations where possible and committed to supporting the implementation of 'street pastors'

- 4.86. **How best can Cleveland Police and its partners address negative safety perceptions of town centre spaces?:** Acknowledging both context and reality, whilst crime was falling, public perceptions of crime remained high, and the actual level of crime was still comparatively high. The Borough had a high level of negative socio-economic factors, something which was often a driver for crime.

Continued joint working via the Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) was an important strand in tackling perceptions (efforts around early intervention were noted), as was improved positive messaging through varied channels and partners in a layered and consistent approach (maximising use of social media and other widely accessed communication mediums).

Referencing the earlier views of the PCC around his desire for Cleveland Police to highlight more about what it did, although monthly newsletters (including positive news stories) for all wards within the Borough were produced and shared, further transparency in relation to police activity would indeed help. To this end, Cleveland Police was in the process of buying 'neighbourhood alert' (a community messaging system) to help promote what the force was doing and its impact.

- 4.87. The Committee expressed specific appreciation for its efforts within the Ropner ward (involving close working between the force and Councillors) which had led to significant reductions in crime / ASB. Emphasising the need for all Councillors to keep encouraging the reporting of incidents, Members did, however, note the expectation that people often had around being informed of any developments after they had flagged a concern – it was subsequently acknowledged that responses were not routinely provided by the force to those who reported the initial problem behaviour.
- 4.88. Discussion ensued on the issue of off-road bikes, with the Committee questioning what the force was doing about the visible rise in electronic devices which were almost silent and therefore posed a danger to pedestrians. Members were reminded about *Operation Endurance* which targeted off-road bikes, with patrols based on intelligence received from communities (reinforcing the importance of concerns being reported). In addition to this, longer-term measures were being



put in place to deter / prevent this activity. In response to a query about whether such bikes were legal, it was confirmed that, subject to restrictions in terms of power output, speed, and the fact a user needed to be 14 years-old or over, they were (should the bike meet requirements, it was subject to the same regulations as a pedal bike). In simple terms, riding a bike that conformed to restrictions in a reasonable manner was fine, but riding in an anti-social manner that put people at risk would not be.

- 4.89. Noting SBCs positive record around partnership-working, the Committee asked if there was anything the Council was either not doing or needed to do more of when it came to supporting safety across the Borough. Cleveland Police welcomed the valuable relationship it had with SBC and felt the opportunity was there for sharper focus on priorities and to hold each other to account via existing SSP arrangements – there was a lot of activity going on, but not all of it was connected. It was noted that a Cleveland Police Corporate Communications Officer attended daily meetings with partners about the previous day's work / challenges.
- 4.90. Welcoming its stated impact, the Committee sought further details around the Norton retail crime initiative. Members heard that this was shaped through closer relationships with shops to develop intelligence, with force personnel conducting regular visits to stores to increase police visibility.
- 4.91. The Committee questioned the planned activity within Stockton town centre, specifically the use of response officers (assigned to top shops who were seeing the highest thefts) and the current relationship between local shops and the police. Force representatives spoke of the strong partnership between shop personnel and its officers, with the police keen to work with premises to give them confidence around the issue of shoplifting. There was a particular focus on preventative measures (not just merely responding to an incident which had already occurred).

## Cleveland Fire Brigade

- 4.92. Presented by the Cleveland Fire Brigade (CFB) Group Manager / Head of Prevention and Engagement in November 2024, a summary of the work undertaken during 2024 by community fire stations across the Borough showcased several safety initiatives implemented by CFB – these included 'Safer Homes' visits, operational intelligence / station risk footprint visits, school visits, a property risk register, arson audit inspections, community engagement by fire station crews, and *Operation Autumnus* (bonfire period work with partner agencies). Future plans to aid in making town centre spaces more welcoming and safer included the development of partnership agreements with other key agencies and strengthened arrangements around supporting vulnerable groups.
- 4.93. Stockton Community Hub activity for the 2024 calendar year was then highlighted, with data supplied in relation to at-risk adult cases, school engagement (including the number of pupils involved in these sessions), and individuals identified for fire setter intervention (mostly children, though CFB was starting to deal with adults) – see graphic below:

Area	Billingham	Ingleby Barwick	Norton	Stockton Town	Thornaby	Yarm
<b>At-Risk Adult Cases</b>	177	15	72	83	51	28
<b>School Sessions / Pupils</b>	11 / 1174	2 / 224	12 / 1049	17 / 2638	3 / 718	5 / 244
<b>Fire Setter Intervention</b>	5	3	4	3	4	1



In terms of the latter, CFB acknowledged that it might not be aware of all individuals who may benefit from being involved with the fire setter programme, and urged Members to let the Brigade know of anyone it could be engaging with to help minimise future incidents.

- 4.94. Other Community Hub work was outlined, including involvement in events, meetings with local partners, the use of risk reduction equipment, homelessness referrals, and sessions delivered as part of the Borough's Holidays Are Fun (HAF) programme. Staff walk-arounds in hotspot areas were planned, and it was suggested that negative perceptions of town centre spaces could be addressed by the promotion of ongoing work (continuing public events, consultations and surveys) and case studies of successful prosecutions for key areas of concern that residents had.
- 4.95. An overview of the achievements of the local Community Liaison Officer (CLO) since August 2023 demonstrated a range of engagement (including attendance at Stockton Tasking and Co-ordination Group (TCG) and Stockton Joint Action Group (JAG) meetings) which aided in preventing access to 'fuel' (materials that could be burned). Again, Members were encouraged to contact CFB if they were aware of any properties (e.g. empty / derelict) which may provide a greater risk in terms of fire setting.
- 4.96. Finally, safety initiatives involving CFB Commissioned Services during 2024 (up to the end of July 2024) were documented, with road safety education in primary schools, carbon monoxide awareness sessions, and the issuing of grants to reduce arson all highlighted. Investment in high quality professional youth work was seen as important in addressing negative safety perceptions of town centres, along with community consultation around what would help make people feel safer (and then acting on this).
- 4.97. The Committee highlighted the issue of derelict / empty buildings which had the potential to attract those intent on setting fires, and queried what powers CFB had to secure such premises. The Committee heard that there was little the Brigade could do in this regard, though it was aware of a number of buildings which were considered a concern (Members highlighted problems with young people getting into Kensington Gardens, Billingham, and setting fire alarms off). The CFB Community Liaison Officer (CLO) role was to draw owners' attention to any property risks, and it was noted that Middlesbrough Council proactively boarded up identified problem buildings and then recharged owners. Any concerns in relation to abandoned premises could be relayed via email to [info@clevelandfire.gov.uk](mailto:info@clevelandfire.gov.uk).
- 4.98. CFBs relationship with local partners (including SBC) was probed, with Members being assured that this was strong and that the Brigade attended the same meetings as the police.
- 4.99. For those incidents where there was a reasonable idea of who had caused them, the Committee asked what was being done to track down the culprits once the fire had been put out (as the public perception was often that nothing happened). In response, Members were told that CFB considered every deliberate fire a crime, however, the police did not see it this way. Every CFB officer wore body-worn cameras (prompted to a large degree by physical / verbal abuse they received) which had the potential to aid identification of those responsible for fire-setting, and the Brigade actively pushed for an arrest if it had evidence. CFB requested that its CLO be made aware of suspects so individuals could be reported to the police. Fire Setter referrals could be submitted via <https://www.clevelandfire.gov.uk/community/firesafetyeducationintervention/>.
- 4.100. Referencing ongoing efforts to regenerate the Borough's town centre spaces, attention turned to concerns around the prevalence of rubbish bags around takeaways which had the potential to present fire-setting opportunities, with the Committee querying what work was being done with businesses to reduce risks. Members were informed that the Brigade's Fire Engineering Department was responsible for this and had a business premises inspection programme in place (on a five-year cycle) which involved discussions with the 'responsible person' for a property. A particular area of concern had been identified in relation to flats above Chinese

restaurants, though these were not generally located within town centre areas. Again, CFB encouraged the sharing of any information on specific premises which may present risks.

- 4.101. The final question focused on youths involved in fire-setting and the extent to which CFB educated young people to minimise future incidents. CFB gave assurance that once individuals engaged in fire-setting were identified, education officers visited schools (mainly primary) to conduct 1:1 intervention (though it was noted that those starting fires in town centres often did not live in these locations). Multi-agency 'Silver Recovery Groups' also existed in both Hartlepool and Middlesbrough which enabled information-sharing around known / suspected fire-setters.

## Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP)

- 4.102. Responsible for setting a strategic plan to identify and tackle key community safety issues in Stockton-on-Tees, the SSP monitored progress and performance in relation to harm reduction and perceptions of safety, and acted as a critical friend for proposals and initiatives with all partners.

The screenshot shows the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council website. The header includes the council logo, navigation links for 'Our Council', 'Our People', 'Our Places', and 'Our Economy', and buttons for 'Create a My Council account' and 'Sign in to My Council'. The breadcrumb trail is 'Home > Our People > Community safety'. The main heading is 'Safer Stockton Partnership'. The text describes the SSP as a local community safety partnership working to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. It lists the following members: Catalyst, Cleveland Fire Brigade, Cleveland Police, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Durham Tees Valley Community Rehabilitation Company, National Probation Service, Safe in Tees Valley, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, Public Health Team Stockton, Stockton Youth Offending Service, and Thirteen. The 'Aims and objectives' section states that the SSP supports the priorities of the Police and Crime Commissioner, including a better deal for victims and witnesses, tackling re-offending, working together to make Cleveland safer, and securing the future of communities. It also mentions that every three years, the SSP undertakes a Crime and Disorder Audit and produces a Community Safety Plan.

Stockton-on-Tees  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Create a My Council account Sign in to My Council

Our Council Our People Our Places Our Economy

Home > Our People > Community safety

## Safer Stockton Partnership

The Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) is your local community safety partnership and works together to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in Stockton.

The partnership is a collection of agencies and organisations brought together under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

The partnership is made up of the following members:

- Catalyst
- Cleveland Fire Brigade
- Cleveland Police
- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
- Durham Tees Valley Community Rehabilitation Company
- National Probation Service
- Safe in Tees Valley
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
- Public Health Team Stockton
- Stockton Youth Offending Service
- Thirteen

### Aims and objectives

The Safer Stockton Partnership continues to support the priorities of the Police and Crime Commissioner and in particular the following:

- a better deal for victims and witnesses
- tackling re-offending
- working together to make Cleveland safer
- securing the future of our communities

Every three years, the Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) undertake a Crime and Disorder Audit and, following public consultation, produce a Community Safety Plan which sets out how agencies within the Partnership intend to achieve targets in crime reduction.

The SSP brought together key statutory stakeholders / partners to deliver plans, providing an overarching view of key strategies that impact this area of business, and was responsible for setting a strategy and action plan to tackle serious violence.

## Views from other stakeholders

### Town Councils

#### Billingham Town Council

- 4.103. The Chair of Billingham Town Council, accompanied by its Town Clerk, addressed the Committee in November 2024. The main concerns regarding Billingham town centre was anti-social behaviour (ASB) and vandalism from younger people (another issue was shoplifting, however, because it happened within shops, this did not directly affect the people walking through the centre). The Town Council did not address these issues directly – if anything was reported, it passed the information over to the town centre management.
- 4.104. Residents had expressed concerns that the town centre felt unwelcoming and lacked safety, with a general perception of it being dull and grey. There was a strong desire for a greater variety of shops, including independent retailers who could offer a unique shopping experience (distinct from typical high street offerings) to attract out-of-town visitors. Residents would also like an improvement to the quality of the buildings, making the town centre more visually appealing, and advocated for re-instating the flats above the shops to increase activity in the area. More of a leisure offer to boost night-time / weekend activity would be welcomed (especially with having the Forum next to the site), as would no charges for car parking (encouraging visitors and boosting business). Local people were, however, against the re-development of the existing town centre site for housing (reflected in the responses to a previous SBC consultation).
- 4.105. Future priorities to make Billingham town centre as welcoming and safe as possible should include extra security presence (especially during evenings), good lighting (which needs to be extended to John Whitehead Park), an enhanced leisure offer (e.g. places for people to eat in the evening to increase the night-time economy and complement existing offers like the Forum theatre), and making the town centre more visually appealing. Creating a busier town centre could possibly mean less ASB as more people were around to deter potential offenders.
- 4.106. Reflecting on the identified need for better and more varied shop provision, the Committee highlighted the pop-up shop initiative in Yarm which could be an idea for Billingham. The successful enterprise arcade concept (providing short-term, flexible, low-cost retail space) in Stockton was also noted, with Members recognising the clear call for a diversified business offer within the Billingham town centre area.
- 4.107. The Committee asked if the Town Council thought it was being consulted enough on future thoughts / plans around Billingham town centre developments and whether it felt that SBC was listening. In response, it was stated that whilst existing Town Council membership included five SBC Ward Councillors (who were invited to give updates on what was happening in their individual wards), much information was sourced via social media. The Town Centre Manager was sometimes not aware of developments – this made the Town Council look inefficient.
- 4.108. Reluctance around plans for town centre housing proposals was followed up, with the Committee suggesting that authorities needed to make it clear to local people how this would positively contribute to the end 'goal' for Billingham as a place to live and visit. In answer to a query on why there was such objection, concerns around who would be living in these properties were relayed.
- 4.109. Exploring the prevalence of shoplifting, the Committee emphasised the benefits of a visible policing deterrent and felt inaction around this issue would be off-putting for potential new businesses (USA-style 'mall police', where premises provided funding for shared security arrangements, was noted). The Town Council agreed that any future plans were dependent on the town centre space being secure.

