ADULT AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES COMMITTEE

AGENDA

Thursday 5 September 2024

at 10.00 am

**in Council Chamber,
Civic Centre, Hartlepool**

MEMBERS: ADULT AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES COMMITTEE

Councillors Allen, Boddy, Buchan, Cook, Hall, Little and Roy.

1.   **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

2.   **TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS**

3.   **MINUTES**

   3.1   To receive the Minutes and Decision Record in respect of the meeting held on 18 July 2024 *(previously circulated and published)*

4.   **BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS**

   No items

5.   **KEY DECISIONS**

   No items

6.   **OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION**

   6.1   Allotment Review – *Assistant Director, Preventative and Community Based Services*

   6.2   Historic Places Panel Report – *Assistant Director, Preventative and Community Based Services*

CIVIC CENTRE EVACUATION AND ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE
In the event of a fire alarm or a bomb alarm, please leave by the nearest emergency exit as directed by Council Officers.
A Fire Alarm is a continuous ringing. A Bomb Alarm is a continuous tone.
The Assembly Point for everyone is Victory Square by the Cenotaph. If the meeting has to be evacuated, please proceed to the Assembly Point so that you can be safely accounted for.

7.   **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

No items

8.   **ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

FOR INFORMATION

Date of next meeting – Thursday 7 November 2024 at 5.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

ADULT AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

18 July 2024

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: Gary Allen (In the Chair)

Councillors: Moss Boddy, Bob Buchan , Fiona Cook, Ged Hall, Sue Little, and Aaron Roy

Also present: Councillor Rachel Creevy

Officers: Jill Harrison, Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services
John Lovatt, Assistant Director, Adult Social Care
Gemma Ptak, Assistant Director, Preventative and Community Based Services
Danielle Swainston, Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning
Angela Armstrong, Principal Democratic Services and Legal Support Officer

1.   Apologies for Absence

None.

2.   Declarations of Interest

None.

3.   Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2024

Received.

4.   Introduction to Adult and Community Based Services Committee (*Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services*)

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To set out the role and remit of the Adult and Community Based Services Committee.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services provided the Committee with a comprehensive presentation which included the role of the Committee and Elected Members and details of the Leadership Team of the Department.

Further details were provided of the Adult Social Care Team, including Commissioned Services and the Preventative and Community Based Services Team. The service provision of each area was presented along with a summary of the performance for each Team.

The Council's overall budget for 2024/25 to 2027/28 was outlined including the current use of reserves, the significant budget gap over the coming years and the main pressures faced by the Council including social care. Further detailed updates on the Council's overall budget would be presented to Finance and Policy Committee. There were a number of significant challenges to be faced by the Adult and Community Based Services Department including the financial pressures and impact of budget cuts, health and social inequalities and an increasing demand for services. The priorities of the Council Plan were provided in the presentation alongside the Departmental priorities which included good outcomes for people, tackling poverty and income maximisation and the sustainability of the care market.

The Executive Director outlined an overview of the CQC Assurance process highlighting that Adult Social Care had been reintroduced to the programme commencing with pilot sites in 2023. All assessment were to be complete over two years and reports being published on the CQC website. It was noted that there had been a mock 'assurance visit' in May 2023 and to support this a Continuous Improvement Group had been established with briefings for staff, partners and providers taking place. It was expected that a CQC Assurance visit would take place in the last quarter of 2024.

The Chair commented that the presentation had provided a good overview of the Department including the challenges to be faced but was confident

that the forthcoming CQC Inspection was an opportunity for the Department to showcase examples of best practice across Adult Social Care.

A Member highlighted that the recent 'swimsafe' sessions delivered by the Department had been a great success and that everyone had enjoyed them.

In response to a question from a Member, the Executive Director confirmed that there was an annual process in place with providers in relation to their fees and an agreed model used that took into account issues such as national living wage, energy and food costs and calculated a percentage fee uplift. The process worked well and the Department worked closely with providers and it was noted that when benchmarked against other local authorities, Hartlepool was around mid-table in relation to fees.

The Department was commended by Members on the work and preparation undertaken in preparation for the CQC Inspection and on the drive for continuous improvement.

Decision

The presentation was noted and the Department were commended for the work and dedication taken for continuous improvement within the service.

5.   Adult Social Care Quality Assurance Report – 2023/24 (*Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services*)

Type of decision

Non key

Purpose of report

To present Members the Annual Adult Social Care Quality Assurance Report covering the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services presented the Adult Social Care Quality Assurance Report, which was attached at Appendix 1 and provided an overview of the quality assurance activity undertaken within adult social care during 2023/24. Areas of work covered in the report included: feedback from carers and people who use services; case audits; peer review; and feedback from the workforce.

The Executive Director concluded that there was a huge amount of quality assurance activity being undertaken within the Department including annual survey feedback and an annual practice month.

A discussion took place during which a Member sought clarification on how the successes of the Department were celebrated with the workforce. The Executive Director confirmed that supervision was undertaken on an individual basis and was a supportive process. In addition, where compliments were received they were always shared with the member of staff involved. There were also regular staff departmental briefings where feedback was shared as well as on an individual and team basis. In response to a suggestion from a Member, the Executive Director added that there was an annual social work day, and Occupational Therapy week and newsletters were regularly circulated to staff sharing staff achievements and updates on performance. The Executive Director confirmed that in general, sickness within the Department was in line with the rest of the Council. Members were asked to note that whilst lots of other local authorities had difficulty recruiting and retaining social care staff, Hartlepool was fortunate to be perceived as a good place to work and there were no problems filling any vacancies when they do arise.

A discussion ensued on the audit of 15 minute home care calls which had been undertaken. Members were reassured that all care packages involving 15 minute calls had been audited to ensure these were being used appropriately.

Decision

The Adult Social Care Quality Assurance Report 2023/24 was approved and the work undertaken to ensure the quality of practice was noted along with the processes in place to understand the views of people with lived experience and the workforce.

6.   **Annual Reports of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2023/24** (*Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services*)

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

To present to Members the Annual Report of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2023/24.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning Services presented the report which provided an analysis of complaints and compliments received and demonstrated learning that had occurred from complaints, and actions implemented as a result.

It was highlighted that during 2023/24, 47 compliments relating to Adult Social Care had been received. In addition to this, 26 complaints had been received, 1 was resolved within 24 hours and 9 were not considered further leaving 16 that were investigated. Members were asked to note that 15 had been concluded within 1 remaining ongoing. The Chair commented that it was good to note that complaints received were listened to and dealt with effectively.

In response to a query from a Member, the Assistant Director confirmed that early resolution was always the aim for any reported issues to enable a quick and efficient outcome. A Member highlighted that given the number of individuals receiving support from adult social care, the level of complaints received was very low.

A lengthy discussion ensued on seeking feedback from service users on a regular basis. The Executive Director of Adult and Community Based Services confirmed that the majority of long term support was provided through external commissioned providers who have their own complaints process and procedures for capturing feedback. In the case of the direct care and support service and reablement services which are delivered in-house, feedback is routinely sought. In response to a question, the Executive Director informed Members that the number of complaints received by providers was monitored and where issues could not be resolved, complaints were escalated to the Department. Members were reassured that anyone receiving long term social care support had an allocated social worker who would inform that individual of the process that could be followed if any complaints/issues were not resolved with the provider. In response to concerns raised by a Member, the Assistant Director, Joint Commissioning stated that all providers should communicate the full complaints process and procedure to all individuals receiving care including the process for escalating complaints to the Department. This has recently been re-emphasised with all care providers.

In conclusion, Members indicated their support for the Department and the process for dealing with any issues that arise. The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care added that some very valid comments had been raised adding that systems and communications can always be improved but the key to success was ensuring individuals were listened to and communicated with effectively. There were several measures being looked at to improve how the Department worked alongside care providers and with the individuals receiving care including improved engagement with care providers. The Executive Director confirmed that all systems in

place were subject to regular review to ensure a quality service was provided with continuous improvement always a key driver.

Decision

Members noted the Annual Report of Complaints and Compliments 2023/24 and that the report would be published online.

7.   Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

None.

The meeting concluded at 11.05am

H MARTIN

DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES

PUBLICATION DATE: 24 July 2024

ADULT AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES COMMITTEE
5 SEPTEMBER 2024

Subject: ALLOTMENT REVIEW

Report of: Assistant Director (Preventative and Community Based Services)

Decision Type: Non-Key

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1.   **COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY**

Hartlepool will be a place:
-    where people are enabled to live healthy, independent and prosperous lives.
-    of resilient and resourceful communities with opportunities for all.
-    that is sustainable, clean, safe and green.

2.   **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

2.1   It was agreed at Council on 13th July 2023 that the proposed increase in allotment fees for 2024 would be cancelled and a wholesale review of the allotment service would be carried out. This report outlines the outcome of the review.

3.   **BACKGROUND**

3.1   The council manages over 1,000 allotments across 16 sites in the borough. These spaces are an important resource, offering a wide range of benefits for the community and to the environment.

3.2   The review presented an opportunity to take stock of the allotments, and how they support council priorities in relation to social, economic and environmental benefits.

3.3   After a tendering process the work was completed by ERS Research & Consultancy, enabling the review to be independent of the current service.

4.   SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

4.1   The scope of the review was broad, there was a desire to understand how Hartlepool performed in comparison to other local authorities, but also an aspiration that good practice would be shared in order to feed into future service development. The following information was requested,

Background
Basic benchmarking information such as number of allotments, how waiting lists are managed, the cost of rent and how maintenance is dealt with.

Operating and Delivery Models
Comparisons and case studies from comparable sites to understand how services are operated and different models which are used.

Administration Processes
Details on administration processes and software that supports the running of services.

Case studies and best practice
Examples were sought demonstrating:
- community participation;
- security on sites; and
- environmental impact.

4.2   The consultants carried out a review of the existing service, examining documents and data alongside speaking to staff. Other work, included,
- Desk-based review of other local authorities.
- Local authority surveys and interviews.
- Wider stakeholder surveys inviting contributions from councillors and representatives of allotment sites and associations.

5.   OUTCOME

5.1   The review report is attached as **Appendix 1**.

5.2   It concludes that the current allotment offer provides value for money and suggests a number of recommendations where there are opportunities to better manage resources whilst improving the offer for tenants. These are outlined below, with consideration of the potential impact.

5.3   Fees;
- *Consider increasing the fees by a minimum of 25% from £1.12 per week to £1.39 per week, with a 5% increase in subsequent years.*
- *Consider implementing a 50% increase in fees for new tenants from April 1st, 2025, with a 5% increase in subsequent years.*
- *Where rents are to be increased, consider implementing concessionary rates.*

5.4   Fees have remained static for a number of years and Members have considers options to increase rent in order for the service to become cost neutral. The suggestion to increase rent by 25% is below the previous proposal which was agreed then subsequently cancelled. The impact of the increased rent on the current budget is outlined in Appendix A of the document.

5.5   One option to offset the smaller rise is the suggestion that rent for new tenants should be increased by 50%. This additional income would not cover the gap created by the reduced increase, but would go some way to address this.

5.6   In both instances it is proposed that after the first year, rent should then rise by 5% each year. It is worth noting that the report states that, 'Almost all local authority survey respondents cited that a rent increase within the next five years is either highly likely or likely', therefore the situation that Hartlepool is in is not unusual.

5.7   It is suggested that the introduction of concessionary rates may make changes more acceptable. Advice is not provided on who should be the beneficiaries of concessionary rates, and further work would need to be carried out to understand the impact of this and the additional administrative burden that would be created.

        Based on the current financial position and the need to progress towards a break even budget for the Allotment Service it is recommended that no concessionary rates are introduced at this time. Further work will be done to consider the introduction of concessionary rates in the future for the unemployed and carers, if the financial position allows.

5.8   Service Improvements;
        • *Consider implementing the Colony system or similar to streamline administration*
        • *Consider implementing rolling tenancy agreements to reduce administrative time.*

5.9   The service currently uses the software APP to manage tenancies and record information. This system was not designed for allotment services and allows little flexibility, for example it is not possible to vary rent charges for individual tenants unless this is done manually and, information and photographs have to be uploaded off site, rather than in real time. All other authorities indicated they used Colony.

5.10   Whilst there would be initial and on-going costs to move to dedicated allotment software, this could save staff time and resources. Such a system would allow for the introduction of more electronic communication and would enable information to be uploaded in real time, this in particular would assist with annual inspections where photographs are currently uploaded from a camera and individually labelled to create a record of each plot.

5.11 Each year tenants are sent a pack of information including a letter, tenancy agreement and varying forms covering animal and hazard registration. The co-ordination of this approach is time consuming and costly given the printing and postage requirements. There needs to be further legal advice regarding halting sending annual agreements, however it is clear that this could have the potential to save a considerable amount of time and resource.

5.12 Operating Models;
- *Consider undergoing a scoping exercise with local stakeholders such as Parish Councils, Town Councils, allotment associations, and individual tenants, to establish appetite for alternative models of management.*
- *Consider the benefits of establishing a Charitable Trust as an alternative to association self-management.*

5.13 Self-management has been tried on one site previously. The consultation carried out as part of the allotment strategy indicated that there was little interest in tenants taking on management responsibilities; asked to list the top three priorities for sites out of a choice of ten, this came last. Further investigation is required to understand the opportunities around this and the appetite Parish Councils may have to take on allotments. Similarly additional work would be required to understand the implications of a charitable trust and how this would operate.

5.14 Security and the environment;
- *Consider implementing increased visibility across sites and including regulations for fencing within tenancy agreements.*
- *Consider implementing initiatives to better the environmental impact of sites, for example through working in partnership with recycling centres or considering ways to improve biodiversity.*

5.15 Tenants regularly raise the issue of security on sites and complaints cover issues of fly tipping and Antisocial Behaviour, to the theft of items from plots. The assumption is often that CCTV cameras will provide a solution however the report suggests that improved visibility across sites is effective in addressing these matters. There is a capital funding implication to this, and it is likely that it could be considered as external fencing becomes beyond repair and replaced.

5.16 Similarly the introduction of lower internal fencing could be achieved as plots change hands, and agreements can be rewritten. It is acknowledged, however, to be a sensitive subject, with many tenants considering that their plot is more vulnerable, the more visible it is and therefore work communicating the benefits of these changes would be needed.

5.17 The issue of rubbish removal is a challenge with many tenants wishing to see the return of regular skips for waste. Tenants are advised when taking on plots of which items they can recycle and re-use, in an effort to discourage waste, further to this they are sign posted to the household waste recycling centre for items can't be disposed of on site. This will continue to be encouraged through better communication.

5.18   With regard to considering more environmental initiatives, tenants on Summerhill have made efforts in this regard planting wildflowers in the lanes, however it is acknowledged that this is an isolated site and more could be done.

5.19   <u>Communication</u>
- *Consider implementing improved and regular forms of communications with tenants, including newsletters, engaging with tenants more effectively via social media, and establishing an online feedback form that is reviewed regularly.*

5.20   The issue of communication is one that is raised regularly, and efforts have been made to engage with site associations. A lack of consistent staffing over the past 12 months has hindered this somewhat. It is considered that with an officer now in post, this is something that can be addressed, however it is also worth acknowledging that the introduction of a new system to manage the service, could free up time to address this matter more fully.

6.   OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

RISK IMPLICATIONS	The decision to cancel the proposed increase in rent placed a financial pressure on the service which may impact on service delivery for tenants and future support that can be provided to those using allotment sites.
FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS	As noted above, the recommendations of this review do not align with the previous proposal to achieve an £85k saving from the allotment service becoming self sustaining. Whilst the recommendations will go some way to reduce the current subsidy for the service, further work is required to understand the full impact of the proposed rental structure, in particular, additional data is required to understand how a two tier system would off-set different rental charges. In a judicial review against Leeds City Council in 2014 the findings noted that it is good practice when considering changes to rent levels to compare current and future rents against those of other local authorities, in order to assess the reasonableness. This review does provide those comparisons. The judgement also stated that the cost of providing the service is a relevant factor but it is not the only factor in determining the rent. It is necessary to notify allotment tenants one year in advance of any changes to allotment rents therefore a decision on any increase would need to be provided to tenants at the end of the 2024/25 season in order to introduce a rise from 1 April 2026. This does provide some

	time to further investigate the matter and consider a variable price structure as proposed within the document.
LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS	Some of the recommendations in the strategy will require further advice, for example proposals to end the practice of sending a tenancy agreement annually. Should the review be endorsed, further work could be carried out on the practicalities of implementing some of the recommendations.
CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY	Allotments provide benefits through increasing access to a healthy diet (fresh fruit and vegetables), physical activity, engagement with the natural environment and social interaction, all of which have proven benefits to health and wellbeing.
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS	The review provides recommendations regarding a broad range of issues including how Hartlepool sites compare with others with regard to access and facilities. This information is valuable in considering future developments on sites.
STAFF CONSIDERATIONS	Existing staff commissioned and maintained oversight of the process to conduct the review and will be responsible for delivering any recommendations.
ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS	Allotments are an important Council asset comprising 38 hectares (94 acres) of public land within the Borough. The service continues to manage the land in the most appropriate, cost effective way within the resource that is available.
ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS	Allotments contribute to the bio-diversity of the area they are located in and can also provide vital habitats for many species. Further to this there are opportunities for tenants to contribute to supporting the environment for example through compositing on their plots, using water-butts to reduce the need for mains water, and providing seasonal fruit and vegetables reducing reliance on supermarket produce which can have a wider carbon footprint.
CONSULTATION	Consultation was completed as part of the strategy as outlined in para 4.1 describing the scope of the review.