- 4.110. Discussions concluded with broad acknowledgement of the change in how people looked at town centres and how shopping habits had altered (increase in out-of-town provision and online options). However, the desire for a greater variety of shops was re-iterated, with the existing Forum possibly offering the creation of a leisure focus. The importance of building décor in promoting a stronger sense of a welcoming town centre environment was also stressed.

### **Ingleby Barwick Town Council**

- 4.111. A written submission from Ingleby Barwick Town Council was considered by the Committee in November 2024. It began by stating that Ingleby Barwick town centre was very different from the town centres in Billingham, Thornaby and Yarm, in that it was spread out and not localised. In addition to the Tesco supermarket and Myton shops, it also consisted of shopping parades at Lowfields, Beckfields and Sandgate. Town centre crime had been identified as being minimal by the SBC Community Safety Team whom the Town Council had an excellent working relationship with (and had done for several years).
- 4.112. Almost a third of the Town Council precept was spent on SBC Community Safety for the use of enforcement, CCTV and monitoring. There had in the past been small pockets of ASB and, more recently, the use of electric bikes and scooters – the Town Council strongly advised the public to report any aspect of these behaviours to the SBC Civic Enforcement Team. Communication from local residents was low with regards to town centre safety – the main gripe was the lack of Christmas decorations in comparison to other town centres.
- 4.113. Noting that social media adversely distorted the reality of what was going on across the Borough, Members representing one of the Ingleby Barwick wards expressed their understanding that other areas of Stockton-on-Tees experiencing more challenging issues received priority in terms of resource allocation. Regarding Christmas decorations, the Town Council had a precept to use for these, but an issue with SBC meant there were difficulties in purchasing items.
- 4.114. The Committee also urged a look into prohibitive rent / rates which affected businesses across the Borough. Encouraging more 'service' businesses in addition to the retail offer was advocated.

### **Thornaby Town Council**

- 4.115. Two Thornaby Town Councillors spoke to the Committee in November 2024 about the importance of perceptions when it came to the sense of a location being / feeling welcoming and safe. Referencing previous missed opportunities to have a more robust police presence within the town centre space, as well as the impact of social media in spreading misinformation, the change in shopping habits meant that the focus should now be on providing opportunities for products and services that people could not obtain online. Towns needed to consider what their unique selling point was in order to attract footfall – leisure and other niche activities offered potential, but prohibitive business rates meant premises could soon close and / or relocate.
- 4.116. Acknowledging the historic planning issues which had impacted Thornaby, the Committee asked what the Town Councillors' perception of their town centre was – representatives responded positively, though expressed uncertainty (and a sense of powerlessness) around what would be replacing the former Golden Eagle hotel. Members stated that the town centre owners would decide the future of this site following a period of consultation, though it was envisaged that the space would likely have a family orientation.



## Yarm Town Council

- 4.117. A written submission had been received and was shared with the Committee in November 2024. The main issues regarding town centre safety in Yarm that were regularly reported by residents and visitors were bouts of shoplifters targeting certain shops, extensive cycling on pavements, dog fouling, insufficient resources for high street cleansing, motorcycle parking provision, cluttered pavements, and problems with large trade waste bins.
- 4.118. Relationships between the Town Council and SBC were generally positive, though there had been rare but notable instances where some requests or the parish position were made to feel inferior. In terms of future priorities in making Yarm town centre as welcoming and safe as possible, tackling ASB problems at a nearby playing field, providing more town centre parking, improving parking and public toilet signage, ensuring good floral displays and refurbishing street benches, and the addition of historic reference points and markers were highlighted.

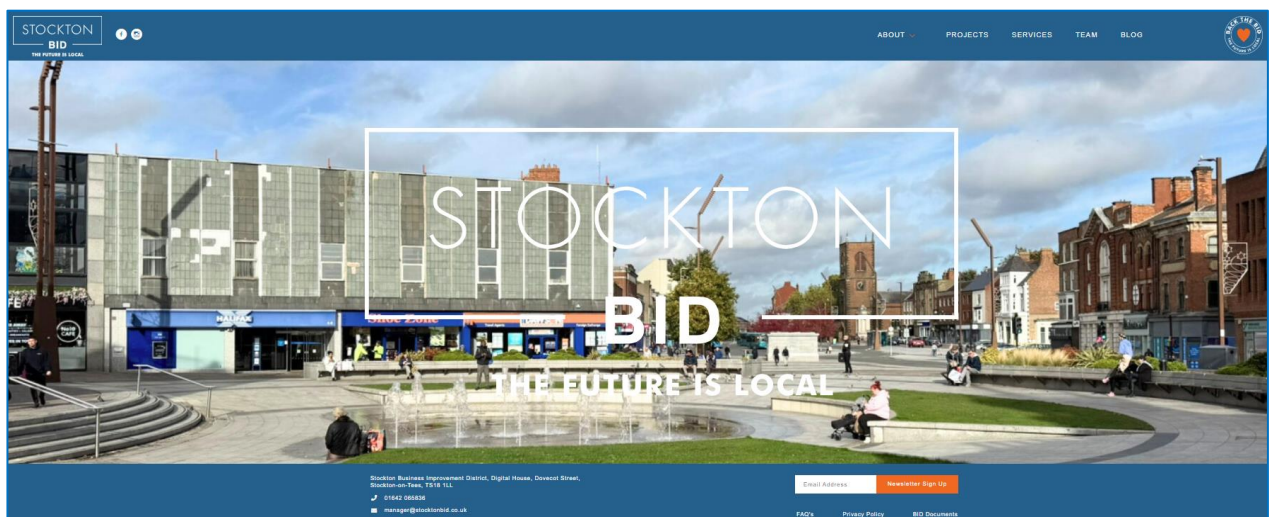
## Business Forums / Groups

### Norton Business Forum

- 4.119. No response was received from Norton Business Forum. In January 2025, the SBC Assistant Town Centres Development Officer noted the recent developments in relation to Norton's public realm – the impact of this, including on businesses, would become clearer in the coming months.

### Stockton Business Improvement District (BID)

- 4.120. Stockton Business Improvement District (BID) was the voice of the town's business community – a network of 400 diverse businesses working together to create positive change. Run by businesses, for businesses, its mission was to make Stockton a place where people wanted to visit, shop, stay and invest. Reflecting on the current challenges and sharing the progress Stockton BID had made in creating a vibrant, thriving Stockton town centre, the Stockton BID Manager addressed the Committee in January 2025 and drew attention to the following:



- 4.121. **Challenges:** Reports of ASB, theft, and public nuisance remained persistent issues in Stockton town centre (people sleeping rough was also raised). Businesses frequently shared concerns about individuals living with addiction using public spaces inappropriately, leaving needles, and engaging in disruptive behaviour. These incidents negatively impacted public perception, creating a sense of unease for visitors and affecting footfall.



In 2024 alone, Stockton BID recorded 651 incidents (including shoplifting and theft), with hotspots such as Wellington Square seeing repeated high-value losses. Violence, though less frequent, remained a concern, with 2.92% of incidents involving physical assaults on staff. These issues directly affected the morale of business owners and employees, further compounding the challenge of creating a welcoming environment.

- 4.122. **Initiatives to address safety:** Enforcement officers played a critical role in maintaining order and cleanliness within the town centre. Despite facing significant adversity, they worked tirelessly to address ASB, littering, fly-tipping, and the ongoing challenge of illegal parking (particularly around Dovecote Street). Their efforts were vital in creating a safer, more organised environment for visitors and businesses alike.

Significant strides had been made through the introduction of the Business Crime Reduction Partnership (BCRP). By implementing the *SentrySiS* reporting system, businesses were now able to efficiently log incidents, creating a centralised approach to tackling crime. Additionally, over 20 radios had been distributed to businesses, improving communication and real-time response to issues. To support night-time economy businesses, Stockton BID had funded their membership to the 'Shop Watch' scheme, ensuring they had the tools they needed to operate safely.

Initially, the rollout of the Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) brought a noticeable improvement, but long-term solutions were essential. Stockton BID emphasised compassionate approaches to addressing addiction-related behaviours, advocating for strategies that go beyond enforcement and work towards integration and support.

In partnership with funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Cleveland, Stockton BID launched the 'Street Angels' initiative (see paragraph 4.71). This program provided on-the-ground support to individuals in the town centre, enhancing safety while fostering a sense of community care. The Street Angels not only assisted in immediate safety concerns, but also acted as a welcoming presence for visitors.

- 4.123. **Insights from the *SentrySiS* report:** As previously referenced, a total of 651 incidents were recorded in 2024, covering a range of issues including theft (121 instances of shoplifting), ASB, and aggressive behaviour. However, only 3.1% of incidents involved police intervention, highlighting the burden placed on businesses and local systems. Peaks in incidents occurred between March and May (the highest monthly total of 140 in May), with Wellington Square remaining a focal point for safety concerns, accounting for the majority of high-value theft and aggressive behaviour reports. Businesses experienced over £10,000 in losses due to unrecovered thefts (this was more keenly felt by independent traders).

332 individual offenders were added to the database in 2024 (a level which gave rise to negative perceptions of the town centre), with 223 identified as male and 93 as female. A significant proportion of offenders remained of unknown age, indicating gaps in profiling and potential challenges in targeted interventions. It was noted that *SentrySiS* could be further enhanced by the police allowing integration into their own systems – this would mean that reports could immediately be turned into crime records and that an incident would only need to be reported once (as in other areas such as Durham, where this had been successfully rolled out).

- 4.124. **Positive developments in Stockton town centre:** Independent businesses remained a cornerstone of the town's economy (with many showing consistent growth and success), and their unique offerings enhanced the town's appeal and created a sense of community pride. The town had also previously hosted regular vibrant events and festivals that brought colour, art and culture to Stockton (these not only boosted footfall but also fostered a sense of community and celebration) – however, recent times had seen a reduction in the programme to the extent that Stockton no longer felt like an event town.

The ongoing regeneration work was transforming the town centre, making it an even more attractive and functional space for visitors, businesses and residents alike. These projects demonstrated a commitment to Stockton's future and its role as a thriving hub of activity. That said, it was important that partners got a handle on ASB before the riverside development was completed, as it was vital to ensure this space was open to, and used by, all.

- 4.125. **Working with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council:** Stockton BID was proud of its collaborative relationship with SBC. Together, it had implemented critical safety measures such as enhanced CCTV coverage and enforcement actions. However, challenges remained, particularly around resource limitations and securing funding to tackle systemic issues like addiction and negative public perception.
- 4.126. **Looking ahead – recommendations:** Several actions to create a truly welcoming and safe Stockton town centre were proposed which focused on expanding crime prevention efforts, promoting compassionate solutions, boosting public perception, and securing strategic funding (see graphic below).

**1) Expand Crime Prevention Efforts**

- Increase engagement resources and provide additional training for businesses to address safety concerns.

**2) Promote Compassionate Solutions**

- Advocate for respectful language and policies surrounding individuals living with addiction.
- Partner with MPs and social organisations to develop inclusive support systems.
- Challenge local MPs to lead efforts in changing public language about addiction, like the positive changes in how society now addresses racism, sexism, and the LGBTQ+ community. This shift can foster public compassion, dispel false narratives, and encourage constructive conversations about addiction.

**3) Boost Public Perception**

- Launch a public awareness campaign showcasing Stockton's progress and successes.
- Highlight the town's thriving independent businesses, cultural events, and regeneration efforts to create a balanced narrative.

**4) Secure Strategic Funding**

- Collaborate with SBC and external partners to identify funding opportunities for safety initiatives and community engagement.

- 4.127. Referencing the 3.1% of incidents which led to intervention by the police, the Committee asked if this was due to cases not being reported to the force or a lack of a police response. It was explained that businesses could indeed log incidents via *SentrySiS* which the police might not subsequently see, and that there was a need to link this system with police records to give a fairer reflection of what was going on in Stockton town centre. On a more general point, it was felt that when it came to the theft of products, the force was reluctant to send out officers (the recent decision to move the Chief Inspector of Stockton Neighbourhood Policing Team to another area was seen as a significant loss).
- 4.128. Continuing with the 2024 recorded incidents, the Committee asked if the totals included figures from the Cleveland Online Policing App (COPA) – Members were subsequently informed that, whilst a valuable tool, COPA data was not included within the *SentrySiS* numbers. To gain further knowledge of the *SentrySiS* system, Stockton BID was more than happy to educate any Councillors who wanted to understand how it worked and what it involved.

- 4.129. Noting their awareness of some of the known offenders around Stockton town centre, the Committee drew attention to the often-lengthy delay between an individual being arrested and getting that case to court, a situation which appeared to be emboldening certain perpetrators of crime / ASB. Members observed that there was little point having robust reporting systems and enforcement if cases were not dealt with in a timely / efficient manner. Highlighting a York initiative which involved a 'three strikes and out' approach to town centre offending, Stockton BID stated that, ultimately, an increased police presence would be the biggest deterrent.
- 4.130. The Committee queried how the impact of crime / ASB on footfall was measured. In response, Members heard that it was difficult to get an exact picture of how incidents affected the willingness of people to use town centre spaces, and that much was relayed anecdotally rather than through hard data. That said, Stockton BID was able to get a sense of this impact when talking to traders, and a key gauge would be how many new businesses came into the location. There was often a lot of talk about investment into Stockton town centre, but the numbers of lost businesses were not high, and the area was in a better position than many other towns across the region / country.
- 4.131. Discussion ensued on the language employed by some to describe certain town centre users. Stockton BID felt that labelling individuals as 'smackheads' or 'druggies' was not helpful, and emphasised the need to avoid the blanket exclusion of those involved in substance misuse from the public realm (though acknowledged there were times when a banning order may be appropriate) and the provision of support services that can work with individuals to make a positive difference in their lives (enabling them to be more accepted within the community). With this in mind, the Committee asked if businesses were spoken to about how these individuals were viewed and whether such language (if used) was challenged. Stockton BID confirmed its engagement with traders in this regard but also noted that these people were often seen as a threat and endangering livelihoods as a result of lost earnings / stock. Positivity amongst businesses within Stockton town centre was generally high, though.
- 4.132. Referencing the introduction of a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in 2023 covering Stockton (and Norton) town centre, Members sought views on its impact. The Committee heard that there was tangible positivity about its implementation in the early stages and that it was making a difference. However, as time had gone on, its effectiveness had reduced, with more new faces appearing in the town centre who officers did not have the same level of relationship with in order to manage situations as well.
- 4.133. Reflecting on the earlier observations around the reduction in events being held in and around Stockton town centre, the Committee queried if any research had been undertaken on the positive impacts on businesses of Stockton International Riverside Festival (SIRF), fireworks, etc. Stockton BID directed Members to Council officers who may have such analysis on larger-scale undertakings, though also emphasised the importance of smaller events which still aided local traders (engaging with businesses during these times was vital). In addition, creating a programme of more specialised markets seemed the right approach given Stockton's status as a market town.
- 4.134. The Committee questioned if there could be better promotion of independent businesses across the Borough. Members were informed that Council officers had put in place regular meetings with key business personnel – it was expected this would improve communications. Stockton BID recognised that raising awareness of the local business offer was not necessarily a Council responsibility and that a separate channel / medium may be required. Indeed, everyone within the Borough could be an advocate for the town centre, and there was a need to be collectively better at promoting these spaces which would also assist in countering negative perceptions.

- 4.135. Finally, Stockton BID was asked if it worked with other business forums / groups across the Borough. It was confirmed that dialogue did exist around partnerships to tackle crime / ASB, but that any formal assistance may incur a charge. It was also felt that establishing a Billingham BID focusing on the night-time / leisure offer within that town centre space could bring benefits.

### Yarm Business Forum

- 4.136. A written response to the Committee's lines of enquiry was submitted by the Manager of Yarm Business Forum in January 2025. With supporting comments from the SBC Assistant Town Centres Development Officer (who worked closely with the Forum), this covered:



- 4.137. **Main issues regarding the Yarm town centre environment:** Several elements were outlined to make Yarm more welcoming and easier to visit, including more visibility of enforcement and / or Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) during daytime to deter shoplifting and begging, better signage to Yarm from main roads and for its parking options (also ensuring car park payment machines were reliable), improved information about local amenities, and better floral displays (the number of which were halved this year due to reduced Yarm Town Council funding). From a business-specific perspective, clearer information regarding begging and homeless issues / action planning (including contact details for enforcement), as well as on mess and littering (e.g. Care For Your Area contacts) was desired.
- 4.138. **Yarm Business Forum's relationship with SBC:** The relationship with SBC was good, particularly through the Council's High Street representative. However, communication with SBC as a whole (with the exception of the SBC Assistant Town Centres Development Officer) had reduced in the last 18 months and could be improved. There had been no update on the High Street improvement project and no consultation on parking charges. An annual meeting with the whole High Street team at Stockton should be a minimum.
- 4.139. **Awareness of funding to support town centre safety:** Yarm Business Forum was not aware of any such funding opportunities.
- 4.140. **Future priorities to make Yarm as welcoming and safe as possible:** Removal of unsightly and unsafe bins on side streets (Central Street in particular), more regular PCSO / enforcement visibility and visits during daytime, reliable car parking machines, and improved car parking signage were highlighted.
- 4.141. Reflecting on the information provided, Committee observations included support for the concerns around poor signage into and within the town centre (meaning visitors to Yarm were often unaware of the long-stay car park), and an expression of concern over the lack of existing enforcement despite the forthcoming introduction of parking charges. In terms of parking capacity, the Manager of Stockton BID felt it was important that businesses ensured their own staff did not use spaces intended for customers.
- 4.142. The SBC Assistant Town Centres Development Officer stated that ASB and shoplifting were the main issues being raised by traders, and also noted the challenges in getting businesses to engage with wider initiatives given how busy they were. Stockton BID reiterated its links with the Borough's other business forums / groups which included the sharing of best practice, whilst the



strong partnerships between the Council and local business representatives (involving regular engagement, innovative ideas, and compassionate solutions) was emphasised – co-working which was playing its role in falling recorded crime and ASB rates.

## Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector

- 4.143. Representatives from Catalyst (a strategic infrastructure organisation for Stockton-on-Tees which offered a range of specialist support, strategic operations, and a commitment to push forward the conditions in which its VCSE colleagues operated in) were asked to collate views from the sector in response to the Committee's lines of enquiry. Catalyst's Chief Executive, supported by its Community Projects Manager (Equality), gave the following feedback in January 2025:
- 4.144. **Current VCSE town centre support:** Examples of existing VCSE activity within each of the Borough's six town centre spaces were listed. Specific attention was drawn to Vision 25 in Stockton (an organisation helping those with learning disabilities which made good use of the library, thereby introducing people to the town centre), Ingleby Barwick litter-pickers (a proactive group which played an important role in making the area welcoming), and the Thornaby Pavilion 'warm welcome' (bringing numerous people into the town centre space).

<p><b>Billingham</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Billingham Forum</li> <li>• Forum Warm Welcome</li> <li>• Billingham Food Bank</li> <li>• John Whitehead Park Café</li> <li>• Billingham Boxing Club</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ingleby Barwick</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IB Community Hall</li> <li>• IB Litter pickers</li> <li>• IB Leisure Centre</li> </ul>	<p><b>Norton</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Norton Green Market</li> <li>• Methodist Church Food Bank</li> <li>• Open Jar CIC</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stockton</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vision 25</li> <li>• Recovery Connections</li> <li>• Arc</li> <li>• Tees Music Alliance</li> <li>• Splash</li> <li>• Sustrans</li> <li>• Quacked Spines CIC</li> </ul>	<p><b>Thornaby</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thornaby Pavillion Warm Welcome</li> <li>• Thornaby litter pickers</li> <li>• Thornaby Pavillion</li> <li>• Thornaby Methodist Church - centre for support from VCSE</li> </ul>	<p><b>Yarm</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yarm Wellness</li> <li>• True Lovers Walk Volunteers</li> <li>• Town Hall Heritage Centre</li> <li>• Challoner House - food pantry</li> </ul>

Elsewhere, Norton's Open Jar CIC (a pub enabling access for community groups – a good example of crossover between different sectors), the Billingham Food Bank (bringing people into the town centre for a specific need), and Yarm Wellness (assisting groups who would not normally find themselves in the town centre) were all highlighted.

- 4.145. **Volunteer Driver Scheme:** Part-funded by SBC (£17,500), this initiative was gaining momentum and, with areas of the Borough isolated due to public transport issues (i.e. lack / poor awareness of routes; being unable to access vehicles unaided), helped address a key barrier to accessing spaces / activities. However, the current pilot expired in March 2025 and local partners were struggling to find funding for this to continue.
- 4.146. **Community Mental Health Transformation:** The Wellbeing Hub (a one-stop shop for mental health and wellbeing support), opened in July 2024 and located in Wellington Square (Stockton town centre), was an example of partnership-working at its best. Discussions around the need for a similar hub based in Billingham town centre had taken place, but funding had yet to be identified.



Catalyst had also commissioned numerous other wellbeing provision involving The Moses Project, Bridges Family, and the SBC Carers Support Service, as well as Anchoreach CIC peer support and specialist counselling for hearing impaired residents, Thornaby Methodist Church, and Starfish's 'Place To Be' sessions.

- 4.147. **Stockton Street Angels:** Previously run by Stockton Baptist Church and known as 'Stockton Pastors', Stockton Business Improvement District (BID) had set-up 'Stockton Street Angels' (aided by Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland funding) to meet a growing need within the town centre around the night-time economy. Catalyst provided support for its implementation (funding search and volunteer recruitment) and were aware of strong interest in people wanting to be an 'angel'.
- 4.148. **Festival of Thrift:** Billingham hosted its first 'Festival of Thrift' event in September 2023 – based within John Whitehead Park, the route took people into the town centre. Wayne Hemingway MBE (internationally renowned designer and campaigner) encouraged the Borough to capitalise on this concept during his speech to the Catalyst Conference in 2022. Also linked to this initiative were Silver Street (Stockton) workshops and other year-round activity.
- 4.149. **SBC and VCSE Sector:** The relationship between SBC and VCSE organisations was positive, with Catalyst acting as a conduit for engagement. Examples of partnership-working between the Council and the VCSE sector included joint considerations around procurement and volunteering (the latter comprising the production of a volunteering strategy for SBC and a Borough-wide strategic approach to volunteer recruitment / management).


Maintaining healthy relationships between SBC and the VCSE sector was mutually beneficial in terms of developing the Borough – this could be aided through the identification of common purposes and desired outcomes, support over funding and the removal of barriers to make applications easier, and tackling unrealistic expectations around what the VCSE sector could be delivering / assisting with.