7.   RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1   It is recommended that the Committee

- note that a whole sale review has been independently conducted to inform future allotment service developments.
- agree that ongoing and future communication is conducted with allotment tenants and associations to continue to engage them positive in the future development of allotments.
- agree to officers carrying out further work to review the recommendations, consider the implications and opportunities that these will have on the service, should they be implemented and work with stakeholders.
- agree that fees and charges are reviewed and a proposal to increase fees and charges is made as part of the medium term financial strategy. Recommendations will be considered however there will be no introduction of concessionary charges at this time due to the financial position and the need to achieve a better budget position for the allotment service.
- ensure recommendations that will be taken forward are embedded as part of the ongoing review and development of the current Allotment Strategy to minimise duplication and ensure coordination of all work to support the success of the allotment service.

8.   REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1   It was agreed at Council on 13th July 2023 that a wholesale review of the allotment service would be carried out. The work carried out fulfills that requirement. There are a number of recommendations within the report which require further investigation to understand the impact that these may have particular on previous aspirations to make the service self-sustaining.

9.   BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1   Adult and Community Based Services Committee, 7th September 2023 Allotment Strategy

Council, Council Motion (Item 12), 13th July 2023

Adult and Community Based Services Committee, 20th January 2022 Allotment Strategy, Update on Consultation

Adult and Community Based Services Committee, 29th July 2021, Allotment Communication Strategy

10.   CONTACT OFFICERS

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Sign Off:-

Managing Director	Date: 13/08/24
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 13/08/24
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 13/08/24
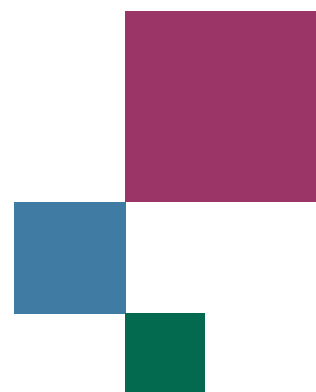
ERS
Research &
Consultancy

Review of Allotment Services in Hartlepool

12 June 2024

Authors

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Partners

HARTLEPOOL
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Quality assurance

Chris Barlow
Associate Director

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Executive Summary

E1. Introduction

The review of the allotment service in Hartlepool provides comprehensive analysis of the current offer provided by Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC) in comparison to other local authority areas across the North East region and beyond. Conducted by ERS Ltd., an independent evaluation and research consultancy, the review aimed to benchmark HBC against other local authorities, and present multiple best practice case studies in relation to a number of themes. There were five key areas identified for this review to consider, namely:

- The potential for implementing alternative forms of management, such as association self-managed sites, Parish Council managed sites or the establishment of a Charitable Trust.

- The prospect of digitalising elements of the service, owing to the time it currently takes to perform administrative tasks.

- Opportunities for increasing community participation, for example through having community plots.

- The security of sites, in relation to fly tipping and antisocial behaviour.

- Improving the environmental impact of sites.

In addition, a number of challenges were raised by wider stakeholders, which centred around inadequate staffing and a breakdown in communication between staff and tenants. These issues are detailed in full on pages 12, 13 and 14 of the report.

ERS enlisted a mixed methods approach for this review, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. These methods are listed below and detailed fully on pages 9 and 10 in the report.

- Document and Data Review

- Desk-based Review of other Local Authorities

- Interviews with HBC Staff

- Local Authority Survey

- Local Authority Interviews

- Wider Stakeholder Survey

E.2 Context to the Review

This review was commissioned in response to increasing budgetary pressures faced by HBC. In 2021, Hartlepool Borough Council proposed a 100 per cent increase in rent to allow the service to become self-sustaining. However, tenants raised concerns about individuals being priced out of participating in allotments as a result of proposed price increases. As a result, it was agreed that the proposed price increase would not go ahead. To ensure evidence-based justifications of future price increases, the Council was asked to produce a wholesale review of their allotment service, including benchmarking

their offer against that of other local authorities, and recommendations drawing upon findings and discussions with allotment officers from across the region.

E.3 Key Findings

The allotments offer in Hartlepool was benchmarked against that of other local authorities, and it was found that whilst HBC has more sites than other locations in the Tees Valley area, such as Darlington, Stockton, and Middlesbrough, it has less than larger local authority areas in the region such as Durham and North Tyneside. Furthermore, the review highlighted that demand for allotments in Hartlepool is average, with HBC falling in the middle of all surveyed local authorities in terms of the number of individuals waiting for a plot. Similarly, waiting time for a plot in Hartlepool is around 3.5 years, placing HBC in the middle of all other local authorities surveyed. The review concluded that the allotment offer in Hartlepool does provide adequate value for money, with HBC offering more items than those areas which it charges higher rent than. Furthermore, out of those areas with comparable levels of deprivation, the majority charge more for rent than HBC. Considering these findings alongside the longstanding freeze in rental prices, it is concluded that a rise in rental costs would be justified.

Operational Processes

We found that association self-managed sites were the most challenging alternative management structure for local authorities, due to this being the only alternative model of management in which local authorities maintain somewhat of a role in overseeing sites. Challenges with self-management included conflict among tenants, involvement in associations for personal use and poor financial management. In contrast, we found that both Charitable Trust and Parish Council managed sites posed no challenges for local authorities, as these sites become completely independent and are responsible for all aspects of operations and administration.

Administration

We found that digitalising elements of the service has been largely successful in other local authority areas. Whilst it was often noted that there are groups of older tenants with low digital literacy, this was reported as a minority amount that is decreasing with time. The review found that Colony software was the most popular among allotment services, and that this is able to perform a range of roles to reduce the time needed to perform administrative tasks.

Community Participation

The review found that local authorities tended to rent plots to community groups, rather than having traditional 'community plots' that are available for any individual to use. Traditional community plots were said to pose challenges for Council's in terms of ownership and responsibility for maintenance, cultivation, and upkeep of the plot. Therefore, Council's often opted to rent plots out to a wide variety of organisations in their area, ensuring community participation whilst reducing the burden on staff and resources. We found that where plots were rented to community groups, these were done so using standard rental rates and waiting list procedures.

Security

The review highlighted a number of different approaches taken by local authorities to ensure safety and security on their allotment sites. Whilst some local authorities use CCTV cameras, this was found to be largely ineffective in catching offenders but was somewhat deemed to be an effective deterrent where sites had limited access points. There are also concerns around whether the use of CCTV on some sites leads to ASB and fly tipping being displaced rather than prevented. However, the review found that increased visibility had been particularly effective in some local authority areas.

Environmental Impact

The review found that some local authority areas implement measures such as providing waste permits to tenants for non-compostable waste and banning the use of sprinklers on sites. Furthermore, it was found that half (50%) of local authority survey respondents permit fires on some sites. We found limited examples of local authorities implementing measures to improve biodiversity on sites, however where this has been done this included planting community orchards, encouraging tenants to leave an area of their plot uncultivated for insects, and asking tenants to plant pollinating plants.

E.4 Recommendations

The key learnings arising from the review included the following recommendations.

- HBC should consider increasing the fees by a minimum of 25%, given that fees have remained static for a number of years. This increase would bring the cost of allotments in line with the average charge among other local authorities with similar levels of deprivation.

- Given the high demand for plots and the costs associated with bringing vacant plots to a lettable standard, HBC should consider implementing a 50% increase in fees for new tenants from April 1st, 2025, with the expectation that there will be a 5% increase for all plots taken in subsequent years, ultimately creating a tiered pricing system. **A full breakdown of the effects of the proposed price increases can be found in Appendix A of this review.**

- Where rents are to be increased, HBC should consider implementing concessionary rates. **For more information on typical concessionary rates and eligibility criteria, please see Appendix B.**

- HBC should consider implementing Colony systems to reduce administrative time and support the Council to introduce new pricing structures such as concessionary rates and/or a tiered pricing system.

- HBC should consider implementing rolling tenancy agreements where legally viable, to reduce administrative time.

- HBC should consider undergoing a scoping exercise with local stakeholders such as Parish Councils, Town Councils, associations, and individual tenants, to establish appetite for alternative models of management.

- Once scoping is completed, HBC should consider implementing alternative management models. Specifically, HBC should consider establishing a Charitable Trust as an alternative to association self-management.

- HBC should consider implementing increased visibility across sites and including regulations for fencing within tenancy agreements as part of this.

- HBC should consider implementing initiatives to better the environmental impact of their sites, for example through working in partnership with recycling centres to provide permits for tenants or considering ways to improve biodiversity.

- Where administrative time is reduced as a result of previous recommendations, HBC should consider implementing improved and regular forms of communications with tenants. This could include fulfilling their target of distributing six newsletters per year, engaging with tenants more through social media, or establishing an online feedback form that is reviewed regularly.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the Review

In April 2024, ERS Ltd was commissioned by Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC) to carry out a review of their allotment service in response to increasing budgetary pressures faced by the service.

The context of this review stems from the need to balance budgetary pressures with community needs. In 2021, consideration was given to a 100 per cent increase in rent, which led to concerns about individuals being priced out of tenancies. It was agreed that the proposed price increase would not proceed.

To ensure evidence-based justifications of future price increases, the service was asked to produce a wholesale review of their allotment service, including benchmarking their offer against that of other local authorities, and recommendations drawing upon findings and discussions with allotment officers from across the region.

This review provides benchmarking information and recommendations to ensure that allotments are managed in an efficient and cost-effective way, utilised to their full potential. The review compares and contrasts the current allotment offer in Hartlepool with that of other local authorities. The review makes evidence-based recommendations to improve their offer, drawing on examples of successful practice from elsewhere.

These best practice examples look specifically at five themes that are set out below.

Operating and Delivery Models
HBC currently manage all of its own allotment sites. There are alternative models of management such as self-managed sites and Parish/Town Council managed sites.

Administration Processes
HBC does not currently use a software system specifically designed to support allotment administration. The current working is reliant on corresponding with tenants using hard copy letters and forms. This review will consider opportunities to reduce the current resource intensive paper-based system through digitalising administrative processes.

Community Participation
HBC engagement with the wider community on its allotment sites, for example through community plots, which are not currently present on any of their sites.

Security
Security on allotment sites is a key issue. Break-ins, fly- tipping and anti-social behaviour cause issues for both tenants and residents living within close proximity to sites.

Environmental Impact
The benefit to the environment of allotments is recognised. Consideration of additional measures to improve the impact have been considered in the report.

1.2 Methodology

The review took a mixed-methods approach, combining a number of qualitative and quantitative methods to allow for the collection of comparable benchmarking data, whilst also ensuring in-depth insight and comprehensive examples of best practice from other local authority areas.

1.2.1 Document and Data Review

To understand the context to the allotment service in Hartlepool, we first conducted a review of available data and documentation held by HBC. This included a deep dive review into documentation including waiting lists data (not identified individuals), background information on the previous service review, site plans, and information on income and budgets. We also reviewed the allotment strategy and data collected through the consultation work and surveys that informed this.

1.2.2 Desk-based Review of Local Authorities

We conducted a desk-based review of the offers provided by other local authorities. This included reviewing historical scrutiny reviews, allotment strategies and wider information on allotment availability, waiting list duration, price, and services included in other allotment offers. This allowed us to identify additional service offers items that have not been previously considered or actioned by HBC, further informing our research questions.

1.2.3 Site Visits

We conducted site visits of allotment sites in the borough. This allowed us to understand the issues and challenges across the different sites, providing valuable contextual insight.

1.2.4 Staff Interviews

We undertook semi-structured interviews with both the Allotments Project Officer and Support Officer from HBC to gather insight into current processes to manage administrative tasks, waiting lists and maintenance requirements. We were also able to establish the elements of the process that worked well and those where there was scope for improvement. This informed the scope of wider interviews enabling us to tailor findings on processes used by other local authorities to the specific needs of HBC.

1.2.5 Local Authority E-Survey

We designed an e-survey which was distributed to allotment officers across the country. This e-survey included questions covering:
- Number of allotment sites
- Length of waiting list
- Cost of rent
- Projection for future rent increases
- Monitoring of sites
- Maintenance offers.
- Details of additional items offered as part of the tenancy.

The e-survey included questions on each of the key themes, allowing us to gather information on approaches implemented elsewhere and the effectiveness of these.

Data has been comparatively analysed against the information collected on HBC, creating a quantifiable picture of how Hartlepool compares to other local authorities in terms of allotment services.

Multiple requests were made to engage with a variety of local authorities via three emails (one initial contact and two follow-up emails). In total, we received six survey responses, of which five individuals agreed to follow-up interviews, and an additional two local authorities that solely took part in interviews.

1.2.6 Local Authority Interviews

To supplement data collected through e-surveys, we undertook in-depth, semi-structured interviews with allotment officers from other local authorities. These interviews served a dual purpose, giving further insight into the answers given through the survey, where relevant, as well as allowing us to gather more information on policies and processes.

1.2.7 Wider Stakeholder E-Survey

To ensure the review considered the views of wider stakeholders we distributed a survey to a selection of Elected Members and association representatives. This consisted of questions to elicit views on the current approach, potential ideas, or opportunities alongside barriers. We received a total of three responses to this survey.

The report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction and Methodology
- Chapter 2: Overview of the Allotment Service in Hartlepool
- Chapter 3: Benchmarking
- Chapter 4: Operating and Delivery Models
- Chapter 5: Administration Processes
- Chapter 6: Community Participation
- Chapter 7: Improving Security
- Chapter 8: Improving the Environmental Impact
- Chapter 9: Conclusions and Recommendations

2 Overview of the Allotment Service in Hartlepool

HBC manage 1,003 allotment plots. These vary from small sites with no internal fencing and a maximum of 20 plots, to larger sites with up to 100 plots with multiple lanes and access gates. Each site presents different management challenges for HBC. The experience of tenants varies considerably given their plot and site. The allotment community is largely comprised of white males aged 50+ years. HBC is interested in understanding potential opportunities to diversify the demographic of their tenants through introducing new opportunities for community participation.

HBC has a landlord-tenant relationship with allotment holders, with each party having a clear role in the daily operations and maintenance of the sites. HBC is responsible for external fencing, lanes on site, access points, waste management, the management of any small car parking spaces and providing running water. Tenants take ownership of cultivation, internal fencing, and the security of their plots. No significant changes have been made to the management of allotment sites in Hartlepool in the last decade, HBC is interested in identifying potential options to improve the allotment service. This includes looking into the feasibility of implementing new administrative software; engaging with tenants digitally; moving to self-management of some sites to offer increased ownership for tenants; and considering the potential to improve value for money by providing tenants the opportunity to take a more active role in management.

2.1 Management

HBC currently employ two full-time staff who manage the daily operations and administration of the allotments service. This includes an Allotments Officer who is responsible for responding to the needs of tenants, liaising with associations and commissioning work to improve the standard of the sites. Working alongside the Allotments Officer is a Support Officer who provides administrative support in carrying out inspections, processing paperwork, managing the waiting list, overseeing probationary periods, and running offers on vacant plots.

2.2 Current Offer

HBC currently charge rent on the basis of 20 pence per square metre of plot space, plus a standing charge of £25. This means that rent varies depending on plot size, however for a 'standard' plot (defined for the purpose of this report as 200m2), an allotment holder will pay £65. This works out at only £1.20 per week. Included in this price is water, which is provided on an unrestricted basis on all sites, maintenance of paths and lanes, and maintenance of external boundary fencing. HBC does not provide, or cover the costs of, waste disposal, and tenants are responsible for maintaining internal fencing.

In the last two financial years (FY22/23 and FY23/24), the allotment service expenditure has been significantly greater than the income collected from rents. Even disregarding the cost of wages and looking solely at expenditure for the upkeeping of allotment sites, HBC spent a total of £112,446 in FY22/23, which was much higher than the income made from rent, which was £77,981. The financial gap was smaller in FY23/24, with HBC spending a total of £90,182 (not including wages) and generating £84,112 in income from rent. Across both financial years, maintenance costs constituted over half of expenditure when disregarding wages. A full breakdown can be seen in the table below.