- 4.150. Noting its links to the information provided by local business forums / groups, the Committee asked if Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV) had been approached regarding a potential Wellbeing Hub in Billingham. Catalyst stated that it would need to ascertain this at a later date, though added that such a hub did not need to involve a large building / presence.
- 4.151. Referencing the existing VCSE town centre support, the Committee sought clarity on 'Quacked Spines CIC' (Stockton) and drew attention to the lack of any reference to libraries. In terms of the former, this was an organisation that encouraged reading – for the latter, the VCSE sector had periodic involvement with libraries, but perhaps not as much as it should.
- 4.152. The Committee felt there was limited mention of activity with young people and stressed the importance of engaging with this demographic. Catalyst advised that contact was being made with the Council's Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF) initiative regarding youth volunteering, and to address a lack of awareness around potential employment opportunities within the VCSE sector. It was also acknowledged that many charities would not let young people under the age of 16 volunteer.
- 4.153. Focus turned to the volunteer driver scheme, with the Committee seeking further detail on its implementation and future. It was stated that SBC agreed funding for one year (match-funded by another organisation), with the money used for an officer to oversee the initiative (e.g. recruitment) and assistance provided by (and to) the North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust who operated its own such scheme. This venture was getting established but was now under threat due to the imminent conclusion of the one-year funding period. Members asked if people could, if they chose, pay a contribution (still likely to be less than an alternative taxi fee) to

ensure the service continued – Catalyst felt that donations could be accepted (as long as users did not feel pressurised), but noted that SBC was keen on this being a free offer. The Committee encouraged approaches to the Tees Valley Mayor and local MPs who may have levers to assist with the continuation of this scheme.

### Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF)

4.154. The Committee Chair attended a BMBF ‘Big Committee’ meeting on 4 February 2025 where young people provided their views on the Borough’s town centres:

- **Billingham:** ‘less well off; appearance puts people off; stereotypes regarding low social / economic levels; needs to be brighter; Forum is a big attraction.’
  - **Ingleby Barwick:** ‘nice.’
  - **Norton:** ‘really nice; like duck pond and surrounding area; needs more bins and parking; could be a bit lighter.’
- 
- **Stockton:** ‘needs more; doesn’t feel safe (won’t go around alone); good that the Castlegate shopping centre has gone; personal experience of being chased by youths wearing balaclavas (reported this incident but heard nothing back from the police or the Council); enthused about the new urban park; no reason to go; only charity shops and few food options; shops more visibly empty; if wanting clothes would go online or to Teesside Park; need better bus routes into town centre; good things seem tucked away (people therefore not aware of them) – need signage.’
  - **Thornaby:** ‘doesn’t feel safe, though safer than Stockton (as it’s more in the open); wouldn’t go out of the way to go; new proposed leisure facility appealing, though would need better transport links to access; electric bikes becoming more of a problem.’
  - **Yarm:** ‘love it; nice; like the appearance (historic feel).’

4.155. When asked what the general impression of young people was about the Borough’s town centres, Billingham and Thornaby were considered better places to be in the morning than the afternoon (when more teenagers were around), whilst Stockton was described as a big bus-stop to get to somewhere else.

4.156. It was felt that young people were forming their opinions on town centres through social media (particularly Snapchat) and via family members. Some young people may have pre-conceived views of spaces by the time they got to secondary school (this could influence whether they wanted to visit), and one young person stated that they would avoid certain places if the general impression amongst friends was negative (‘I wouldn’t want to ‘learn the hard way’). It was agreed that negative views got more amplification than positive experiences.

4.157. In terms of what would help encourage young people to use the Borough’s town centre spaces more, the following was suggested:

- More lighting / colour – better physical appearance (softer new builds rather than brutal style)
- Street art
- Liked hop-scotch designs on walking route through Wellington Square
- More events aimed at a younger audience
- Less vape / dodgy shops
- More emphasis on heritage (like Yarm)
- 'Make it like Newcastle!'

## SBC Ward Councillors

4.158. As part of the initial scoping phase for the review, the Committee identified the need to provide an opportunity for SBC Elected Members to give their views on this scrutiny topic. Questions were issued to all 56 SBC Ward Councillors in December 2024 via the Council's *My Views* survey platform, and 18 responses were received. Feedback included:

### 1) How welcoming do you think the Borough's town centre spaces are? What could SBC and its partners do to make town centres more welcoming?

'I believe that **Thornaby** town centre is a welcoming thriving hub with a successful Thursday market, and the redevelopment of the Golden Eagle site, along with the new swimming baths, will only add to its success – free parking, good bus links and easy walking / cycling access add to its viability. A cycle hub would make a worthwhile addition, although it, like many, needs a better police enforcement presence to make residents feel safe, especially after dark...'

'I am contacted regularly by residents who do all they can to avoid going to **Stockton** Town Centre. Their view, which is apt, is that no amount of trying to make the high street look better is going to tackle the issues people face by aggressive begging or individuals on drugs for example. There is also a huge issue with off road bikes.'

'A workforce dedicated to the safety and maintenance of our town centres would be essential to keep and maintain the standard we require, and to ensure staff can do so effectively with the right tools, and landscaping that makes maintenance easier...'

'The town centres [are] very fragmented and the balance of retailers and quality of these are not particularly engaging micro and macro footfall types of people coming this centre, the attraction aspect has to be worked on as a priority, promote and encourage individuals and groups to use the town centre for better as a social and business hub. Engagement and promotion of developing the businesses look and offerings would be a strong area of focus I would strongly recommend.'

Officers with extensive knowledge (of which we are fortunate to have a few) need greater autonomy to work with the police to root out the issues that affect residents most. Until the issues with crime and ASB are dealt with, you will not get footfall back to the town.'

'...there is little to any welcoming feel, or urge to visit our town centre spaces, especially **Stockton** High Street, despite immense efforts by the Council and resource and financial focus on Stockton High Street in particular, compared to other town centres who many residents quite rightly feel are ignored, for example **Billingham**.'

'Certainly **Ingleby Barwick** could be made more welcoming at Christmas time. Many residents complain about the quality and effectiveness of the lights...'

'Each of our Town Centres are individually unique. Some of them have different faces / appearances, depending on the time of day. For example, **Yarm** has the appearance of a typical Market Town during the daytime, but on an evening, it changes to one similar to cafe/ restaurant culture that is often seen in some of our major UK cities. Both are positive signs of a well maintained, cultural and inviting space. Alternatively, **Stockton** Town Centre, despite the millions of pounds spent on numerous makeovers, it is still regarded as a 'no go area' for many of our residents. Rather than designing out ASB and Crime for the areas where money has been spent, it has had the alternative effect. The areas around the water fountain, The High Street, Trinity Gardens, Church Road, Parish Gardens and Wellington Square, have become a magnet for beggars, drunks, open drug dealing / related crime, ASB, assaults and other crimes.'

<b>Main themes:</b> (in descending order of frequency)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police / enforcement presence / visibility</li> <li>• Substance misuse (drink / drugs)</li> <li>• Begging</li> <li>• Signage (welcome, parking, etc.)</li> <li>• Parking charges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positivity / hopes re. planned regeneration</li> <li>• E-scooters / bikes</li> <li>• Stockton town centre fountain</li> <li>• Heritage</li> <li>• Public consultation / engagement</li> </ul>
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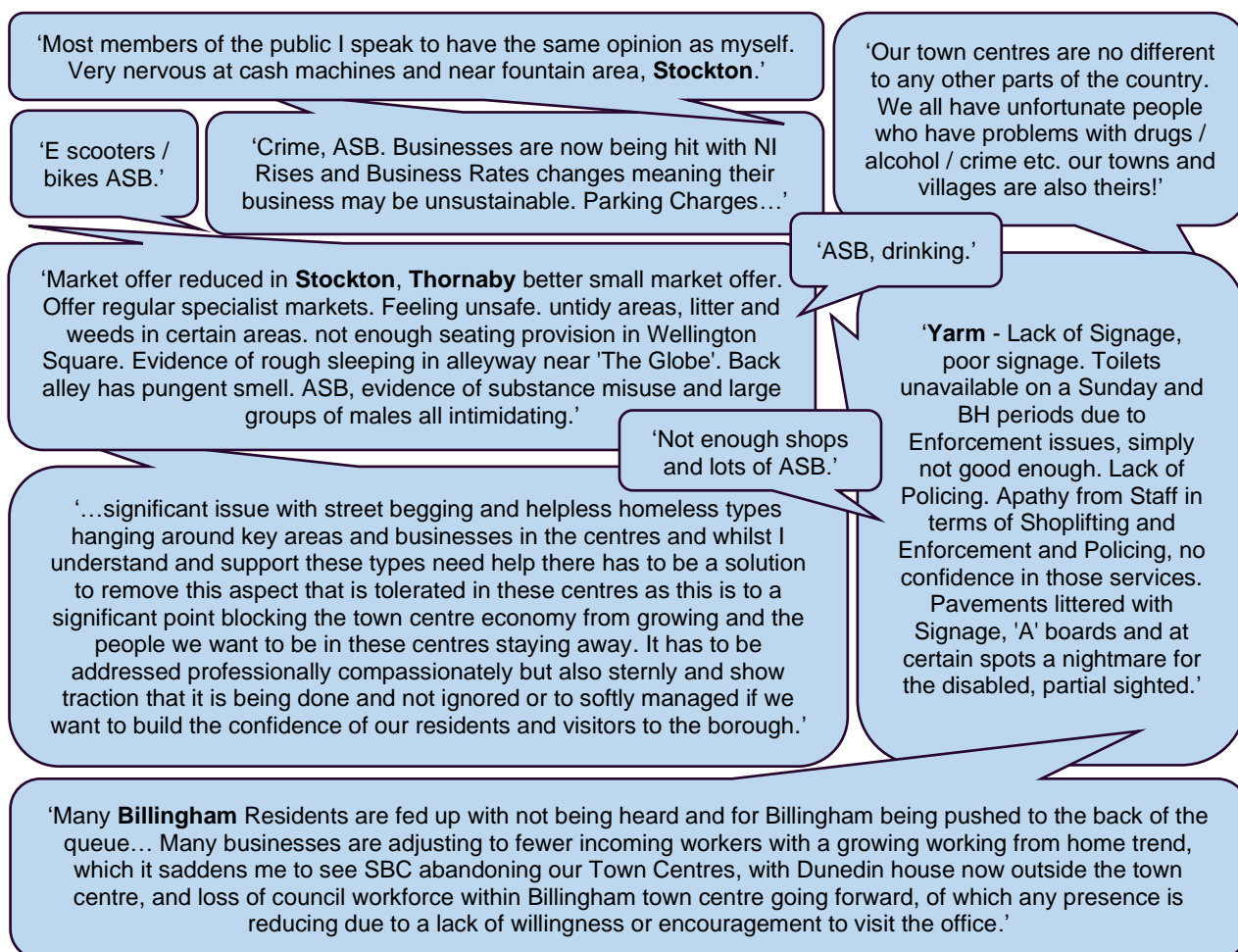
## 2) How safe do you think the Borough's town centre spaces are? What could SBC and its partners do to make town centres safer?



<b>Main themes:</b> (in descending order of frequency)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police / enforcement presence / visibility</li> <li>• Substance misuse (drink / drugs)</li> <li>• Begging</li> <li>• Lack of police / enforcement action</li> <li>• Concerns about night-time safety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of consultation</li> <li>• Safety of women / girls</li> <li>• Shoplifting</li> <li>• Empty buildings</li> <li>• Stockton town centre fountain</li> </ul>
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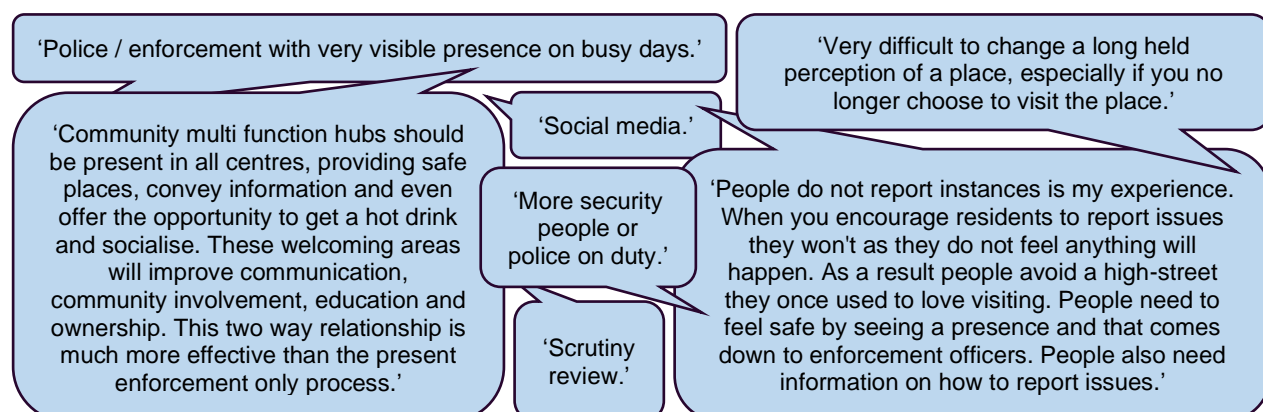


### 3) What are the main issues residents / businesses / visitors are highlighting to you in relation to the Borough's town centres?



<b>Main themes:</b> (in descending order of frequency)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substance misuse (drink / drugs)</li> <li>• Parking (inc. charges)</li> <li>• Begging</li> <li>• Empty / lack of shops</li> <li>• E-scooters / bikes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business rates</li> <li>• Shoplifting</li> <li>• Cleanliness</li> <li>• Police / enforcement presence / visibility</li> <li>• Poor transport links</li> </ul>
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### 4) Overall recorded crime / ASB across the Borough is down, yet perceptions of town centre safety continue to be poor. How can / should this apparent mismatch be addressed?



“RECORDED” crime may be down, but sadly many residents no longer wish to report crime with a lack of confidence in our police... As we fail to tackle ASB in our town centres, and to do so visibly and effectively will have a greater impact on perceptions than data will. If people see, observe ASB taking place and either the council or police just letting it go by, then people will naturally reinforce any perceptions. Greater communication on conviction success and sentencing will provide greater confidence to demonstrate issues are resolved where possible. More obvious and effective CCTV will also support this.’

‘Promote a safe and welcome Stockton across the borough, some work needs doing on how we market Stockton as a safe place to spend social, business and leisure time... Target our various wards and communities and ask them - put some visual facts and marketing up for people to read when they visit, do not state the obvious, state what they want to hear and understand and how we all play a part in working together on this.’

‘**Stockton:** Approaches to the town Centre from the West of Stockton and Thornaby need to be addressed, basically, ‘scruffy’ ‘unkempt’ and ‘uncared for’. This adds to the perception that you will see ASB once in town...’

**Main themes:**  
(in descending order of frequency)

- More police / enforcement presence / visibility
- Increase awareness of reporting routes
- Business grants / incentives
- Demonstrate action taken

- Increase CCTV presence
- Improved marketing
- Cleanliness
- Social media

## 5) Are there any further comments you would like to make in relation to this scrutiny topic?

‘I believe the vision document supporting the purpose and development of each town centre is helping SBC tackle the many challenges town centres now face, ultimately though, residents need to feel safe, while businesses need to feel supported and protected ‘law and order’. Sadly many don’t feel this is the case.’

‘The **Yarm** High Street Operatives do a Sterling job, but since they lost their Town Hall Bolt hole they have to have equipment dropped off, whereas before it was available to address Fouling / Cleansing issues.’

‘Really looking forward to the waterfront changes and Hope plans will be put in place to make it a very successful area which will be enjoyed by the majority of residents.’

‘Ban alcohol on all public open spaces.’

‘You can try and smarten the high street all you want, but you are simply trying to paper over the cracks. Unless you deal with the ASB and Crime, and also support businesses (not punish them), you will not encourage people to return to the Town Centre.’

‘Our generations are changing and their views and needs on life in general also so we need to balance the centres with a mix of the old past, good present and the anticipated great future – it all has a space in our centres and that is the critical formula to unlock, nurture and progress. There is always a lot of talk in Stockton and whilst valid for understanding and progress the actual action and getting things done is a different matter. This balance needs addressing and the talkers need to turn this into actual ACTION.’

‘We need to improve the overall cleanliness of all our town centres. Introduce floral displays, existing flower / shrub beds weeded. Maintain what we have, street furniture needs cleaning and inspected for damage, then repaired... Signage needs to reflect our heritage, particularly in **Stockton** and **Yarm**. Not obtrusive or focussed on corporate SBC BUT INFORMATIVE and in keeping with our historic town centres.’

‘Evenings can be more disconcerting to visitors.’

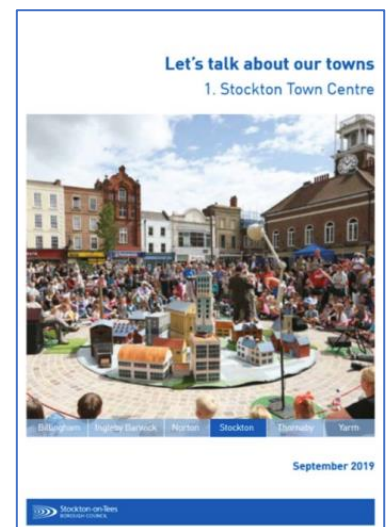
‘We should also not focus solely on our town centres but also our communities, if people don’t feel safe leaving their home, then they will never visit our town centres.’

4.159. Noting discussions at the previous Committee meeting around the importance of language when referring to those with substance addictions, disappointment was expressed about the use of the word ‘undesirables’ in one of the survey responses.

## Public engagement

4.160. Since 2019, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) had provided the following public engagement opportunities with regards town centre developments:

- **SBC Let's Talk About Our Towns 2019:** This four-week consultation asked for people's views on the future of **Stockton** town centre, to identify what was important to the users of the town centre, and to inform future priorities for intervention. With a final total sample size of 962, results / outcomes (see <https://www.stockton.gov.uk/lets-talk-about-our-towns-2019>) led SBC to conclude that:
  - Although not conclusive, feedback suggested broad support for a 'mixed use' approach to any development. There was little desire for pubs / nightclubs as part of the development.
  - Better links between the river and high street scored particularly highly, along with parks and gardens, riverside picnic areas, restaurants, activities for younger people, activities for older people, spaces for events, and independent businesses.
  - There was broad support for creating open space, with lots of positive comments for parks and greenspace. Responses suggested this should include trees and seating areas along the river. In addition, comments in support of entertainment and leisure facilities included adding bowling, skating, cinema / theatre, swimming and indoor / outdoor sports facilities.
  - Strong support for linking the high street and riverside, and creating more leisure facilities facing the river – comments also referenced similar successful schemes in Durham, Newcastle and York.
  - Concerns raised about the number of existing business / commercial units already vacant in Stockton, although comments acknowledged the need for more independent businesses and support for SMEs, and the associated benefit of having businesses in the centre.
  - Lots of comments suggested the town centre should be for leisure / entertainment and less about housing, although acknowledgement residential would help build a community and bring footfall to the town centre.
  - Mixed response on future of Riverside Road – most comments in favour of its removal to link the high street / river but concerns on the impact of other roads without a replacement / alternative.
  - Overwhelming support within comments to re-purpose Castlegate / Swallow Hotel and bring more retailers in one place. Around eight in ten comments mentioning Castlegate were in favour of its removal – comments also suggested consideration was needed around the potential risk of re-locating businesses and the lack of covered shopping areas if progressed.
  - General concerns about the cost, funding and community safety were raised.
  - Some responses also suggested heritage, events and public transport / bus station should be central to any development.



- **SBC Let's Talk About Our Towns 2020:** Following a consultation in 2019 asking for people's views on the future of Stockton Town Centre, a six-week consultation in 2020 then asked for people's views on the future of **the other five town centres** in the Borough. Results / outcomes (see <https://www.stockton.gov.uk/lets-talk-about-our-towns-2020>) included the following themes around 'welcoming' and 'safe':

<b>Billingham</b>	311 responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lots of support for more / better shops (including start-ups), along with improvements to parking.</li> <li>➤ General concerns raised about crime, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and policing.</li> </ul>	
<b>Ingleby Barwick</b>	462 responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Desire for more facilities, with the most popular responses including restaurants, cafes and pubs, along with more / better shops.</li> <li>➤ Calls for more youth and community facilities, better public transport and a greater police presence to help tackle crime and ASB.</li> </ul>	
<b>Norton</b>	285 responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Parking emerged as the key issue, along with parking enforcement.</li> <li>➤ Comments regarding crime and ASB along with calls for a better choices of retail shops.</li> </ul>	
<b>Thornaby</b>	349 responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Strong support for more facilities (with a focus on retail and leisure), and for the redevelopment of key buildings within the town centre.</li> <li>➤ Crime and ASB emerged as a key issue, along with calls for more / better policing.</li> </ul>	
<b>Yarm</b>	208 responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Strong support to resolve traffic and parking issues along with improvements to the toilets.</li> <li>➤ Some concerns were raised about over-development of Yarm.</li> </ul>	

- 4.161. The **SBC Residents Survey 2023** asked local people to rate their feelings on a range of questions covering life / job satisfaction, happiness, anxiety, loneliness, and accommodation. It also requested responses on community diversity, belonging, internet use, management of finances, and lifestyle changes to tackle environmental issues.

Although there were no town centre-specific questions, the final part of the survey involved four qualitative (free text) questions which asked:

- What is really good about the place you live?
- What would make it better?
- What could you do to improve the place you live?
- What could others do to help you make it better?

The results of this survey had not yet been made public.

- 4.162. **Anecdotal feedback** (via informal conversations, not a formal consultation or survey) which SBC had received from various groups (like the Business Ambassadors, young people from Bede and Stockton Riverside College, Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF), Voice Forum, Place Leadership Board) who were spoken to about how the Borough could be better promoted was highlighted to a SBC Members Briefing Session in July 2024. Challenges identified through this engagement included 'feelings of safety in the town centre', 'perceptions around the town centre and anti-social behaviour', an 'I'll say it before you do / talk down, not up approach', and 'improving a sense of arrival and welcome for gateway sites'.



- 4.163. In June 2023, the [Office for Place](#) (which became part of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in November 2024) held a webinar on 'beautiful and safe high streets' where a panel discussed the role of place quality in creating and stewarding prosperous and safe high streets and town centres. A subsequent blog post (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/report-beautiful-and-safe-high-streets>) highlighted the following themes with regards 'process and governance':