Table 1. Income and Expenditure

	FY22/23		FY23/25	
Income from Rent	£77,981.00		£84,112.00	
Expenditure	*Including wages*	*Excluding wages*	*Including wages*	*Excluding Wages*
	£157,341	£112,446.00	£163,157.00	£90,182.00
Total	**-£79,360.00**	**-£34,465.00**	**-£79,044.00**	**-£6,070.00**

When interpreting the above data, it should be considered that there was an underspend on wages across both financial years due to a vacant post. Actual costs in 2024/25 will be significantly greater as two members of staff are employed.

2.3 Key Issues

This section of the report draws upon data collected from interviews with HBC staff, as well as results from a survey through which wider stakeholders were invited to share their views on, and experiences of, all areas of the allotment service. Data has been triangulated to highlight the key issues within the allotment service, which can broadly be broken down into four themes of security, digitalisation, and operational processes. There were a number of comments that centred around communication as a key area of improvement for the allotment service. The specific challenges faced within each of these themes are detailed below.

2.3.1 Security

Security is a key area of improvement for HBC in regard to its allotment sites. Many of the sites have multiple access points and some are open to the public, meaning that non-tenants can have access to sites. In sites that are not open to the public, locked gates are installed. A key issue is tenants persistently leaving gates open despite signage being displayed to serve as a reminder. Alongside vandalism, break ins and theft, public and specifically vehicular access often means that waste is fly tipped on allotment sites throughout the borough.

"Security is a big issue (…) Broken fences. Gates should be self-locking. Poor police presence in the community."

- **Elected Member**

Fly tipping is one of the greatest issues faced by the allotments service in Hartlepool. Whilst the problem varies by individual locations, it is a consistent complaint from tenants across the majority of sites. Fly tipping is often considered to be a direct result of non-tenants discarding rubbish on the allotment sites, due to easy vehicular access and a lack of visibility. The type of waste left on vacant plots is somewhat indicative of the fact that tenants are also partly responsible for this issue. Fly tipping poses significant challenge. It is costly to remove, results in an influx of complaints from both tenants and surrounding residents, and often results in difficulty re-letting vacant plots on which waste has been dumped. At present, fly tipping remains on sites for a significant amount of time, due to a lack of financial resource to pay for removal services.

2.3.2 Digitalisation

Administration was reported as being the most time-consuming element of the daily operations of the allotment service. A bespoke digital system could support online applications, streamline offering plots and signing tenancy agreements. HBC carry out the majority of administrative functions using paper to

ensure that tenants are not excluded on the basis of low digital literacy. The exception is appointment requests for no access plot inspections and offer runs, which are done through email or text message. It is recognised by allotment staff and wider stakeholders that digitalising processes could significantly reduce time taken to perform tasks, therefore freeing up staff time to address other concerns and provide additional support to tenants. Concerns around digital exclusion are similar to that of other neighbouring local authorities, such as Redcar & Cleveland, who noted that they have no plans to digitalise their allotment service due to the older demographic of plot holders. However, the case studies presented in Section 5 of this review somewhat mitigate these concerns by providing examples of the potential for successful digitalisation.

"A system to electronically sign tenancy agreements would be good, as at the moment it's a huge admin task"

- **HBC Staff**

"We could eliminate 90% of paperwork and postage costs by going electronic."

- **Allotment Holder**

2.3.3 Operational Processes

The quality of vacant plots and offer run processes were identified as area for potential improvement. It was believed that the number of vacant plots on sites across the borough was a key challenge, and that the current processes of offering out plots is not adequate in addressing this issue. It was suggested that prospective tenants who reject multiple plots due to the overgrown state of the plot could be moved to the bottom of the waiting list, as there are concerns about their level of commitment to cultivation and allotment upkeep. A bidding system was also given as a potential suggestion to manage vacant plots, alongside greater association involvement, through which existing tenants would be given the opportunity to share knowledge and advice on clearing overgrown plots, helping prospective tenants to "see past the work".

"If you refuse a number of plots, you should be put to the bottom of the list (…) If a plot was rejected for this reason, they have no real concept of growing and will soon be disheartened"

- **Elected Member**

"Ask associations to get involved with showing prospective tenants the empty plots as they should be able to get them to see past the work. We all have to do it!"

- **Elected Member**

Furthermore, allotment holders and elected members were asked whether alternative models of management may be useful in improving the allotment service in Hartlepool. The majority of respondents did not think that association self-management in particular would be a good option. Specifically, respondents raised concerns around the burden that self-management places on volunteers, as well as the levels of understanding among association members about effectively managing sites. However, multiple responses did state that this should be "constructively considered" going forward.

"I don't think self-management is the right solution as people volunteering for this is a big ask and a long-term commitment."

- **Elected Member**

2.3.4 Communication

The issue of communication between HBC and tenants was identified as an issue. This was raised both in terms of a general lack of responsiveness caused by perceived understaffing, and in relation to HBC working alongside tenants to improve allotments. Tenants felt that they had no outlet to express opinions and ideas, as previous lines of communication, such as focus groups were no longer operational. Since these ceased, tenants cited that there have been no regular means of having their voices heard, and that during one-off alternatives, such as surveys, tenants did not feel listened to. The issues with communication were consolidated by findings from HBC staff consultations, during which it was discussed how newsletters are irregular, and alternative forms of communication such as the use of social media are underused. There were considerable issues with previous focus group arrangements due to a number of individual tenants dominating discussions. The Council noted that this led to unequal chances for tenants to share views, and they therefore expressed a preference for an alternative method of communication with tenants.

"Communication is a massive issue. It was a fool's decision to abolish the focus group that was the contact between allotments and council. The last big survey they did didn't listen to us"

- **Elected Member**
  -

"Newsletters go out through email, but they're not very regular. We also have a Facebook page, but it doesn't get used a lot"

- **HBC Staff**

3 Benchmarking

3.1 Number of allotment sites and plots

3.1.1 Number of Sites

HBC operate 16 sites, which is comparable to areas such as York City Council, which has 15 sites run by York Allotments Charitable Incorporated Association (YACIO), and St Helens Council, which has 19 council-ran sites. In comparison to the Northeast region, HBC have more than neighbouring areas such as Middlesbrough (7), Stockton (6) and Darlington (3), but significantly fewer sites than other local authorities such as Durham (113), Gateshead (56), and North Tyneside (47). It should be noted that HBC is one of the smallest local authorities in England.

Figure 1. Number of sites in each local authority survey respondent area compared to HBC
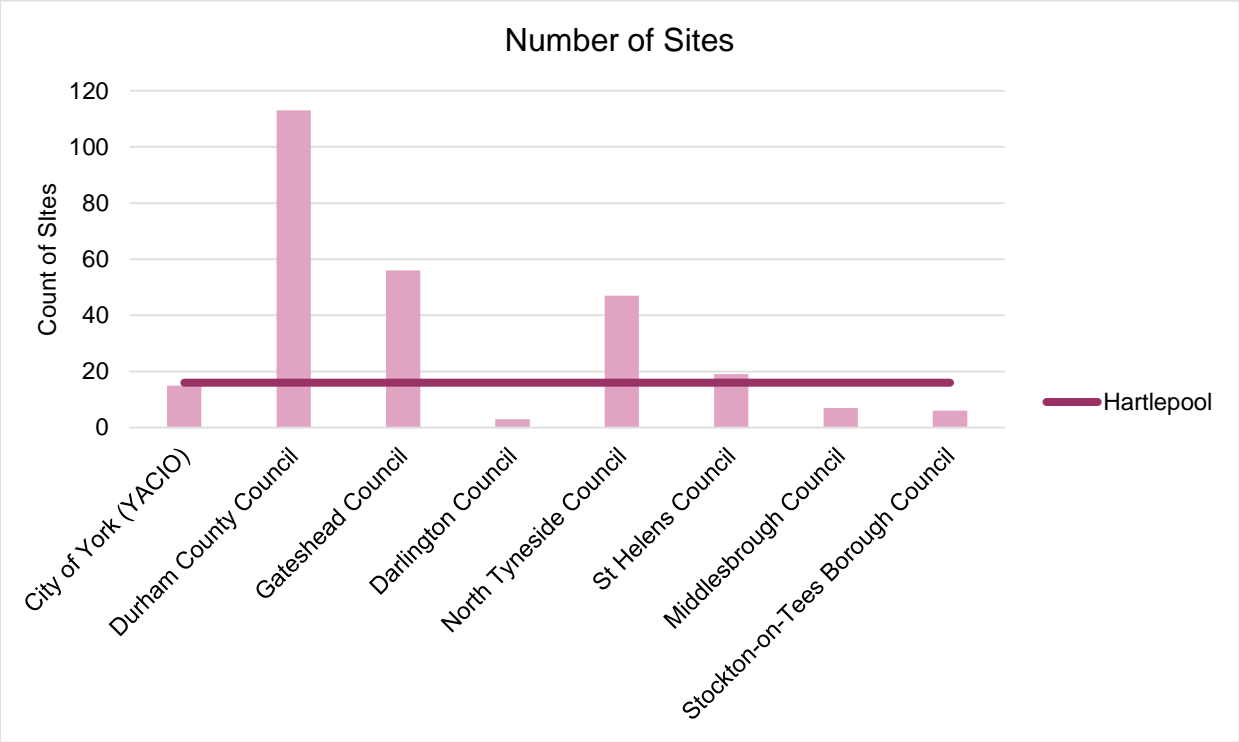
3.1.2 Number of Plots

HBC have a total of 1,003 plots across all sites, which places them in the middle of all local authorities surveyed, in terms of plot numbers. The local authority with the most plots in this cohort was Durham County Council, with a total of 2,500 plots, whereas the local authority with the lowest was Darlington, which has only 77 plots.

Figure 2. Number of plots in each local authority survey respondent area compared to HBC
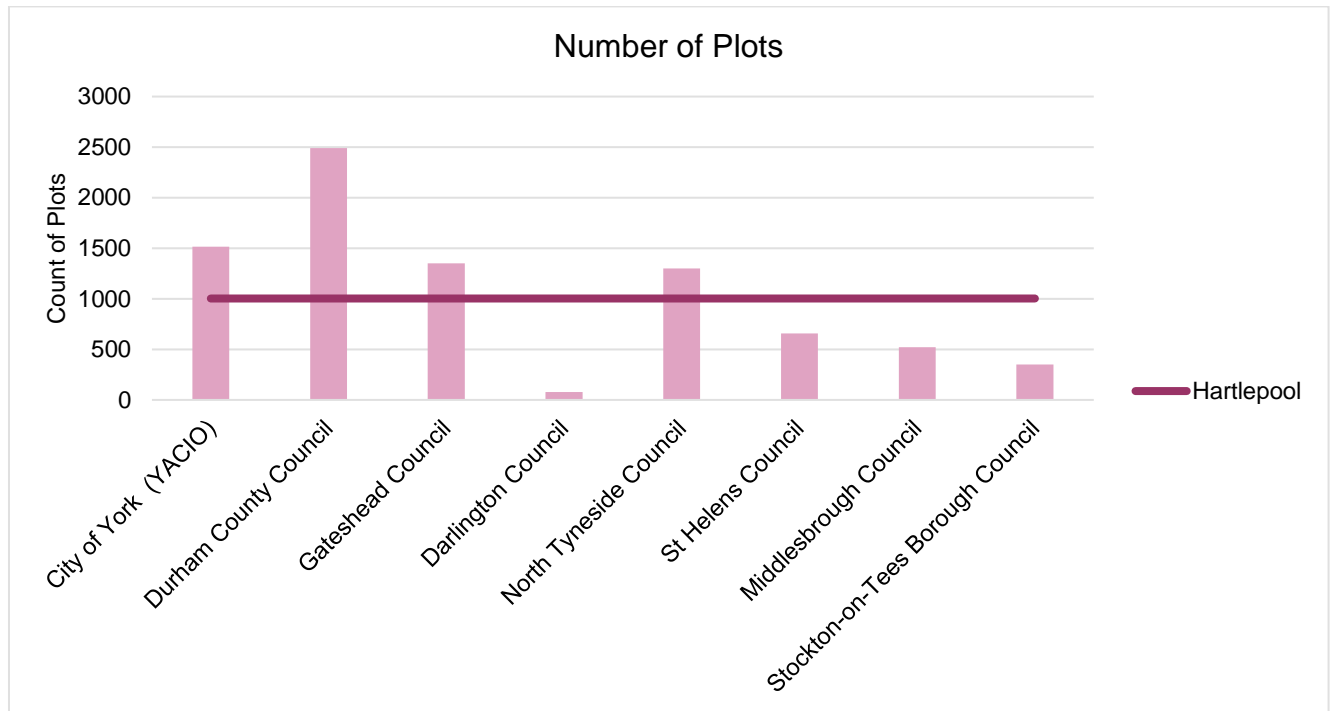
3.2 Vacant Plots and Waiting Lists

3.2.1 Percentage of Vacant Plots

Local authority survey respondents had between 1% (St. Helens) and 7% (Darlington) of plots that are vacant. Hartlepool was amongst the lowest of these, with only 2% of vacant plots This is comparable to Durham (2%) and North Tyneside (2%).

Figure 3. Percentage of Vacant Plots in each local authority survey respondent area compared to HBC
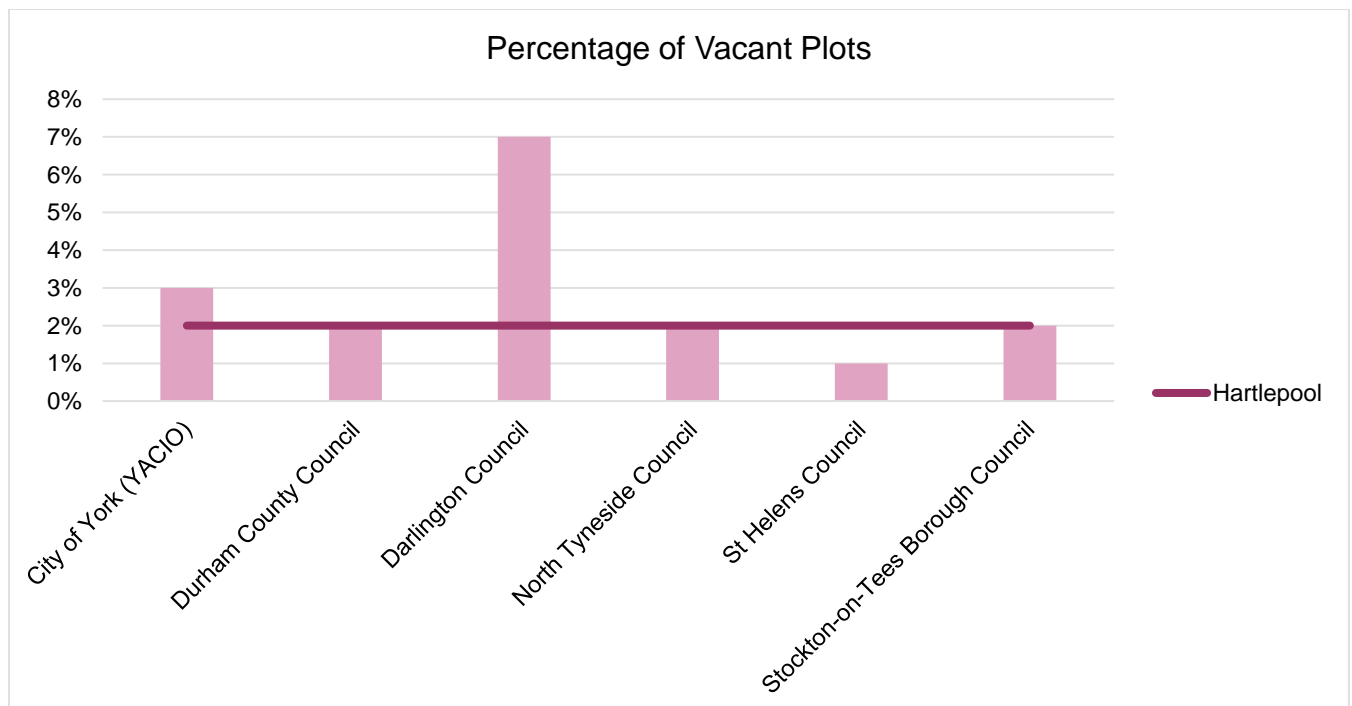
3.2.2 Length of Waiting List

The local authority survey respondent with the longest waiting list was Durham County Council, with a total of 2,162 individuals waiting to be allocated a plot. In contrast, the local authority survey respondent with the shortest waiting list was Darlington Council, with only 335 individuals waiting for a plot. HBC falls in the middle of these figures, with 883 individuals waiting for a plot.

Figure 4. Number of individuals on waiting list in each local authority survey respondent area compared to HBC
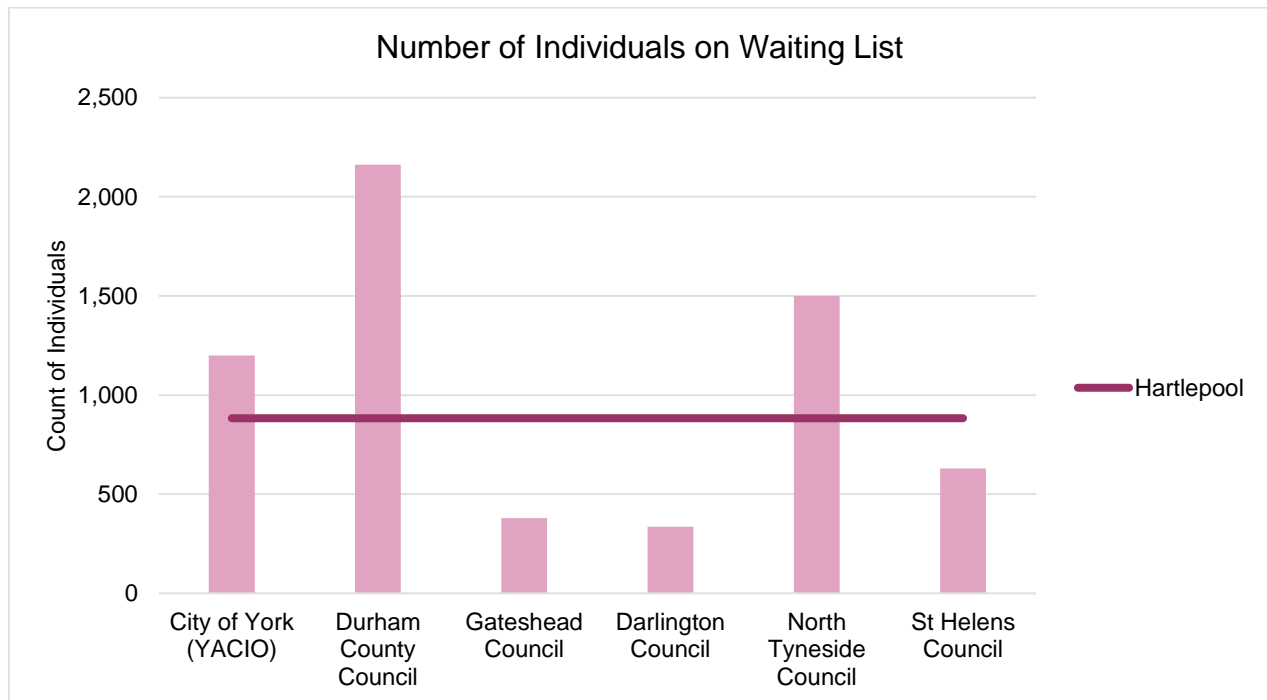
3.2.3 Waiting List compared to Adult Population

Out of all local authorities surveyed, Hartlepool have the most demand for allotments. Figure 5 shows the percentage of adult (16-64) population in each local authority area that are on the waiting list for a plot in their respective areas. Hartlepool has the largest percentage of their population on the waiting list, at 1.6%, indicating that the demand for plots in the borough is higher than in other local authority areas.

Percentage of Adult Population on Waiting List for Allotments (2021 Census)
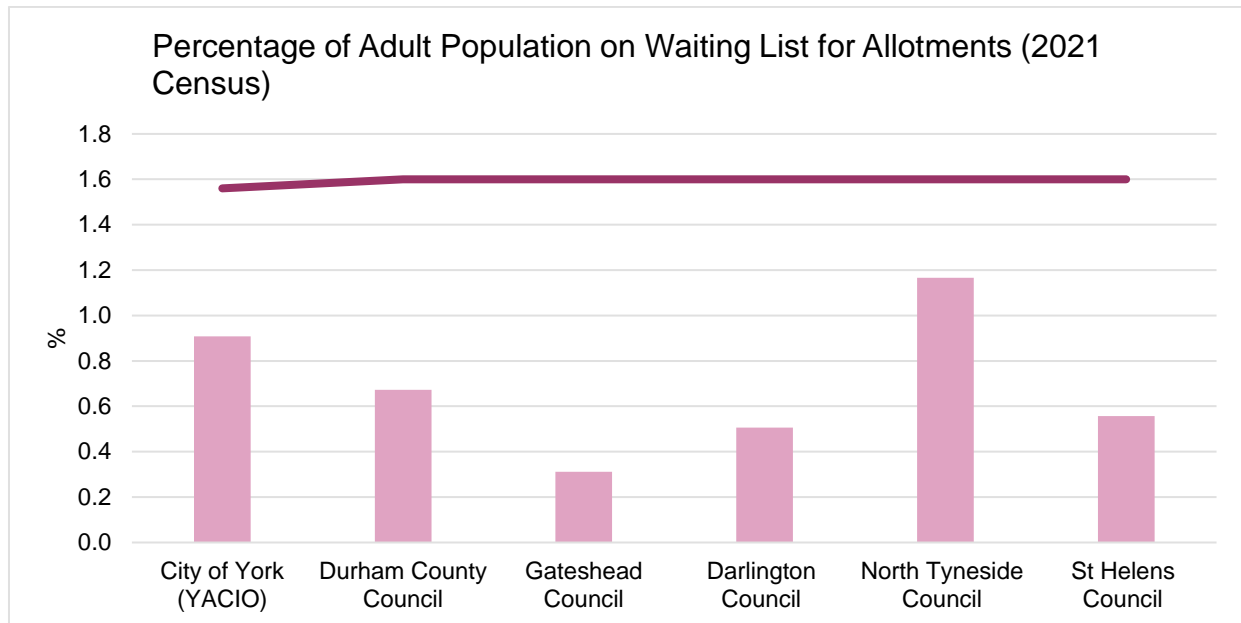
3.2.4 Average Wait Time

HBC have an average wait time of approximately 3.5 years, which places them in the middle of all local authorities surveyed in terms of wait time. The local authority with the longest average wait time is Durham County Council, with an average of 6 years. St Helens has the shortest wait time of all local authorities surveyed, at around 1.5 years.

Figure 6. Average waiting for a plot among local authority survey respondent areas compared to HBC

Average Waiting Time for Plot
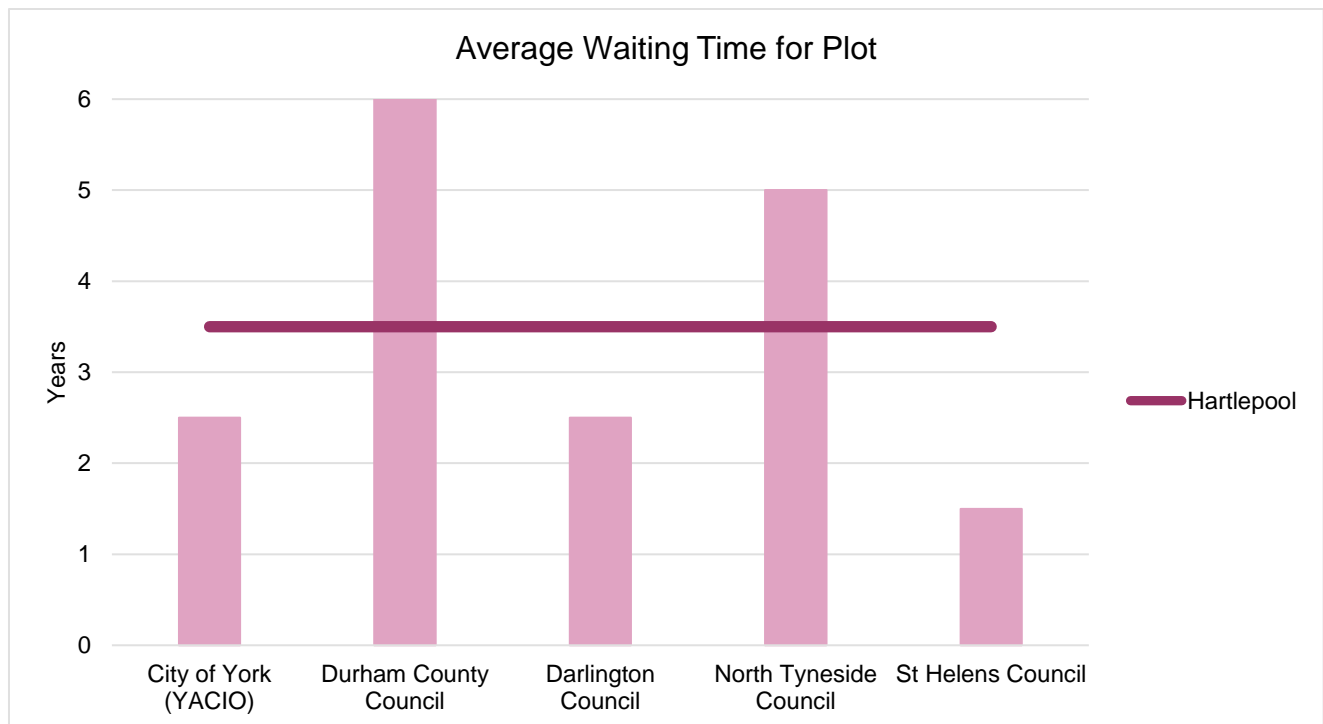
3.2.5 Timescales

During interviews and site visits with HBC staff, it was noted that the timescale between notice to quit being served to plots being re-let was a couple of weeks. This places Hartlepool in line with the majority of other local authorities surveyed. The exceptions were York and Darlington, which both stated that this process takes over a month but less than 6 months.

Table 2. Time taken from notice to quit to plots being re-let in all local authority survey respondent areas

Local Authority	On average, how long does it take from a surrender/notice to quit being served to the plot being re-let in your area?
City of York Council (YACIO)	Over a month but less than 6 months
Durham County Council	Less than a month
Gateshead Council	Less than a month
Darlington Council	Over a month but less than 6 months
North Tyneside Council	Less than a month
St Helens Council	Less than a month

3.3 Cost of Rent (and Projection for Future Increases)

3.3.1 Cost

Among the local authorities surveyed as part of this review, rental prices range from £35 per annum (Stockton) to £200 per annum (Darlington). Charging £65 for 200m2 plot (£1.20 per week), Hartlepool places in the lower end of all surveyed local authorities in relation to cost charged.

Figure 7. Average price for a 200m2 plot in selected local authority areas compared to HBC
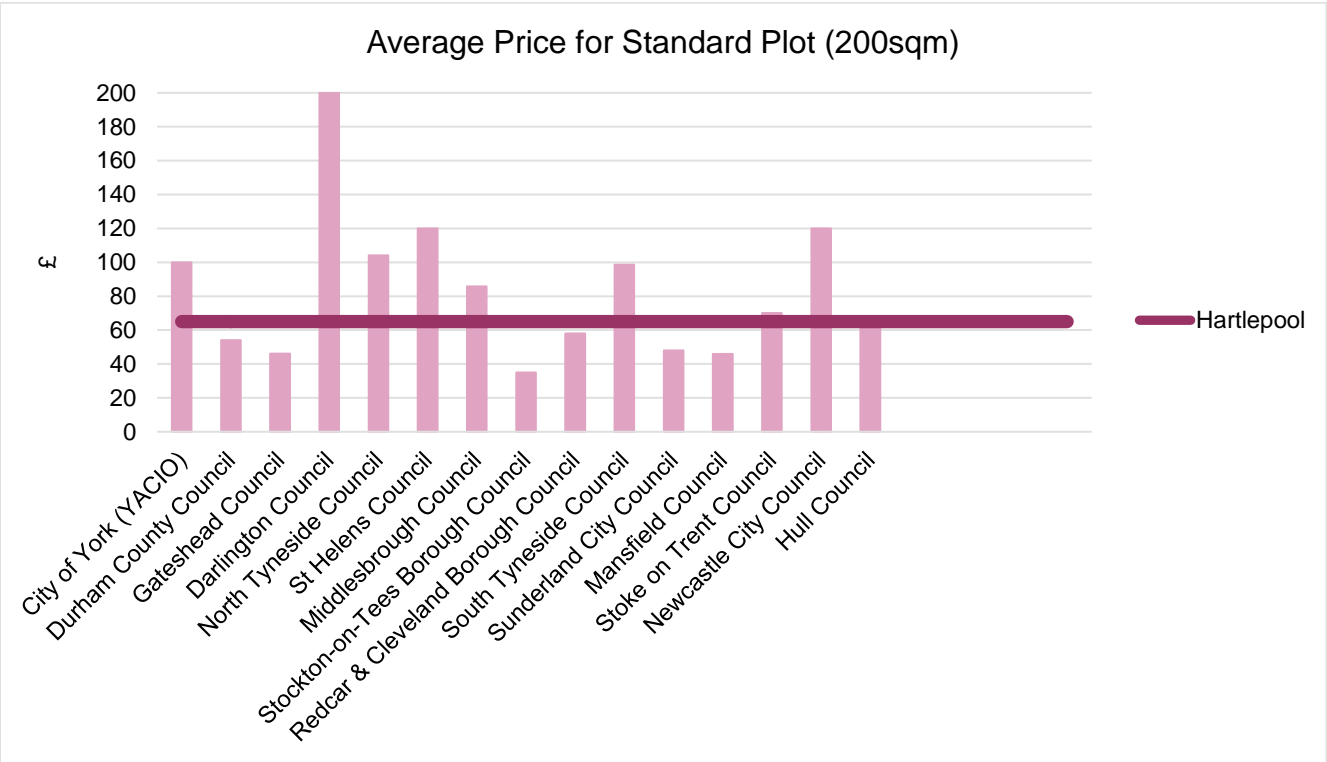
3.3.2 Cost and Income Deprivation

When benchmarking the price of HBCs offer against that of other local authorities, the demographic composition of the population should be considered, as tenants in more affluent areas are better equipped to cope with the rising costs of the service. Hartlepool ranks highly among other local authorities in terms of deprivation, being the 5th most income-deprived area out of 316 local authorities in England[1]. This is important to consider when assessing the price and offer of the allotments service.

Compared to other local authorities included in cost benchmarking, Hartlepool is among the most income-deprived, second only to Middlesbrough. This is closely followed by Kingston-Upon-Hill, Wolverhampton, South Tyneside, and Sunderland respectively. Out of these five comparable local authorities, the majority charged more than, or equal to, HBC for allotment plots. These local authorities charge, on average, 42% (£27.18) more than HBC. Two comparable areas charged less (Sunderland by £17 and Wolverhampton by £8). We do not have information on what service is provided within their rent charge.

The average (mean) rental price among the five benchmarked local authorities with the largest proportions of income deprived populations is £71.32. When considered alongside the items included in Hartlepool's current allotment offer, it is recommendable that HBC look to increase the price of their allotments by 25% (an extra 18p per week), to bring their pricing in line with the average for other areas comparable to Hartlepool in terms of deprivation. It should be recognised that the inflation in rental charges for allotments in 2023/24 in Hartlepool is the first time that prices have increased for a number of years. The previous change was decided by the 2017 Council.

A full breakdown of the effects of the proposed price increases can be found in Appendix A of this review.

Table 3. Price of rent in comparison to levels of income deprivation

	Percentage of Population that are Income Deprived[2]	Price in Comparison to HBC
Sunderland	19.20%	⬇
South Tyneside	20.60%	⬆
Wolverhampton	21.10%	⬇
Kingston-Upon-Hull	22.70%	➡
Middlesbrough	25.10%	⬆
Hartlepool	**22.80%**	

3.3.3 Likelihood of Rent Increases

Almost all local authority survey respondents cited that a rent increase within the next five years is either highly likely or likely. The only exception was the City of York (YACIO), who stated that this was unlikely.

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[1] Exploring local income deprivation (ons.gov.uk)
[2] Exploring local income deprivation (ons.gov.uk)

3.4 Maintenance Offers and Items Included

Regarding items included in the offer, HBC is similar to most other local authorities. Local authorities such as York, Gateshead and North Tyneside offer additional items such as disabled access, storage, meeting rooms, toilets, and waste disposal on some sites. It should be noted that whilst these local authorities offer more than HBC, the majority do charge higher rent. The exception is Gateshead Council, which offers more than HBC and charges lower rent.