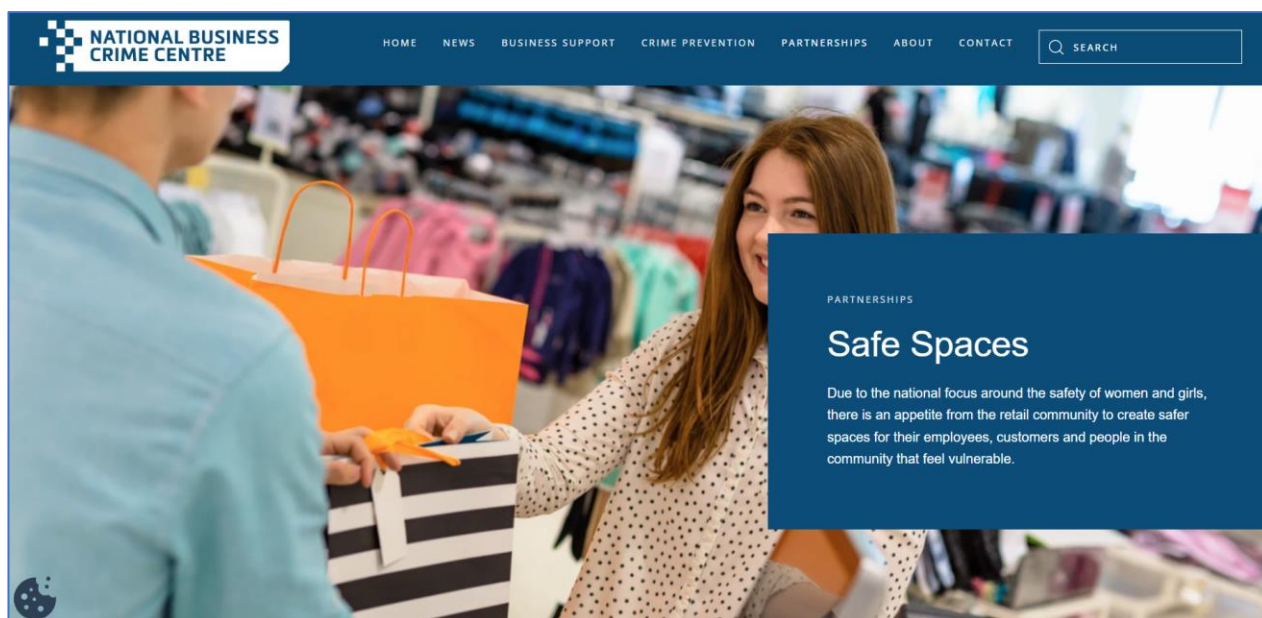
### PROCESS AND GOVERNANCE

1. **The vision thing:** You do need a clear vision of a better, busier, more prosperous and lovely place.
2. **Ownership from the top:** That vision needs to be owned and committed to at the top of the local Council and other relevant organisations – both at political and officer level. There is no real substitute for that.
3. **Empowering frameworks not rigid masterplans:** Be wary of overly rigid masterplans – they can constrain as much as they empower. Better to have a clear framework to de-risk investment and development. Have flexibility within a framework working to the vision, not a tight all-constraining exoskeleton. Flex plans to opportunities and be pragmatic.
4. **Dare to be emotional:** Care about pride, about past, about love of place. That does not preclude looking into the future, but you need to know where you're coming from and recognise that humans are emotional as well as rational.
5. **Perhaps above all, safe places or busy places:** Find a thousand different ways to fill your town centre with people. At the heart of this, nearly always, is re-introducing homes to the town centre as was normal until 100 years ago. But also: what events can you run at the weekend? How can you tempt children, older people, visitors into your town centre for fun and work?
6. **Success needs many parents and partnerships:** No one organisation, and certainly not the Council alone, can regenerate a high street or a town centre. It's not just about de-risking investment via planning certainty. It's also about partnerships with people, organisations and place. Multiple people and organisations should feel ownership of the change and improvements. Be open to any idea and any suggestion, and be prepared to back some mistakes!
7. **Get cracking:** Don't wait for perfection. Start small, if necessary. Build momentum. Be relentless.
8. **Whenever possible, do nice things first:** When it comes to potentially tricky issues like parking and movement, it's normally right to make things easier (i.e. easier to walk and cycle safely) before you start constraining other options for getting about. Build confidence with evidence and example that streets filled with people, not cars, nearly always have busier and more profitable shops.

4.164. Examples of business group / business improvement district (BID) involvement in considerations around town centre promotion / safety across the UK were shared with the Committee at the business-focused evidence-gathering session in January 2025:

- **Blackburn:** marketing and promoting Blackburn as a vibrant town centre, creating a safer and more secure space, making it cleaner, greener and more sustainable, and supporting businesses with information and advice  
<https://blackburnbid.co.uk/>
- **Bournemouth:** A welcoming and safer town centre  
<https://towncentrebid.co.uk/our-projects/welcoming/>  
<https://towncentrebid.co.uk/our-projects/safer/>
- **Harrogate:** Harrogate Hosts here to welcome town centre visitors  
<https://harrogatebid.co.uk/harrogate-hosts-here-to-welcome-town-centre-visitors/>
- **Tunbridge Wells:** Tunbridge Wells Safe Town Partnership  
<https://www.twstp.co.uk/about-us>
- **Wolverhampton:** A clean safe and welcoming city (including the City Ambassador Team and Night Guardians)  
<https://enjoywolverhampton.com/bid/a-clean-safe-and-welcoming-city>

4.165. Details of efforts to counter retail crime which involve businesses were also highlighted (see <https://brc.org.uk/nrcsg-against-shop-worker-abuse-and-violence/partnership-working/section-1-business-crime-reduction-partnerships/>). The 'Safer Spaces' initiative (also known as *Operation Portum*) was an overarching scheme that businesses could sign up to and support with the objective to collectively increase safe spaces in retail premises (for further details, see <https://nbcc.police.uk/partnerships/safe-spaces>).



4.166. Further examples of town centre developments involving 'welcoming' and 'safe' themes from other Local Authority areas across the UK were provided to the Committee:

- **Barnsley:** Evening and night-time safety in the town centre (Barnsley's town centre had been awarded Purple Flag status for five consecutive years – this means it offers an entertaining, diverse, safe and enjoyable night out)  
<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/tourism-and-events/barnsley-town-centre/evening-and-night-time-town-centre-safety/>
- **Brighton & Hove:** A city where people feel safe and welcome  
<https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/brighton-hove-city-council-plan-2023-2027/outcome-2-fair-and-inclusive-city/city-where-people-feel-safe-and-welcome>
- **Darlington:** Funding boost to help keep town centre safe  
<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/your-council/news/news-item/?id=2114>
- **Kirklees:** Council funding helps shoppers and staff feel safe in town centre  
<https://kirkleestgether.co.uk/2021/04/06/council-funding-helps-shoppers-and-staff-feel-safe-in-town-centre/>



4.167. The SBC Service Manager – Public Protection drew specific attention to **Barnsley**, an area SBC officers had previously visited to get a sense of their approach to managing the town centre space. Several similarities to Stockton-on-Tees were found (e.g. fountain area in the town centre, Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in operation, issues with addiction), and the co-location of a multi-agency 'hub' within the town centre was highlighted.

## 5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

- 5.1. This was a very wide-ranging scrutiny topic, encompassing both safety and the welcoming nature of the six Stockton-on-Tees town centres. Whilst 'safe' and feelings of safety can be more easily defined, what makes a space 'welcoming' can mean multiple things to different people. That said, creating an attractive location, where people feel comfortable, secure, and willing to spend time, was a clear overarching theme.
- 5.2. Over the last six years, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) has engaged in various consultations and engagement regarding town centre developments. The last Residents Survey (2023) missed a further opportunity to ascertain specific views on town centre spaces and barriers to their use, and future Borough-wide surveys of those living in Stockton-on-Tees should include a dedicated section to capture these critical insights. The Council should also ensure that a summary of the information gathered is relayed back to the public to enhance transparency and demonstrate community involvement.
- 5.3. The decrease in recorded crime / anti-social behaviour (ASB) incidents is welcomed, and whilst there is confidence that this reflects a genuine drop, the Committee remains cautious that this could also reflect the fact that a proportion of the public may be unwilling to report crime, believing that little will be done (something the police and partners also remain alive to). Both SBC and the police should continue to emphasise the importance of raising any concerns which will contribute towards addressing identified problems (even if this means the person making the report does not receive a direct response). The ASB hot-spot patrol initiative shows promise, and the Committee looks forward to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Cleveland evaluation of this and whether there is scope to extend it to other town centres within the Borough.
- 5.4. Shoplifting has become an increasingly high-profile concern in the national media, but local police data indicates a decrease in four of the Borough's six town centre spaces in the last 12 months. Stockton and Thornaby are the exceptions, with Cleveland Police acknowledging that there is work to do in the former around shoplifting, with measures to be put in place to prevent this happening and strengthen confidence within premises. The retail theft initiative in Norton has delivered promising results – consideration should be given to implementing this in Stockton and Thornaby to further enhance safety and confidence.
- 5.5. A range of Council-related activity supports the Borough's town centres to be welcoming and safe. Departments including Community Safety and Regulated Services (Licensing, Trading Standards, Environmental Health), Public Health, and Town Centres Development all play crucial roles, with links to Planning, Legal, Highways and Care For Your Area (e.g. street cleaning), as well as cross-directorate input into regular town centre audits. The Committee continues to highlight that any consultation with 'partners' around town centre design concepts (whether new or proposed changes to existing spaces) needs to ensure the right SBC departments (and, where appropriate, SBC Ward Councillors) are involved in conversations / developments, particularly regarding future maintenance requirements / responsibilities.
- 5.6. As acknowledged by the SBC Town Centres Management department, first impressions count. Ensuring and maintaining a robust programme for street cleansing, litter collection, and other aspects such as horticultural services is essential to presenting the towns in their most welcoming light (this includes the visual state of infrastructure, and the Committee commends officers for working with building-owners to address structures which have become a blot on the landscape).



- 5.7. The introduction of a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in 2023 was a significant development, though the Committee notes the comments from Stockton Business Improvement District (BID) about the apparent dilution of impact since its implementation. Feedback on the SBC Community Safety and Regulated Services evaluation and review of the PSPO would therefore be timely and should help refine and enhance its effectiveness.
- 5.8. The stated intentions to establish a Town Centres Management Group offers a further opportunity to involve all relevant partners / stakeholders (including relevant Ward / Town Councillor representation) in the identification of town centre issues, the formulation of solutions to tackle ongoing and future challenges in these spaces, and the exchange of ideas which could potentially be implemented across any of the Borough's six town centres.
- 5.9. Services are in place to support individuals affected by substance misuse and are key to ensuring that town centres remain welcoming and safe. The Council and its partners should assess the impact of these services on the attractiveness of town centres, and identify gaps in provision with a view to addressing these (e.g. street drinking / addiction).
- 5.10. The Committee welcomes the OPCC focus on retail crime and would encourage the continued concentration on this moving forward to ensure perpetrators are identified and then brought to justice for their actions (frustratingly, ongoing issues within the overarching criminal justice system does not always support this). Businesses have a critical role in safeguarding themselves and should be encouraged to think about how they can prevent / deter would-be shoplifters (this may involve a level of investment to minimise potentially larger losses of stock).
- 5.11. In wider safety matters, the Committee is pleased to learn of a variety of measures that have been initiated to address issues such as ASB, neighbourhood crime, and violence against women and girls, as well as challenges associated with the night-time economy (particularly for Norton, Stockton and Yarm). The ASB hot-spot patrols are of particular interest and demonstrate the value of a uniformed presence in deterring problem behaviour. Insufficient police / enforcement visibility was a theme which emerged throughout this review – mindful of recent Government announcements around strengthening the neighbourhood policing model (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/200-million-boost-to-transform-neighbourhood-policing>), it is to be hoped that the Cleveland area receives a greater allocation of overall national funding than it has in the past, and that opportunities to increase patrols are not missed.
- 5.12. A strong sense of partnership-working pervaded through the evidence received, but it is interesting to hear involved parties call for local stakeholders to be held to account more within existing Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) arrangements. Whilst it is important to work together to address issues, challenging each other and ensuring each entity is playing its full part is just as key.
- 5.13. Communication of initiatives and success stories pertinent to town centre spaces was another theme (and indeed required improvement) which emerged. The sense from some that nothing will be, or is being, done to address problem behaviour has been identified by the Committee in previous reviews, therefore further development in this area is still required.
- 5.14. Town Councils provide a valuable source of information and intelligence, and relayed several issues pertinent to their own town centre space. Acknowledging that high streets were now viewed and used very differently compared to previous times, the need to identify a town centre's 'unique selling point' (be that a retail, services, or leisure offer) and capitalise on this was emphasised – Town Councils can, and should, play a part in realising this. The subjects of prohibitive business rates, lighting, building décor, and police visibility were also highlighted, as was the importance of good signage, floral displays, and incorporating heritage into these environments – all relevant elements which provide further proof of the extremely wide-ranging nature of this scrutiny topic.

- 5.15. The business community are crucial to the success of town centres, and whilst shopping habits have undoubtedly changed, they continue to offer a means with which to bring people into these spaces. Evidence from Stockton BID demonstrated ongoing concerns about problem behaviour within Stockton town centre, with businesses reporting 651 incidents in 2024 alone. The stated lack of a formal link between intelligence from the business community and police systems requires attention (though the Committee notes the force's trial in engaging with this), as does the sense that the Borough (and therefore local businesses) no longer benefits from as many events – the potential for a more varied / specialised markets programme should also be explored. Whilst the situation in Yarm is different to that in Stockton, the positive relationship between Yarm Business Forum and SBC representatives is encouraging, though the feeling that communication with the Council as a whole had reduced in the last 18 months should be addressed.
- 5.16. Acknowledging the wide-ranging contribution of the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector into making town centres attractive and appealing, the Committee welcomes the volunteer driver scheme, an innovative initiative which helps address a theme which was raised a number of times during this review – namely, the challenges that some people had in accessing town centre spaces. Support with transport to enable use of services / locations is an issue that emerges in numerous scrutiny topics, and it is therefore hoped that this initiative can be extended. In other VCSE-related matters, the strong interest in people becoming a 'Stockton Street Angel' is encouraging – organisers will need to ensure this cohort receives appropriate support / training to carry out the role.
- 5.17. The Committee welcomed input from both young people involved in the Council's Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF) initiative and a number of SBC Ward Councillors who responded to the survey issued as part of this review, much of which reinforced town centre-related themes that had emerged from other contributors. Young people are the future users of the Borough's assets and need to be encouraged into town centre spaces by offers which are relevant and appealing to them. Leisure opportunities can be an enticing factor, and the Borough appears in a good place to capitalise on existing (e.g Billingham Forum / Stockton Splash) and proposed (e.g. Thornaby swimming pool and gym) sites – however, these must be accessible (with associated public transport links) and safe spaces.
- 5.18. A range of town centre-related measures from around the UK was brought to the Committee's attention, and there remains much value from being conscious of what is going on elsewhere in places which are often experiencing similar issues and challenges to Stockton-on-Tees. Council officers demonstrated their openness to learning from others and should continue to give due consideration to implementing alternative approaches to make the Borough's town centres more appealing. Barnsley's multi-agency hub concept is an interesting approach that could increase the presence of relevant organisations in town centres and thereby improve public perceptions of feeling welcomed and safe.
- 5.19. Despite attempts to consider existing issues across all six Stockton-on-Tees town centres, contributor submissions and subsequent discussions were often drawn to Stockton town centre. However, residents and businesses in (and visitors to) the Borough's other five town centre spaces must not be overlooked by the (some would say understandable) tendency to direct a greater proportion of available resources into Stockton high street. The people of Billingham, Ingleby Barwick, Norton, Thornaby and Yarm deserve to be heard and need to feel they are being listened to when it comes to tackling town centre-related issues. Indeed, initiatives which have been implemented within Stockton may well be transferable to other towns experiencing similar challenges – this should be considered and facilitated where possible.

- 5.20. Much emphasis was put on the question of reality versus perception. Despite reductions in reported crime and ASB, it is clear (particularly from online commentary) that some negative perceptions of the Borough's town centre spaces persist. We live in an age of numerous platforms which enable any individual to amplify negativity and, in some cases, distort the truth with impunity, yet the Committee cannot pretend that there are not factors within these spaces which discourage people to access them. There is a small number of individuals (a cohort acknowledged by SBC) who are having an adverse impact on other town centre-users. This group has vulnerabilities, but whilst they have as much right to access these spaces as anyone else, SBC has a duty to the wider public including residents, businesses and visitors to the town centres. SBC and its partners continue to explore options and opportunities to address these issues in a compassionate and pragmatic way, and the Committee looks forward to this work progressing.
- 5.21. All contributors to this review demonstrated a strong willingness to both individually and collectively strive to make spaces safer and in turn more welcoming. Words are powerful, but action is even more impactful, and pooled resources need to visibly show (and be effectively communicated) that efforts are being made to increase the attractiveness of the Borough's town centres. The Council has made a number of significant announcements about the regeneration of its six towns, emphasising a commitment to vibrant and thriving communities – the success of these initiatives will be much dependent on whether the public feel confident in accessing these spaces. As York's vision emphasises, *'people, or footfall, is the key to a successful place'* – it is essential for people of all demographics to engage with these areas and become advocates for their success. Contrary to some who prefer to perpetuate only negative views of the Borough, Stockton-on-Tees town centres have a lot to offer and also have the potential for even more, and all local people have a stake (and potential benefit) in making these spaces the best they can be.

## **Recommendations**

The Committee recommend that:

### **Strategy**

- 1) Future refreshed versions of relevant Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) long-term strategies (e.g. Stockton-on-Tees Plan, Community Safety Strategy, Inclusive Growth Strategy) identify and reflect the unique nature of each of the Borough's six town centres, and outline how SBC and its partners will maximise a sense of 'welcoming' and 'safe' within these spaces (acknowledging the key findings of this review).**
- 2) Utilising existing partnerships (including engagement with local business forums / groups), consideration be given over how to maximise the annual events and markets programme to provide further opportunities for increased footfall / exposure to town centre environments.**
- 3) As far as possible, SBC ensures the ongoing and future development of the Borough's town centres maximises accessibility, with appropriate amenities (e.g. seating / toilets) to support the experience of those using these spaces, and the promotion of existing public transport options into these areas.**

*(continued overleaf...)*

## **Recommendations (continued)**

The Committee recommend that:

### **Communications / marketing**

- 4) There should be a specific ‘town centres’ element to the SBC Communications Strategy which reflects greater and more consistent use of communication platforms (online and print media) to proactively market the Borough’s town centres (including periodic marketing campaigns) and promote positive developments, ensuring this reflects all six town centre spaces (not just Stockton).**
- 5) SBC engages with the Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF) initiative to establish effective ways in which to publicise / promote the Borough’s town centre offers to young people.**

### **Data / Evaluation**

- 6) SBC provides the Committee with an evaluation of the 2023 implementation of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) in Stockton and Norton town centres, including details of how this was / is resourced, and whether such an approach may be suitable for other town centre spaces within the Borough.**
- 7) Within 12 months, SBC provides the Committee with an assessment of how the 2025 implementation of new / increased parking charges in Stockton and Yarm had impacted access (footfall / dwell time) to these town centre spaces, clearly demonstrating views from / experiences of local businesses.**
- 8) The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Cleveland provides the Committee with the outcomes of its evaluation of the recent anti-social behaviour (ASB) hot-spot patrols in Billingham, Stockton and Thornaby.**
- 9) Cleveland Police ensures incidents reported to them by the business community are captured and reflected within its own crime / ASB recording systems.**

### **Town centre presence**

- 10) Cleveland Police and SBC consider further ways in which greater police / enforcement visibility can be achieved within the Borough’s town centres, particularly around identified hot-spot areas for crime / ASB / congregations of groups of individuals with addiction issues, as well as anticipated new developments (e.g. new Stockton waterfront).**
- 11) Where appropriate, consideration be given to the introduction of multi-agency, co-located hubs within town centre spaces to provide sanctuary, support and signposting for those with addiction needs.**
- 12) SBC and its relevant partners formulate an agreed plan for managing and supporting highly visible street drinkers / drug-users (who may or may not be ready for recovery).**



# Appendix 1

Footfall / Dwell Time Data – Norton South (2024) and Stockton High Street (August 2024)



# Appendix 1

(continued)

## Footfall / Dwell Time Data – Norton South (2024) and Stockton High Street (August 2024)

### STOCKTON BOROUGH COUNCIL — DATA EXPLANATION



#### VISITOR INSIGHTS DATA EXPLANATION

##### VISITOR INSIGHTS DATA SOURCES

- We collect **GPS coordinate data** gathered by application publishers on hand-held devices. These devices are predominantly phones, though can be devices such as Fit Bits and Smart Watches.
- This GPS location data is sourced from over **100 data application publishers** found on these devices.
- We ensure we use a **wide range of application types** across all operating systems used, e.g., weather, travel, utilities, news, gaming etc.
- This ensures in our sample size we have a **wide range of audiences** that is representative of the UK population, which therefore **reduces bias**.
- On average, we ingest circa **350m location data points** per day
- We can draw **bespoke digital geofences** on our platform, Terain, and analyse footfall and visitor behaviour insights based on this geolocation data.

**We then apply human behaviour algorithms to big data through our market-leading AI system to extract the most accurate visitor movements and behavioural patterns in the UK.**

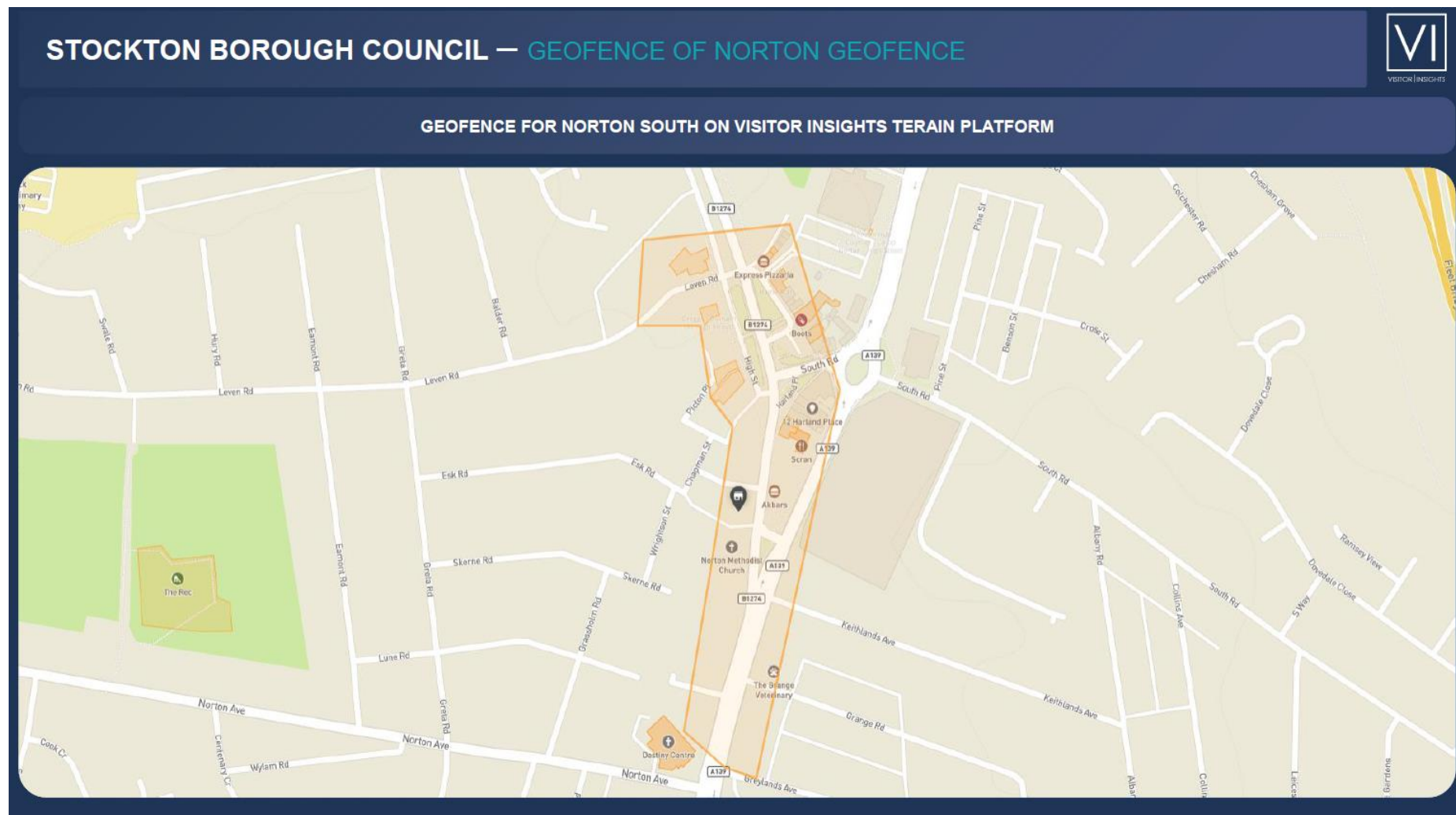
##### IS THE DATA GDPR-COMPLIANT?

- Our data is fully GDPR-compliant as all data points are fully anonymized and we only use consent-based data.
- We cannot, and do not, monitor individual users or journeys – only Device IDs, Date/Time Stamps and Lat/Longs.