Table 4. Items included in the offer of each local authority survey respondent area

	Hartlepool	Durham	York	Darlington	North Tyneside	St Helens	Gateshead	Stockton
Water	Green	Red	Green	Green	Orange	Orange	Orange	Green
Paths	Green	Green	Green	Green	Orange	Orange	Red	Green
External Fencing	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Disabled Access	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange	Green	Green	Orange	Red
Information Boards	Orange	Red	Green	Orange	Orange	Green	Orange	Red
Site Shop	Red	Red	Orange	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Meeting Room(s)	Red	Red	Orange	Red	Red	Red	Orange	Red
Storage	Red	Red	Orange	Red	Orange	Red	Orange	Red
Toilets	Red	Red	Orange	Red	Orange	Red	Red	Red
Waste Disposal	Red	Red	Red	Red	Orange	Red	Orange	Red
Tree and Hedge Maintenance	Green	Green	Orange	Green	Orange	Green	Green	Red

Key

Description	Colour
Not offered on any sites	Red
Offered on some sites	Orange
Offered on all sites	Green

4 Operating and Delivery Models

Staffing

HBC currently employ two full-time staff who oversee the daily operations of the allotment service. The number of staff employed as part of the allotment service varies significantly by local authority area. Some local authorities interviewed as part of this review had comprehensive teams of staff, whereas some were understaffed. For example, Durham County Council have a total of four full-time allotment staff, including one Senior Allotment Officer who oversees all operations, and three Allotment Officers who are responsible for site inspections, enforcement, and handling complaints. In addition, they also have a maintenance team, including one charge hand and three maintenance assistants, who are responsible for repairs and maintenance on Durham County Council managed sites. It should be noted that Durham has an overall population over five times the size of Hartlepool. In contrast, Stockton Council have two staff with responsibility to manage allotments, however neither have dedicated time to do this, so management is done on an ad-hoc basis. North Tyneside had the most similar staffing structure to HBC, having historically employed two allotment officers. However, due to budget cuts there is now only a single officer handling the day-to-day management of allotments, with assistance from the internal business support team.

Management

All sites in Hartlepool are HBC managed. There is limited appetite for association self-management. Wider stakeholders noted that alternative management structures could improve the quality of the sites across the area. For example, whilst some stakeholders acknowledged that self-management has not previously worked, they suggested that Parish Council management could be a more successful alternative. Other stakeholders referenced that their sites had previously offered the option to be self-managed, showing an appetite for this among some locations within the borough.

Both Parish/Town Council and Charitable Trust managed models have proven successful in other local authority areas, with many areas employing a combination of multiple management structures. There have been considerable challenges with association self-management. Half of local authority survey respondents stated that association self-management had proven to be 'unsuccessful'. However, out of the local authorities that had trusts who managed allotments, one rated this management structure as 'mostly successful' and one rated this as 'very successful'. Out of the local authorities that had Parish Council managed sites, one rated this form of management as 'mostly successful' and one as 'very successful'. Overall, whilst association self-management was most common amongst survey respondents, it was found to present significant challenges.

Figure 8. Levels of success of each alternative model of management according to survey respondents

Levels of success of each alternative model of management

Model	Somewhat successful	Very unsuccessful	N/A	Successful	Unsuccessful
Trust	20.00%	20.00%	60.00%		
Parish Council	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%		
Association		33.33%		16.67%	50.00%

Legend: ■ Very successful ■ Successful ■ Somewhat successful ■ Unsuccessful ■ Very unsuccessful ■ N/A
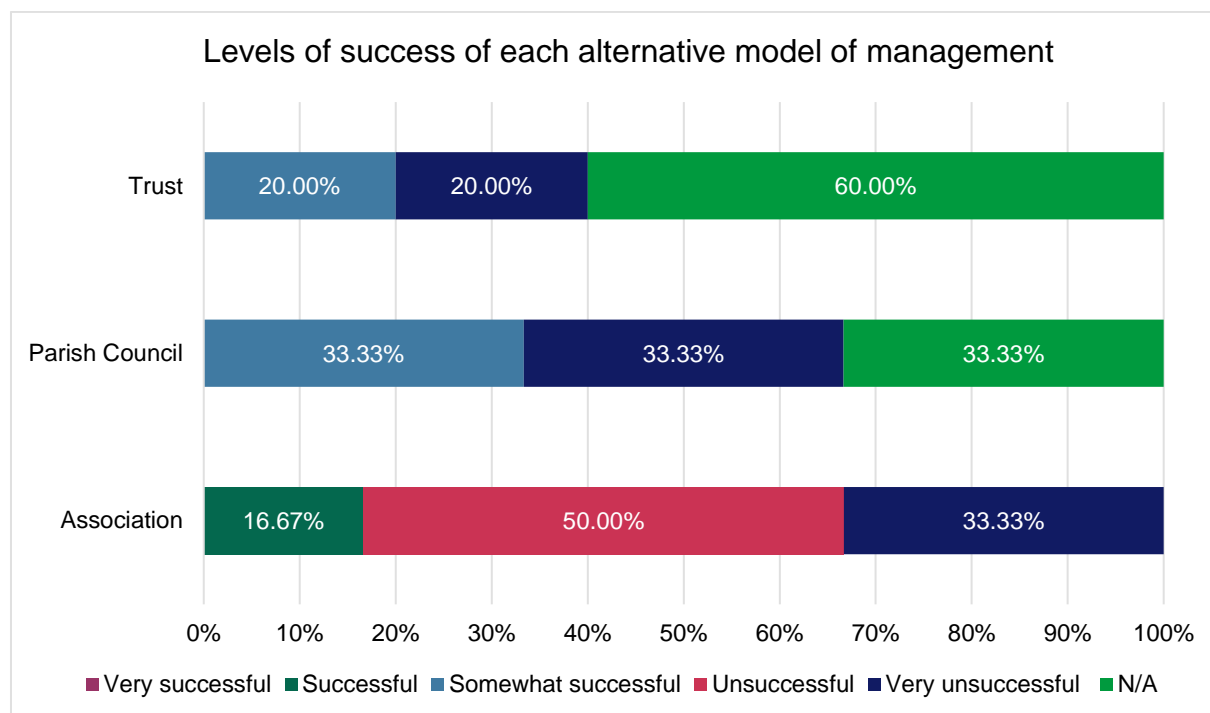
The greatest benefits of alternative models of management given by local authorities were better access to funding and increased pride in place, with 40% of respondents rating these as the 'most significant' benefits. 'Other' answers included cheaper rent as a significant benefit, however this was isolated to association self-managed sites. Significant challenges included member conflicts and the failure of associations to plan for the long-term, leading to loss of plots through irreversible neglect.

Figure 9. Benefits of alternative models of management, according to survey respondents

Benefits of alternative models of management, ranked 1-5 (where 1 is the least significant and 5 is the most significant)

	1	2	3	4	5
Better quality facilities		20.00%	40.00%		40.00%
Better control over lettings and re-lettings	20.00%		20.00%	40.00%	20.00%
Increased pride in place	40.00%		40.00%		20.00%
Better long-term vision		40.00%		40.00%	20.00%
Better access to funding	40.00%	40.00%		20.00%	

Legend: ■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5
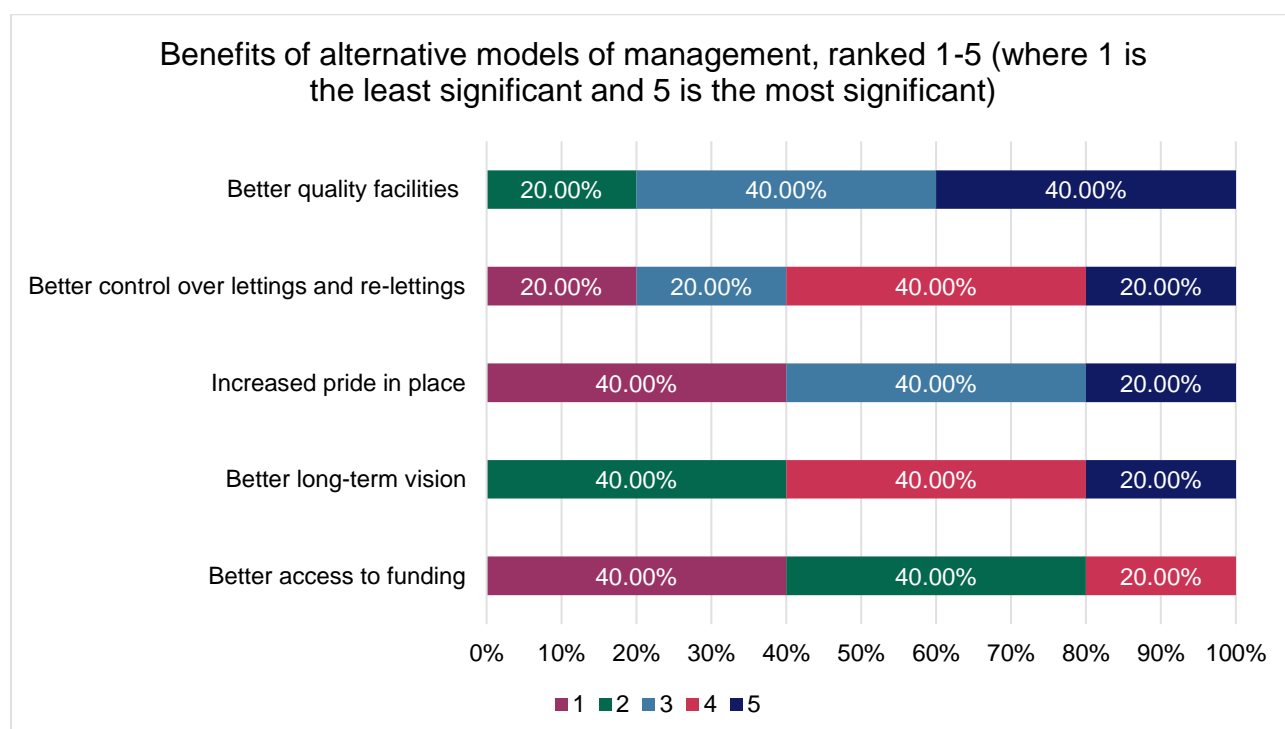
With the above findings in mind, the below case studies present successful examples of alternative management structures used within other local authorities that can be drawn upon by HBC to inform approaches for reducing financial and resource pressures.

4.1 Case Study

Charitable Trusts

Background

An option taken by a number of local authorities across the country when looking to implement alternative models of management across their allotment sites is to transfer management to a charitable trust. Charitable trusts are typically comprised of existing tenants willing to take on the responsibility of becoming trustees. There are a number of benefits to implementing this model of management for both tenants and local authorities. For example, there are greater opportunities to secure funding and therefore often lead to improved quality of sites, as well as significantly reducing the burden on local authority staff.

An example of this form of management is the allotment service within the City of York, whose allotments are currently managed by YACIO. In 2016/2017, York City Council reviewed the management of their allotments, and as part of this conducted numerous meetings with groups of tenants to establish an agreed way forward. It was collectively decided that a charitable trust would be the most appropriate model of management. As part of this decision, a small group of five existing tenants volunteered to form the Trust, which has now expanded to a total of eight trustees. Once formed, the Trust was given an initial 7-year lease of allotment sites from York City Council. YACIO currently manages 16 sites, each of which have one or more site secretaries who are given one free plot as an incentive to fulfil this role. In addition to these site representatives, YACIO currently employ a part time administrator. These site representatives are responsible for lettings and inspections, and report back to trustees. YACIO's sole form of income is the rent, which they collect across all of their sites.

Successes

Reported successes of this form of management within the City of York were increased control over lettings and re-lettings, alongside improved site maintenance and increased accountability to tenants. It was also noted that better access to funding is a core benefit, but they reported not having had the opportunity to exploit this yet.

Challenges

The challenges of this model of management related to the initial stages of establishing the Trust. These challenges centred around difficulty with datasets inherited from the Council and the inclusion of anomalies, which absorbed a significant amount of administrative time. The main issues included conflicts among tenants, and a lack of authority held by the Trust in comparison to local authority. It was reported that many disputes are historical and have been ongoing over a long period of time, and that these can often include 'factions' on sites that have regular conflict with one another. Having a robust complaints procedure and mediation processes has been effective in resolving disputes, meaning that implementation of the ultimate sanction of eviction has been rare.

> ❝ *Some tenants are more likely to disregard something from a charity of trustees.*
>
> **Trust Member**

Resource Implications for the Local Authority

Due to independence of the Trust, the role that local authorities are required to fulfil in this form of management is limited. The Trust is responsible for all daily operations across sites, as well as administration, thus for Trust-managed sites the resource implications for local authorities is minimal. Trusts are required to report to local authority staff on an annual basis for a review, however unless significant issues arise the resources required from the local authority to complete these reviews are negligible. Ultimately, Trusts are completely autonomous, meaning that this form of management across some or all allotment sites would inevitably reduce financial and resource burdens on local authorities.

Requirements for Implementation

Implementation would require an appetite of tenants to take on the responsibility of forming and establishing a Trust, as well as the ongoing responsibility of managing sites. It is a significant job for tenants, and therefore finding individuals with both the capacity and capability may be difficult. It should however be noted that Trusts only require one trustee, and whilst this would not be recommended, a charitable Trust could be established by a small group of interested individuals.

> ❝ *What I'm trying to show is that we are completely autonomous. We don't have to ask the Council's permission to make changes.*
>
> **Trust Member**

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Parish Councils

Background

According to Paragraph 9 of Schedule 29 to the Local Government Act 1972:

"If there is a Town or Parish Council in a particular area, then the responsibility for allotments within the boundaries of that town or parish lies with them."[3]

This means that where there is an established Parish Council in the area, the responsibilities for allotments within the area lies with them. Where new parish councils are established after the implementation of this act, it is recommended that local authorities transfer the ownership of allotments to them. However, whilst local authorities can request that Parish Councils take ownership, it is not mandatory for them to accept.

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[3] Allotments and the law (allotmoreallotments.org.uk)

An example of this form of management is in County Durham, where Parish Council owned allotments are common. Durham had to consider an alternative model to ensure allotments were resourced appropriately. As part of this, some sites were transferred to Parish Councils that are completely independent from the County Council and have total ownership over the operations of their sites. The only involvement from the County Council is the provision of advice on an informal basis.

Successes

The main success of this model of management, from a local authority perspective, would be the elimination of costs for these sites, which significantly reduces resource and financial burdens on the Council's allotment service.

Challenges

Due to the complete independence, there are no challenges to the County Council.

Requirements for Implementation

In Hartlepool, the main challenge of implementing this model would be the willingness of Parish/Town Councils in Hartlepool to take on allotment sites. However, there may be an opportunity for the development of formal advisory processes between HBC and Parish/Town Councils, which may instil greater confidence, increasing the likelihood of them taking them on.

> **If we could put them all out to Parish, we wouldn't need an allotment service at all.**
>
> **Local Authority Staff**

Self-Management

Background

Allotment associations are comprised of a number of tenants on individual sites with particular vested interest in that site. Across a number of local authorities, associations self-manage sites via a lease from local authorities or work alongside them on a partnership basis. There are a number of examples of local authorities in the region with self-managed sites, including Durham, North Tyneside, Stockton, and Middlesbrough.

Working Arrangements

Each of the examples of self-management are slightly different, with respective local authorities having a different role in self-management of sites. For example, in Durham, associations manage sites on a partnership basis. This means that as the landlord, the County Council have the overall control whilst associations are responsible for the initial enforcement of regulations and are the first point of contact for complaints and issues. Associations also decide rental rates, collect, and keep rental income and are responsible for all repairs and maintenance. To ensure the effectiveness of self-management, Durham County Council have recently implemented policies to hold associations to greater account in terms of complaints procedures and financial planning. In North Tyneside, associations lease land and have their own constitutions, create their own rules and regulations and vote in their own committee members, meaning that the local authority has no power to intervene. It is therefore clear that the

working arrangements between associations and local authorities differ across areas and are somewhat flexible based on the needs and resources of individual local authorities and allotment tenants in their area.

Successes

Self-management in North Tyneside has led to greater levels of community involvement, resulting in increased community cohesion among tenants on sites. In Middlesbrough, community allotment associations have been helpful in widening participation in allotments, further expanding the social impact. Specific associations in Middlesbrough provide small plots for people just starting out with allotments and provide training and free tools for community use. These associations have also secured funding to expand this training.

Challenges

There are challenges with self-managed sites. For example, there have been examples of a lack of sustainability in associations, due to difficulties in securing commitment of volunteers to be on the committee and of community management and leadership capability. In multiple areas it was reported that there was often a lack of understanding of 'self-management', resulting in sites being keen to be self-managed for cheaper rent, but not having the desire to run the sites. There are also examples of some associations where committee members have run sites for their personal benefit, leading to a large number of plots being given to their friends and family. Finally, the last reported challenge with self-management is inadequate recording of financial records.

In arrangements where the local authority is the landlord and therefore sustains overall responsibility, they have the full power to mitigate some of these issues. For example, where plots are being misused, they have the power to remove individuals from the site.

Resource Implications

Despite the challenges, association self-management can be effective in reducing the cost for local authorities. For example, in Durham it was reported that the cost of Durham County Council providing an allotment directly is approximately £280, when accounting for management, administration and maintenance. However, for an association managed partnership site, the cost is approximately £70 due to the association taking sole responsibility for maintenance.

Requirements for Implementation

To implement this model in Hartlepool, there would need to be suitable associations on specific sites that were willing to be self-managed. HBC would need to assess which working arrangements would be most suited to their needs, in terms of the level of resource they are able to give and the amount of authority they wish to retain.

Where this model of management is implemented, it should be noted that multiple local authorities stressed the importance of consistent management structures when handling complaints and queries from association members and attempting to resolve issues. Robust procedures should be implemented, and staff at all levels should communicate with one another to ensure these procedures are followed consistently.