# Appendix 1

(continued)

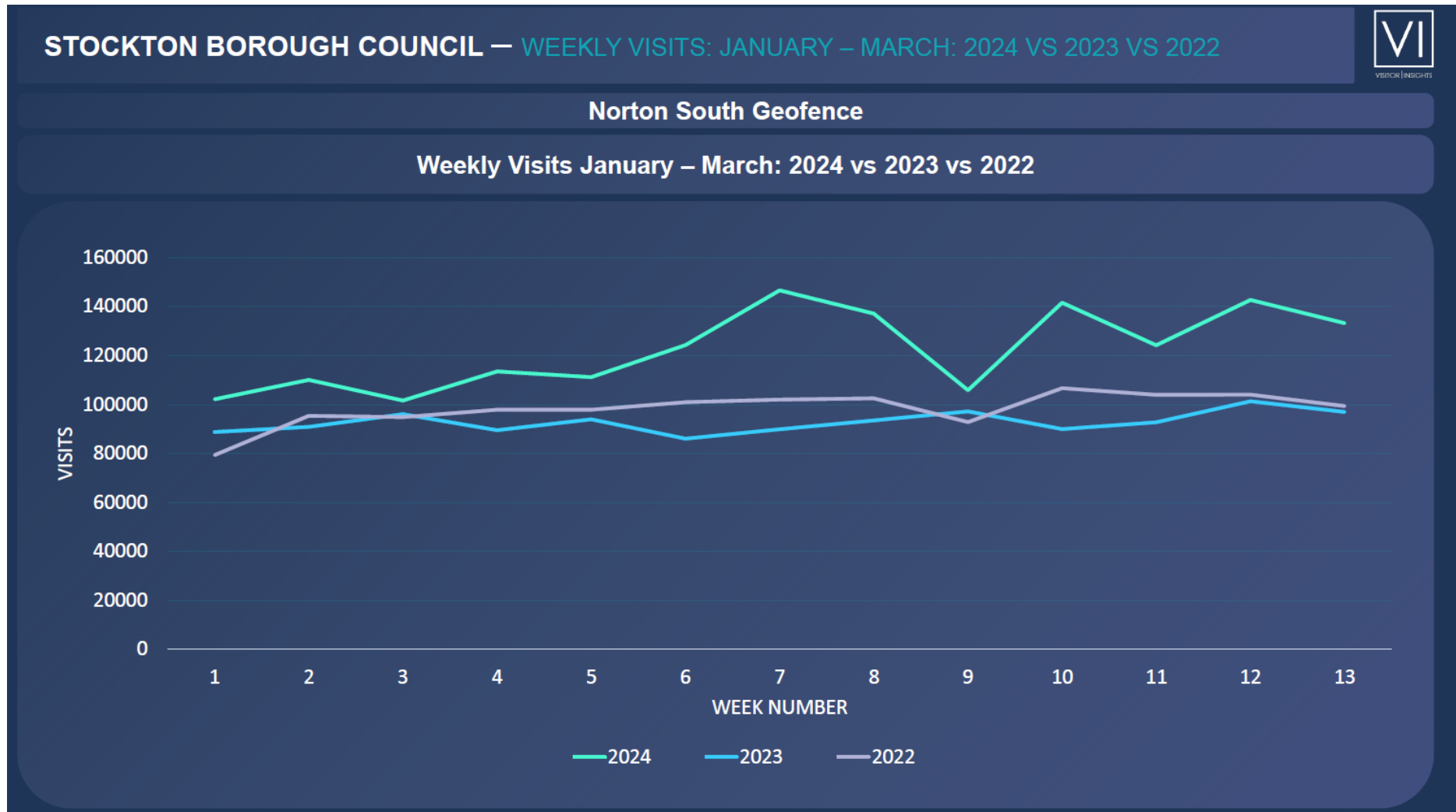
## Footfall / Dwell Time Data – Norton South (2024) and Stockton High Street (August 2024)



# Appendix 1

(continued)

## Footfall / Dwell Time Data – Norton South (2024) and Stockton High Street (August 2024)





# Appendix 1

(continued)

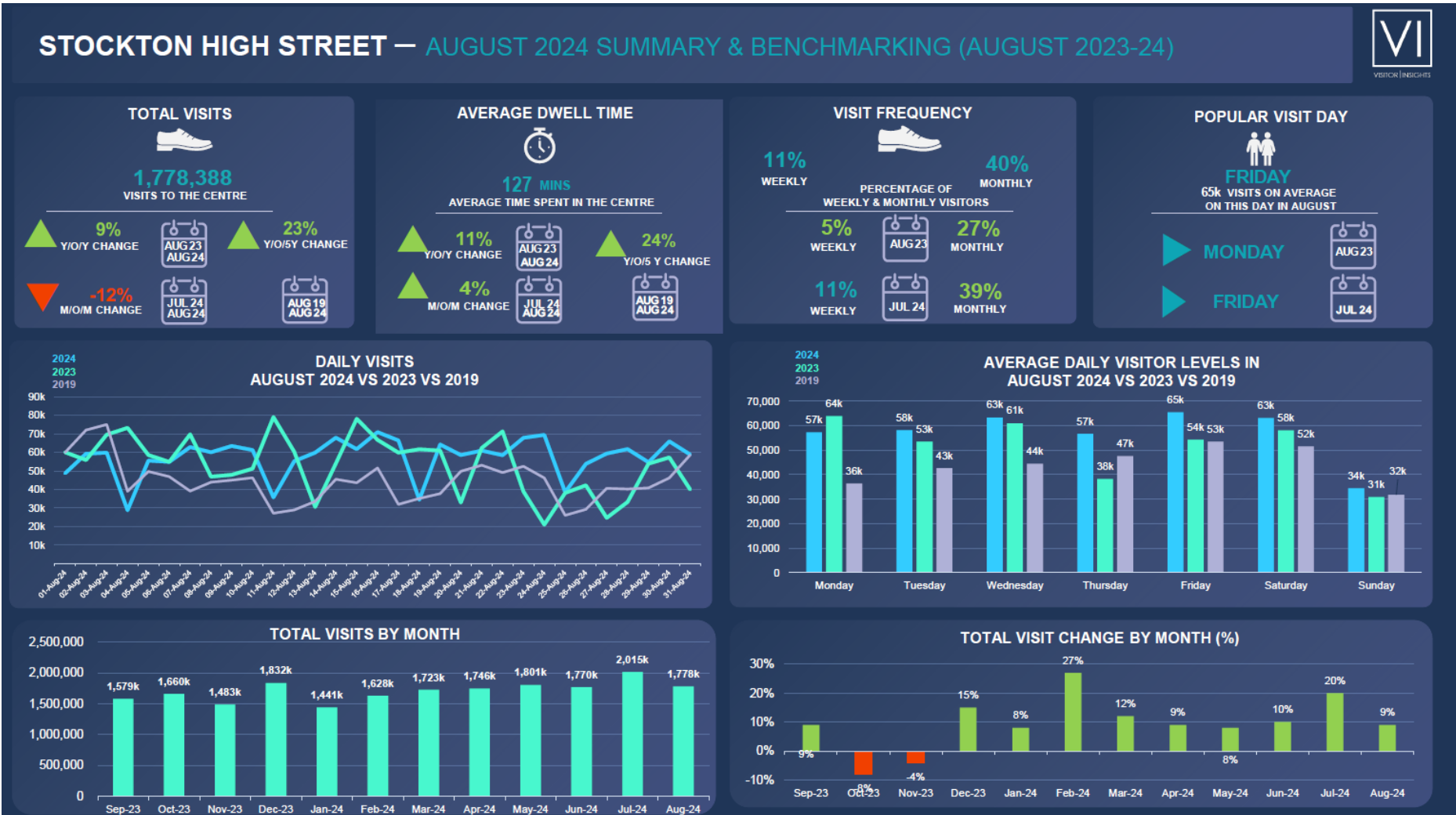
Footfall / Dwell Time Data – Norton South (2024) and Stockton High Street (August 2024)



# Appendix 1

(continued)

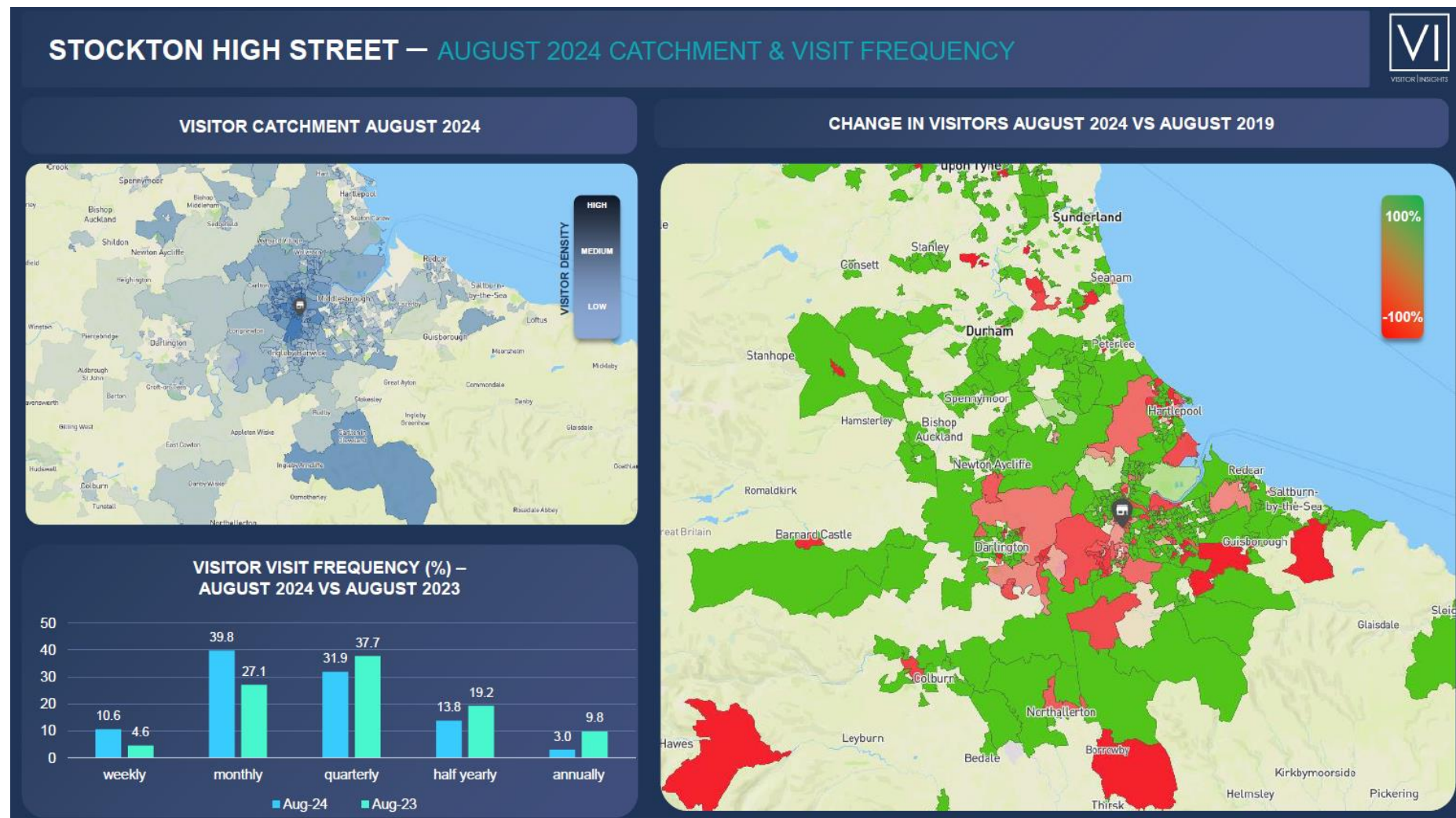
## Footfall / Dwell Time Data – Norton South (2024) and Stockton High Street (August 2024)



# Appendix 1

(continued)

Footfall / Dwell Time Data – Norton South (2024) and Stockton High Street (August 2024)



# Glossary of Terms

<b>ASB</b>	<b>Anti-Social Behaviour</b>
<b>BCRP</b>	<b>Business Crime Reduction Partnership</b>
<b>BMBF</b>	<b>Bright Minds Big Futures (SBC)</b>
<b>BID</b>	<b>Business Improvement District</b>
<b>CCTV</b>	<b>Closed-Circuit Television</b>
<b>CFB</b>	<b>Cleveland Fire Brigade</b>
<b>CGL</b>	<b>Change Grow Live</b>
<b>CLO</b>	<b>Community Liaison Officer (Cleveland Fire Brigade)</b>
<b>COPA</b>	<b>Cleveland Online Policing App</b>
<b>CURV</b>	<b>Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence</b>
<b>NTE</b>	<b>Night-Time Economy</b>
<b>OPCC</b>	<b>Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner</b>
<b>PC</b>	<b>Police Constable</b>
<b>PCC</b>	<b>Police and Crime Commissioner</b>
<b>PCSO</b>	<b>Police Community Support Officer</b>
<b>PSPO</b>	<b>Public Spaces Protection Order</b>
<b>SBC</b>	<b>Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council</b>
<b>SSP</b>	<b>Safer Stockton Partnership</b>
<b>TCDT</b>	<b>Town Centres Development Team (SBC)</b>
<b>TCG</b>	<b>Tasking and Co-ordination Group (Cleveland Police)</b>
<b>VAWG</b>	<b>Violence Against Women and Girls</b>
<b>VCSE</b>	<b>Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise</b>