Volunteers

In addition to implementing alternative models of management, many local authorities use volunteers to fulfil varying roles on site, helping to reduce resource pressures and safeguard staff capacity without additional costs.

For example, in North Tyneside the Council use volunteer 'site representatives' who assist in showing plots to vacant tenants, are responsible for receiving deliveries on sites and other general tasks such as helping to clear vacant plots. These representatives have no authority or input into the management of the site, and their role is to act as 'eyes' on site at all times to report issues. These volunteers are also given a discount on their rent as an incentive for filling this role. Similarly, in Middlesbrough there are site 'caretakers', who are community members that are responsible for showing vacant plots to prospective tenants, reporting issues on site, and receiving deliveries. As an incentive, caretakers are given two free plots.

> *They [caretakers] are absolutely crucial on those bigger sites.*
> **Local Authority Staff**

5 Administration

HBC operate a largely paper-based administrative processes. There has been a recent move to some forms of digital communication such as sending text messages to arrange inspection appointments for no-access plots, and sending offer runs through email. Some concern was expressed during this research around digital exclusion, especially given the older demographic of allotment holders. Many other local authorities have moved to almost wholly digital administration, with the exception of sending paper copies to a small number of residents who do not have access to emails. As seen in Figure 10 below, all survey respondents ranked all forms of digitalisation 'very successful' or 'successful', with the exception of online queries, which 20% ranked 'somewhat successful'. The specific benefits are further broken down in Figure 11, which shows that faster processing of applications is the most significant benefit of digitalised administration, with 60% of respondents rating this either the most or the second most significant.

Figure 10. Levels of success of each form of digitalisation according to survey respondents

Level of success of each form of digitalisation

Category	Somewhat successful	Mostly successful	Very successful
Surrendering of plots		25.00%	75.00%
Queries	20.00%	20.00%	60.00%
Complaints		25.00%	75.00%
Communication		40.00%	60.00%
Tenancy agreements		50.00%	50.00%
Application forms			100.00%

Legend: ■ Not at all successful ■ Mostly unsuccessful ■ Somewhat successful ■ Mostly successful ■ Very successful
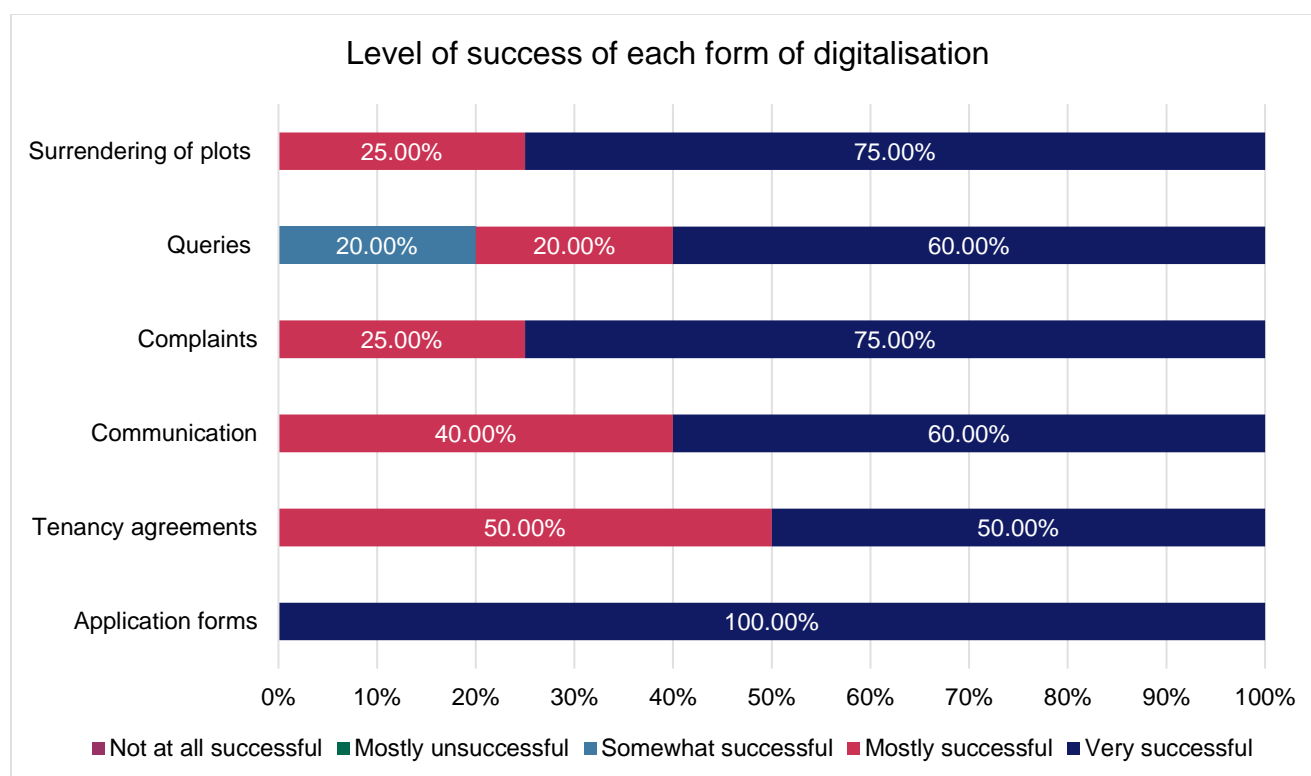
Figure 11. Benefits of digitalisation, according to survey respondents

Benefits of digitalisation, ranked from 1 to 6 (where 1 is the most significant and 6 is the least significant)
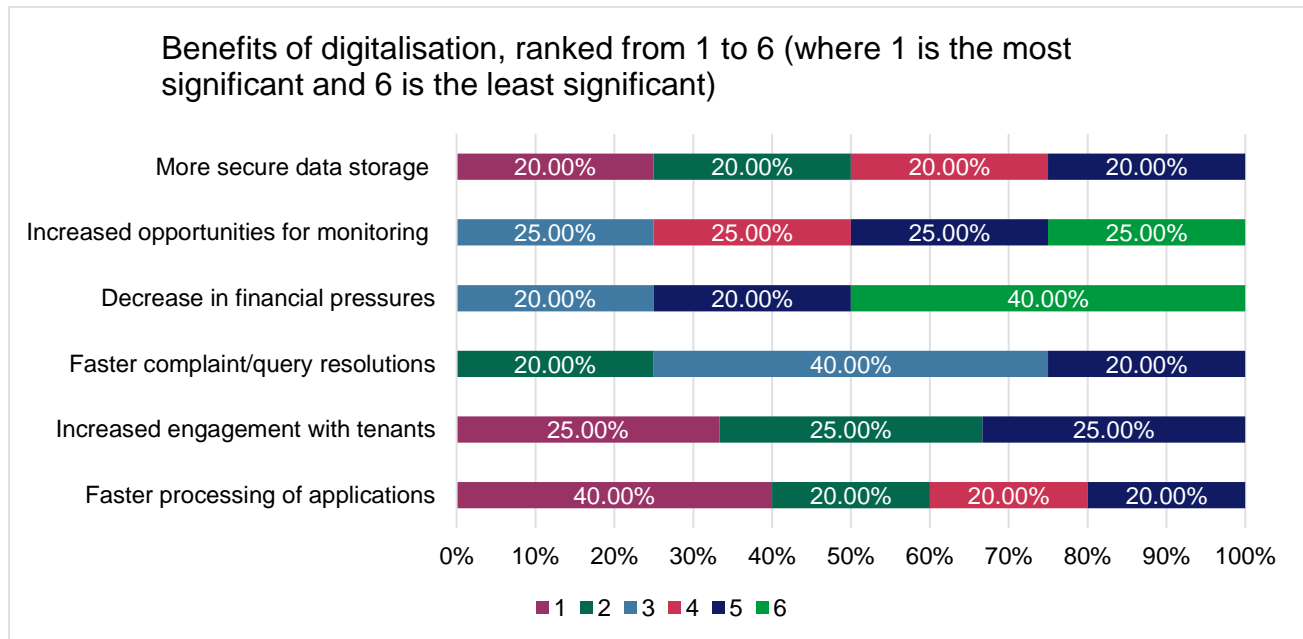
Despite the clear success of digitalised administration, local authority survey respondents did note some challenges. As seen in Figure 12, the most significant of these challenges is digital poverty, which leads to potential exclusion of some tenants and necessitated the use of some forms of paper administration for these individuals.

Figure 12. Challenges of digitalisation, according to survey respondents

Challenges of digitalisation, ranked from 1 to 4 (where 1 is the most significant, and 4 is the least significant)
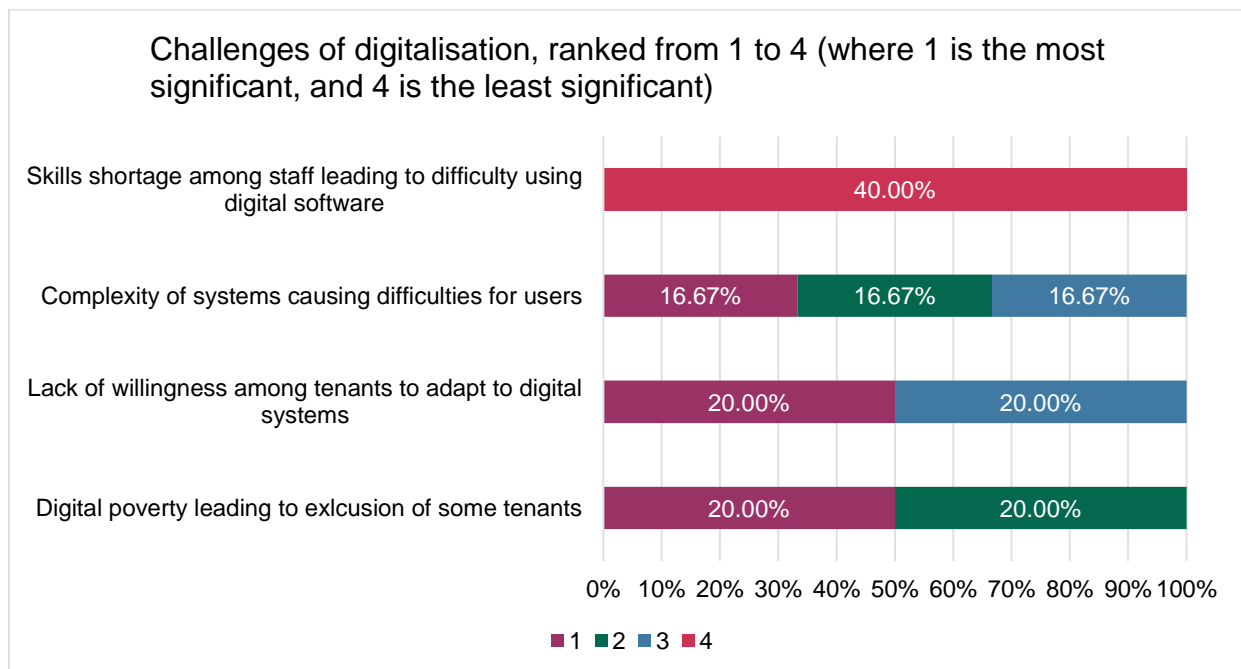
With the above findings in mind, the below case studies present successful examples of digitalisation implemented by other local authorities, with the aim of presenting comprehensive case studies of best

practice that can be drawn upon by HBC to inform future strategies for reducing time spent on administrative tasks.

5.1 Case Study

Digitalisation

Background

Authorities that reported using digital systems for multiple elements of their administrative systems included Durham County Council, North Tyneside Council and YACIO. They all use the Colony allotments software system, which is a platform created specifically for the management of allotment sites. The Colony software has a variety of functions to make administrative tasks less burdensome. Some of the uses reported by local authorities we interviewed include:

- Log online queries and respond electronically

- Applications

- Documentation

- Run reports on tenants and waiting lists

- Issue notices

- Storage of inspection photographs

Some local authorities reported using the software as a standalone product, whilst others have integrated this with their customer service system. Integration with local authority systems was highly praised, meaning that all documentation related to tenancy is held in tenants' online portals, meaning documentation is easily accessible for both parties.

Successes

All of the local authority respondents noted that using Colony was successful. There were no reports of significant pushback from tenants, and the transition to digital systems was said to be smooth for both tenants and staff. Furthermore, Colony was regarded as extremely efficient, saving administrative time, and speeding up processes such as offering plots, accepting plots, and signing tenancy agreements. The majority of tenants in all local authority areas we interviewed used these online systems with little to no difficulties.

Challenges

Despite the mostly successful move to digital systems, there were some difficulties in terms of initial integration for some local authorities. For example, one faced challenges when attempting to merge Colony with their internal systems. Some local authorities highlighted that digital software is always at risk of downtime, and that payment systems have failed in some instances meaning that tenants have paid their rent, but this has not been recorded.

Resource Implications

Whilst all of the local authorities we interviewed said that most of their tenants used online methods of communication and payment, there are small numbers of older tenants who lack digital skills. This means that most local authorities who use digital systems also communicate with some tenants via post, but due to the small number it was not reported as being a significant burden.

In terms of financial implications, the cost for Colony systems was noted as being around £1500 per annum, not including onboarding charges or additional charges for extra users. A breakdown of costs can be seen below.

Qty	Item	Cost (excl. VAT)	Total (excl. VAT)
Colony subscription costs			
1	First user	£1,245.00	£1,245.00
2	Additional users (ea.)	£130.00	£260.00
Standard onboarding costs			
1	Data transfer (2 days)	£1,600.00	£1,600.00
1	Induction training	£1,495.00	£1,495.00
		Total investment (Year 1)	£4,600.00
		Annual renewal* (Year 2+)	£1,505.00

*Prices quoted may be adjusted for inflation upon annual renewal. [4]

Requirements for Implementing

At the moment, HBC does not have any form of online system that allows staff to perform administrative tasks digitally. The most commonly used software is the Colony system, which HBC would need to purchase. If implementing these systems, adequate time for staff to adapt to these new processes should also be expected and accounted for.

> *We haven't had to take any new staff on or anything. If anything, it's more efficient because it reduces time spent on admin.*
>
> **Local Authority Staff**

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[4] 165282958286032-pricing-document-2020-07-20-1440.pdf (digitalmarketplace.service.gov.uk)

6 Community Participation

HBC does not currently have any Council owned community plots on their allotment sites. There is an association led community plot at Waverley Terrace site which has proven successful. A local school previously rented a plot on the Chester Road site, however this was not sustainable due to staff turnover. Working alongside a myriad of community groups has been successful in other local authorities, with some invested groups even securing funding to improve their plots. All but one of the local authorities who responded to the survey had community plots. The most significant benefits to introducing community plots was encouraging a wider range of people to engage with allotments, with two thirds of respondents rating this as the most significant, and the remaining third rating this as the second most significant.

Figure 13. Benefits of community plots, according to survey respondents
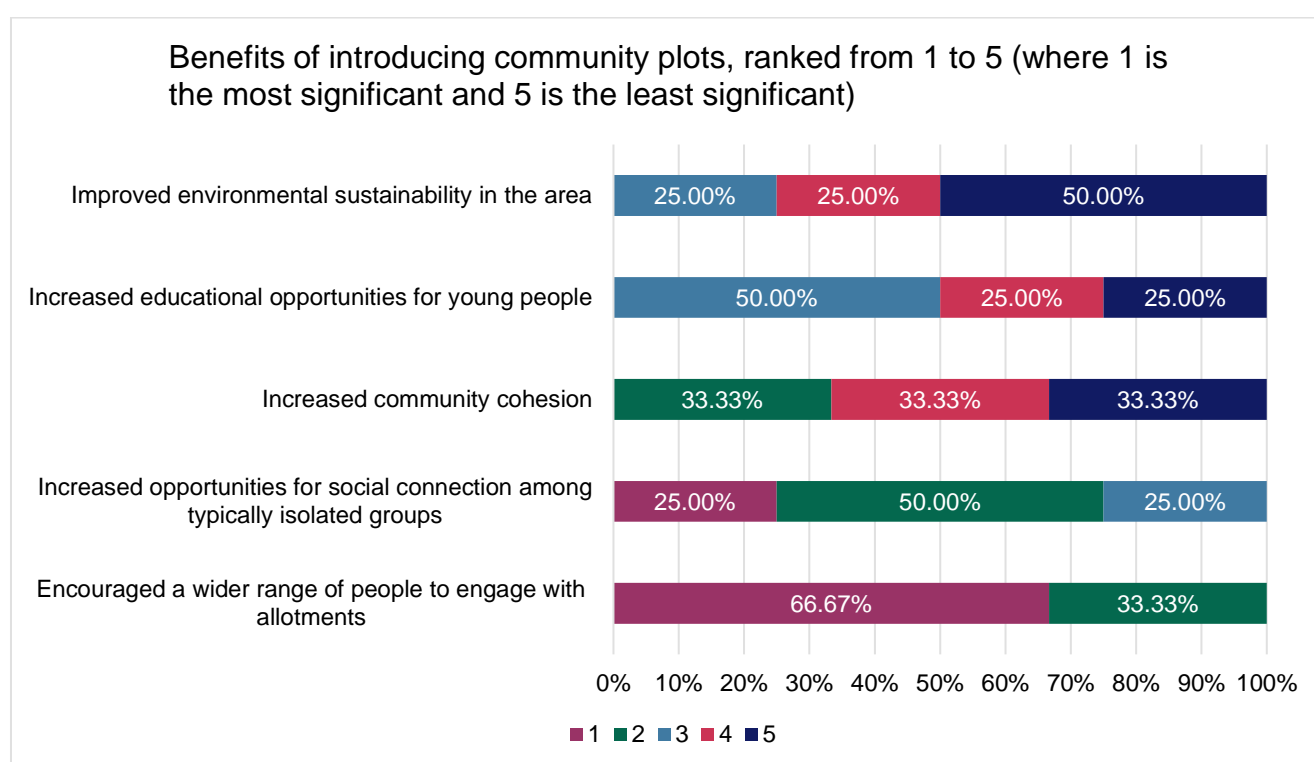
Sustainability is a common issue and plots often become underused once enthusiastic people leave these organisations. As seen in Figure 14 below, this was ranked the most significant challenge, with over half (60%) of respondents ranking it as either the most (40%) or second most (20%) significant. This was closely followed by a lack of initial engagement, with 60% of respondents rating this as either the most (20%) or second most (40%) significant challenge.

Challenges with community plots, ranked from 1 to 3 (where 1 is the most significant and 3 is the least significant)

	1	2	3	N/A
Additional resource burdens for allotment officers			40.00%	60.00%
Underutilisation/lack of initial engagement	20.00%	40.00%		40.00%
Lack of sustainability	40.00%	20.00%		40.00%

There is an interest in widening participation across HBC allotment sites. To support this, a buddying system has been integrated into their strategy. There are significant concerns around the implementation of this system, specifically in terms of the time taken to find and link suitable buddies. It was suggested by HBC staff that a more informal system could be implemented, with Council-led events being held to introduce prospective tenants to existing tenants with the objective of individuals finding buddies through these events. Buddying systems exist in other local authorities, with prospective buddies being able to apply using online forms. Other local authorities operate a variety of alternative methods to widen participation in allotments, such as disabled parking spaces, wide pathways, raised beds and accessible gates/openings. Figure 15 shows the success of these. The most successful of these methods was found to be wide pathways, with the majority (80%) stating that this was 'very successful' in widening participation, followed by raised beds, with over half (75%) of respondents rating this as either 'very successful' or 'successful'.

Figure 15. Levels of success of each method of widening participation, according to survey respondents
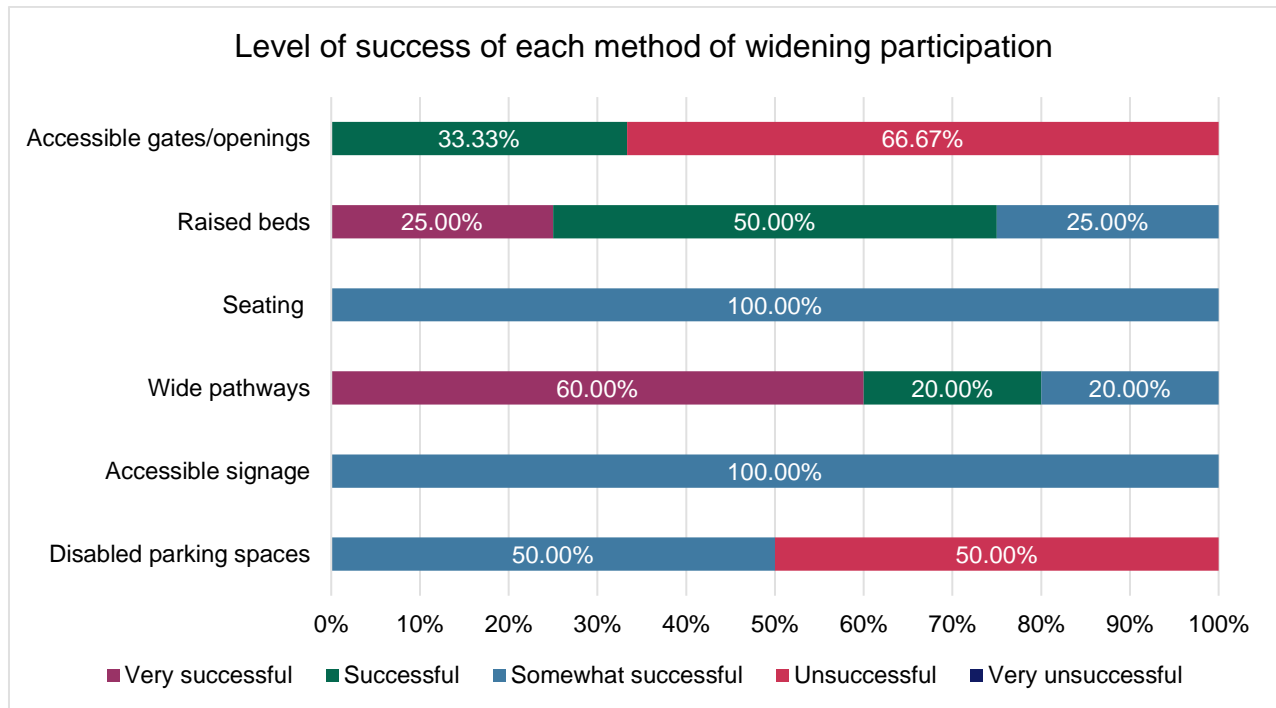
The case studies below present successful examples of community participation from other local authorities, with the aim of presenting best practice ideas that can be drawn upon by HBC to inform the future approach.

6.1 Case Study

Community Plots

Background

Multiple local authorities interviewed as part of this review reported having community plots. However, the majority of these local authorities rented plots to community groups, rather than having plots open to anyone within the community. The most comprehensive examples, and therefore the areas discussed within this case study are Middlesbrough, North Tyneside, and York. In Middlesbrough, the Council have a successful partnership with Community Ventures, who rent two plots within the sites. This group has secured funding to improve their plot, which has been of benefit to the site. In North Tyneside, the allotment service has three plots which are rented out to community plots. In York, the number is much higher, with YACIO renting a total of thirty community plots to a range of groups including schools, Mind, Migrants' organisations, community groups for people with disabilities, and Kids Community Allotment groups.

Distribution and Rental Arrangements

Both Middlesbrough and North Tyneside charge standard rental rates to all community groups looking to take on a plot. YACIO do not charge most community groups, with the exception of schools who are required to pay the standard rental rate. When applying for a plot, community groups are treated like all other prospective tenants in all three local authorities. This means that they are offered plots in the same way as individuals. For rental purposes, there is usually a named individual within each community group who is responsible. If this responsible individual leaves, local authorities are typically able to transfer responsibility to another individual, as long as they are a member of management within this community group.

Resource Implications

When asked why they don't offer plots that are open to the community, North Tyneside stated that it poses too many challenges in terms of maintenance, and that staff do not currently have the capacity to manage this. Therefore, where individuals contact the allotment service looking for community gardens, the Council refer them to VODA, whom they work in close partnership with. In relation to community groups renting plots, this places no additional burden on local authority staff. In Middlesbrough, it was reported that community groups do everything themselves, such as installing gates, creating raised beds, and clearing plots, and have never approached the Council for assistance with this.

Challenges

The main challenge reported with renting plots to community groups was sustainability. In all local authorities, it was reported that turnover can negatively affect the use of these plots. It was often noted that there is usually one or two lead individuals within groups who are focused on and enthusiastic about growing, however when they leave interest wanes and plots are unkept and uncultivated. Local authorities said that they encourage honesty from the outset, asking groups to surrender plots if they are no longer able to cultivate, and serve community groups with the same non-cultivation warnings as other tenants.

Requirements for Implementation

There would be very little additional resource implications should HBC wish to rent plots to community groups, as rental processes would be much the same as those used for individual tenants. However, should HBC wish to open plots to the community, this would require local authority staff to take responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of these plots which could prove burdensome.

" *We would like to do more with community plots, but in theory it's not straightforward. Maintenance standards can be tricky. It's not so much the admin, it's the fact that groups take on a plot full of enthusiasm and that wanes as a result of change in personnel.*

Local Authority Staff

7 Improving Security

HBC implement security measures such as height barriers, locked gates, and high fencing across their allotment sites, to combat break ins and fly tipping. Fly tipping across sites remains a persistent challenge and has proven difficult to address.

HBC has previously attempted to combat the fly tipping issue on its sites through the use of height barriers, however these have been sawn off or in instances driven through by transit vans. Due to budgetary constraints, HBC is currently unable to provide regular methods of waste disposal such as skips and note that if this was provided it would be a weekly requirement. HBC are reluctant to close sites off to cars, due to potential complaints from tenants and the apparent issues with accessibility that this would cause. Potential suggestions from wider stakeholders have included self-locking gates and CCTV. Whilst self-locking gates were not raised as an idea during discussions with HBC staff, they noted that CCTV had previously been considered. Funding both initial installation and monitoring of sites is seen as unfeasible especially given the cost versus the likelihood of prosecution.

Among other local authorities that responded to our survey, the most commonly used security measure was palisade fencing, with all respondents stating that this was used on their sites. This was closely followed by both increased visibility and signage advising of CCTV and/or Smart Water, with 65% stating that both of these measures were used in their area.

Figure 16. Use of security measures among local authority survey respondents
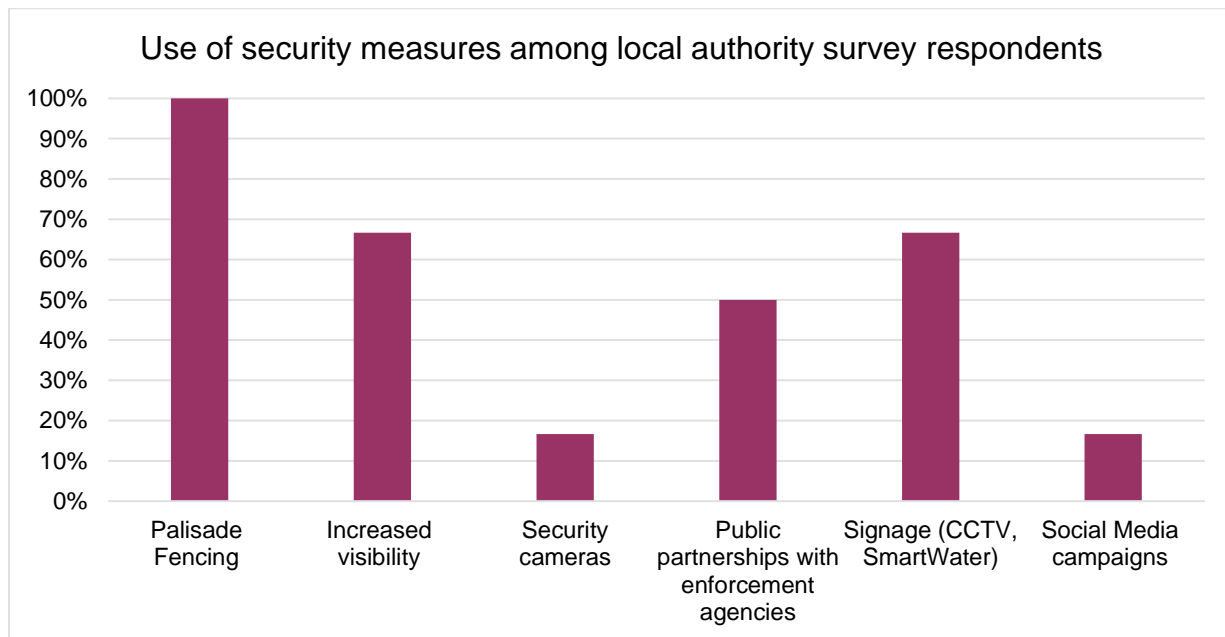
Figure 17 shows the extent to which local authorities regard each security measure as being successful. The security measure most frequently ranked as 'very successful' was palisade fencing, rated as such by 66.67% of respondents, as seen in Figure 15 below.

Figure 17. Levels of success of each security measure, according to survey respondents
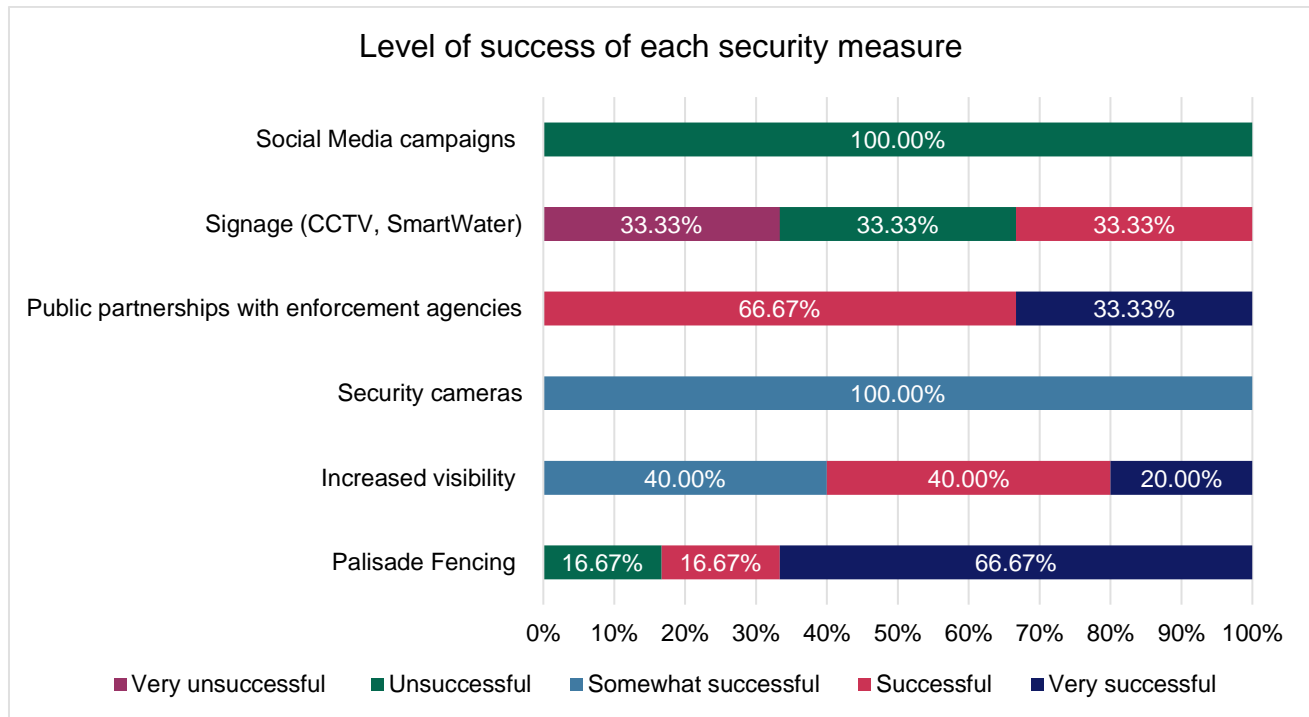
With the above findings in mind, the below case studies present successful examples of security measures implemented by other local authorities, with the aim of presenting comprehensive case studies of best practice that can be drawn upon by HBC to inform future strategies for improving security measures on their sites.

7.1 Case Study

Increased Visibility

Background

Local authorities cited that increased visibility has been effective in reducing ASB and fly tipping on their sites. This means that sites have an external palisade fence and no internal fencing, meaning that residents living in the surrounding area, and members of the community passing the site are able to see across the whole site. Ultimately, this acts as a deterrent as there is a greater risk of trespassers being seen, in contrast to traditional allotment sites which have high fences that provide barriers and secrecy.

Effectiveness

In the view of Durham County Council, increased visibility not only creates a safer site but is also effective in generating a greater feeling of community as tenants are able to see each other. When tenants can view each other's plots on open sites, they have found that plots are often maintained better and are of a higher standard, due to perceived peer pressure. The lack of internal fencing also means fences are not available for people to store piles of waste against. Durham County Council had no firm evidence as to whether this had resulted in a decrease in fly tipping but did cite examples of sites with no internal fencing in historically deprived areas that "always look immaculate". In contrast, sites with higher fences see more crime and ASB throughout the area. There is limited evidence as to whether this is correlation or causation.

Challenges

Despite the benefits, Durham County Council noted pushback from tenants who feel that a lack of fencing puts their plot at risk. To resolve this issue, Durham County Council allows internal fencing of certain specifications. Internal fencing must be post and wire, and no higher than waist height. To ensure these regulations are enforced, fencing specifications are included in tenancy agreements.

Resource Implications

There are some potential resource implications, should HBC look to utilise this method across their sites. Due to the requirement for internal fences to be removed rather than installed, there are no costs of material for this element. However, the installation of external palisade fencing would be costly to the Council. Time and resources would need to be deployed to remove existing fencing, and additional costs for waste disposal should be considered. Finally, fence height would need to be specified in tenancy agreements and would have to be added to inspection agendas, potentially creating additional administrative tasks during yearly inspections. It is suggested that tenants are consulted prior to any HBC decision.

> *There are multiple benefits, but tenants are of the view that they must build their castle walls up high.*
>
> **Local Authority Staff**

CCTV

Background

CCTV cameras and security patrol companies have been used in other local authority areas, to both deter perpetrators of ASB and fly tipping and allow identification of offenders where this does happen. In Stockton, persistent hotspots for fly tipping led to the local authority securing funding from a Ward Councillor's delegated Community Participation Budget to install a camera. This funding also included financing the ongoing monitoring of this camera. In Middlesbrough, the Council has installed cameras at the main gate of some sites. In York, YACIO employed a security company for a few nights to patrol sites where ASB and fly tipping were recurrent issues.
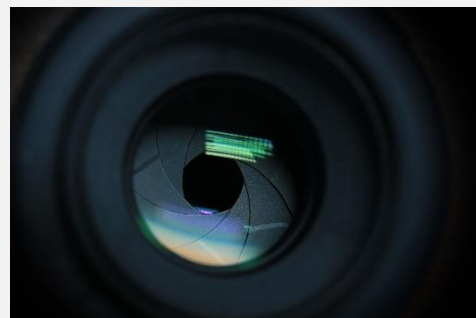
Effectiveness

Regarding the installation of CCTV cameras, experience differed across local authorities. For example, Stockton noted that the camera has been successful in acting as a deterrent, whilst Middlesbrough noted that there are multiple access points to allotments and that where cameras are placed at main gates, trespassers will usually enter at an alternative point along the perimeter. Cameras are not often effective in identifying perpetrators, as they often wear hoods and cover their faces. The time of trespass is not always known, so it takes time to review footage. In York, the sub-contracting of a security company was regarded as costly and ineffective, as the private companies do not have the authority to catch perpetrators.

Resource Implications

CCTV has previously been considered by HBC but not been implemented due to the cost. It has been noted that there is only a small likelihood of securing convictions (which has been the experience in Middlesbrough) as footage has proven to be of minimal use. There was, however, some indication that it could act as a useful deterrent where there are limited access points to sites.

> **The problem with cameras is, they're only as good as the footage they capture. People wear hoods and cover their faces.**
>
> **Local Authority Staff**

8 Improving the Environmental Impact

The following section of the review summarises the approach that HBC take to three key environmental elements of their offer, namely water use, fire permits and waste disposal. This section will then present findings from other local authorities that highlight the initiatives used in different areas.

8.1 Water Use

The approach to water usage and management on allotment sites in Hartlepool is as follows:

- HBC provide unrestricted use of water on all sites
- However, HBC encourages the use of water saving devices such as water butts.

Figure 18 shows which methods of ensuring efficient water use are most commonly adopted among other local authorities. Similarly to Hartlepool, the most common method of efficient water usage on sites among other local authorities was methods of reusing water such as encouraging water butts, with 60% of respondents stating that this was used in their area.

Figure 18. Use of initiatives to ensure efficient use of water among survey respondents
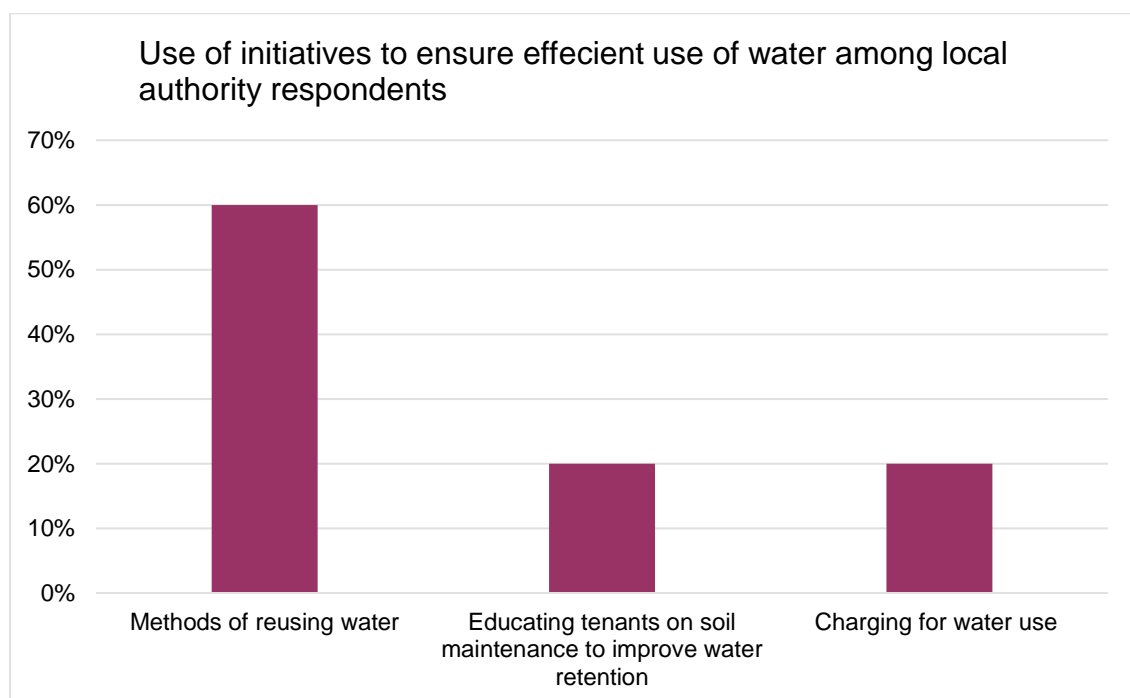
8.2 Fire Permits

Fires are permitted on some sites; however tenants must obtain a permit from the council before burning waste on sites. There are also restrictions on the size of fires, and the type of waste that can be burnt (e.g. only organic waste).

Figure 19 shows the extent to which fires are permitted on sites in other local authority areas. Half of respondents (50%) noted that fires are permitted on all sites.

Whether fires are permitted on sites among local authority survey respondents

8.3 Waste Disposal

HBC encourage tenants to compost organic waste where possible, as a preferred alternative to burning. There are no specific initiatives aimed at encouraging minimising the use of pesticides or allowing overgrowth on specific areas of plots.

Figure 20 shows how other local authorities have adopted environmentally friendly waste disposal initiatives. The most commonly used waste disposal initiative was educating tenants on composting, with 60% of respondents stating that this is used within their service. This is comparable to the approach that HBC currently take.

Figure 20. Use of environmentally friendly waste disposal initiatives among survey respondents

Use of environmentally friendly waste disposal initiatives among local authority respondents
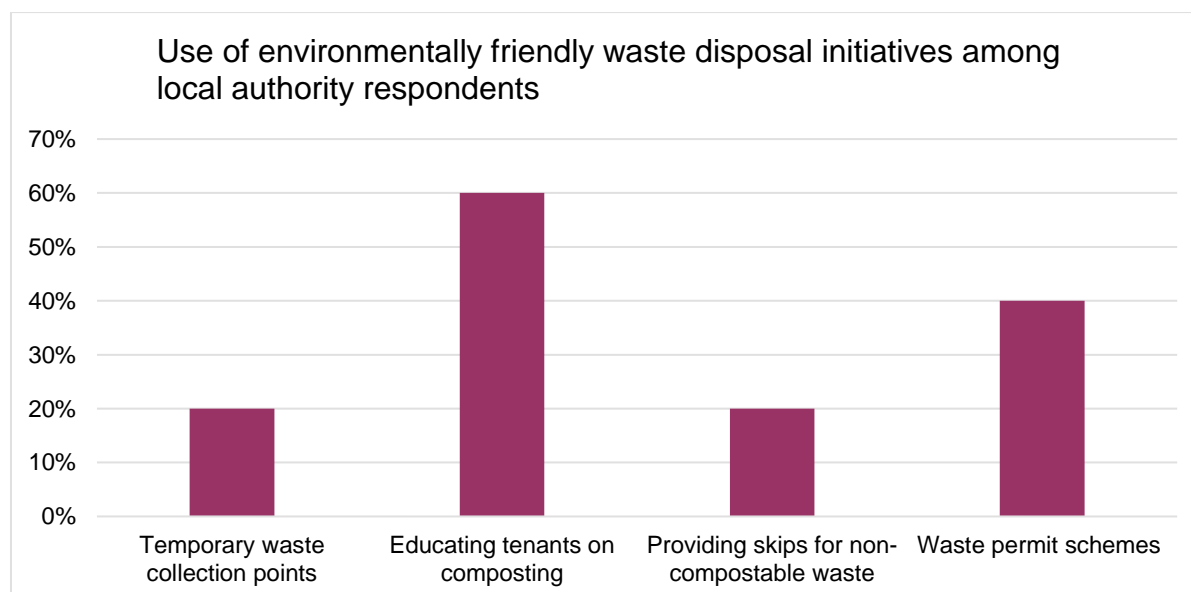
The case studies below present successful examples of initiatives to improve environmental impact within other local authorities, with the aim of presenting comprehensive case studies of best practice that can be drawn upon by HBC to inform the future approach.

8.4 Case Study

Biodiversity

It is a priority for HBC to improve the environmental impact of their allotment sites. Whilst the focus is currently upon efficient water use and waste disposal, this review has identified further opportunities to increase the environmental benefit.

For example, in Middlesbrough, the local authority works alongside Tees Valley Wildlife Trust to ensure the daily operations of their allotment service benefit nature as much as possible. This includes limiting vehicular access to encourage walking or cycling to sites, and a focus on increasing biodiversity. To increase biodiversity across sites, Middlesbrough Council encourage tenants to keep pollinating plants on their allotment sites and limit the use of pesticide. They ask allotment holders if they would be willing to leave a small portion of their plot wild, to help bees and insects. The local authority also limits the trimming of grass verges on sites, to allow longer grass for bees. Finally, the Council encourage and plant community orchards in patches of brambles, to increase the number of trees across their sites. Middlesbrough Council noted that the resource implications for this is minimal.
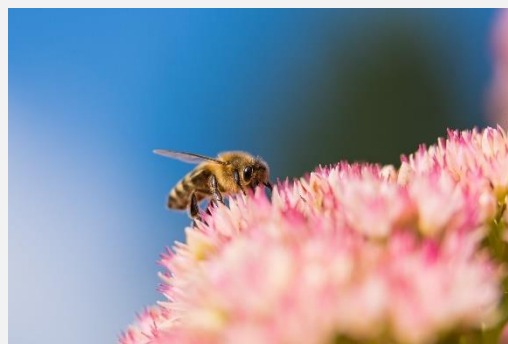
Waste

To encourage responsible disposal of waste, a number of local authorities offer waste permit schemes to allotment holders. For example, in Gateshead, tenants are able to take allotment waste to local recycling centres for free. Similarly, in Darlington the local authority provides waste permits so that non-compostable waste can be disposed of at local waste centres for free. This encourages the proper disposal of waste, ensuring environmentally friendly practices are followed. In Middlesbrough the local authority provides green waste collection once a month to discourage burning where composting is not possible. Other areas such as York and North Tyneside provide waste disposal points on a regular basis at an additional cost. Both of these options would be an additional cost to HBC; however both have been proven to be effective in encourage environmentally friendly waste disposal.

9 Conclusions and Recommendations

9.1 Conclusions

9.1.1 Benchmarking

HBC has more allotment sites than other locations in the Tees Valley area, such as Darlington, Stockton, and Middlesbrough, but fewer than larger local authority areas in the region such as Durham and North Tyneside. In terms of demand for plots, Hartlepool is around average, falling in middle of all surveyed local authorities for both length of waiting list and average wait time. The time taken between surrender to notice to quit being served and a plot being re-let is shorter than other areas, with this happening in a matter of weeks.

Regarding cost, HBC charges £65 for a 200m^2 plot, which places them in the middle of other local authorities in terms of price when excluding Darlington, which charges much more than all other local authorities included in this review. HBC is comparable to areas such as Redcar & Cleveland (£58) and Durham (£54). When considering this alongside what services are included in the offer, whilst HBC is average on price, they also provide more services than those local authorities with lower rental rates. For example, HBC charge slightly higher than Durham County Council, however water is not provided on sites in Durham. HBC charge more than Stockton Council, however HBC take responsibility for maintaining trees and hedges, whereas Stockton does not. Those local authority areas that provide additional items, such as North Tyneside and Gateshead, also charger higher rental rates. Overall, in comparison to other areas the allotment offer in Hartlepool does provide adequate value for money for tenants. Furthermore, out of those areas with comparable levels of deprivation, the majority charge more for rent than HBC. Considering these findings alongside the longstanding freeze in rental prices, it is concluded that a rise in rental costs of 25% (from £1.20 per week to £1.38 per week) for existing tenants would be justified. There is also scope to increase the fees further for people taking on a new plot.

9.1.2 Operational Processes

Association self-managed sites were found to have operational challenges for local authorities that have implemented this and retained a role in overseeing sites. The extent to which local authorities are involved in self-managed sites varies, suggesting that there is scope for different arrangements to fit HBC requirements, should this be considered in the future. Challenges with self-management included conflict among tenants, involvement in associations for personal gain and poor financial management. Local authority case study examples demonstrated that robust policies and procedures that are implemented consistently can help to mitigate issues. In contrast, both Charitable Trust and Parish Council managed sites posed no challenges for local authorities, as these sites become completely autonomous and are responsible for all aspects of operations and administration. Whilst all alternative models were found to reduce financial pressures for local authorities, association-self managed sites often required some ongoing capacity from local authority staff, whereas Charitable Trust and Parish Council managed sites did not.

9.1.3 Administration

In Hartlepool there are concerns around how a transition to a digital process would impact tenants with low digital literacy. All other local authorities who reported using digital administrative processes reported this as being successful. Whilst it was often noted that there was a core of older tenants who did not use online platforms or emails, this was reported as a minority and was decreasing with time. Where local authorities did have to send paper copies in addition, this was not seen as a significant

burden on resources. All local authorities that reported using digital processes used the Colony system that performs a range of roles to reduce capacity needed to perform administrative tasks. This system can be used independently or integrated with existing local authority systems.

Other local authority areas provided examples of how administrative time could be reduced through a change in policies. For example, in Hartlepool, tenancy agreements are currently sent out yearly to avoid adverse possession claims. However, other local authority areas noted that their tenancy agreements are undertaken on a rolling basis to reduce administrative time. As long as rent is paid within 40 days of tenants being sent an invoice, they cannot claim adverse possession. Whilst the legal aspects of this policy have not explicitly been considered as part of this review, this may be of value for HBC to consider.

9.1.4 Community Participation

Local authorities tended to rent plots to community groups, rather than opening individual plots to all of the wider community. Having 'community plots' that are available for any individual to use was said to pose challenges for local authorities in terms of responsibility for maintenance, cultivation, and upkeep of the plot. Local authorities often opted to rent plots out to a wide variety of organisations in their area, ensuring community participation whilst reducing the burden on staff and resources. Where plots were rented to community groups, these were done so using standard rental rates and waiting list procedure.

9.1.5 Improving Security

There are a number of different approaches taken by local authorities to ensure safety and improve security on their allotment sites, Security appeared to be a challenge across most areas. Whilst some local authorities use CCTV cameras, this was found to be largely ineffective in catching offenders but was deemed to be somewhat of an effective deterrent where sites had limited access points. Where this has been used, funding has been secured on the basis of sites becoming hotspots for ASB and fly tipping.

However, one security measure that was considered particularly effective was increased visibility across sites. This involves either removing internal fencing completely, or having low internal fencing, with palisade fencing around the exterior of sites. This was said to act as a deterrent for criminals due to the higher likelihood of getting caught and allow for greater surveillance from both tenants on site, and residents living in surrounding areas.

9.1.6 Improving the Environmental Impact

The majority of local authorities engaged in this research encouraged recycling and efficient water use. Aside from educating tenants on composting and the use of water butts some did not have specific initiatives to improve their environmental impact. Some areas have implemented measures including providing waste permits to tenants for non-compostable waste and banning the use of sprinklers on sites. Half of local authority survey respondents permit fires on some sites. There are limited examples of local authorities implementing measures to improve biodiversity on sites beyond some examples of planting community orchards, encouraging tenants to leave an area of their plot uncultivated for insects, and asking tenants to plant pollinating plants.

9.2 Recommendations

This review has identified many areas of strength within the allotment service in Hartlepool and has shown the extent to which the current offer provides value for money. There are opportunities for HBC to implement new approaches to better manage resources whilst improving the offer for tenants.

Recommendations are included below.

- HBC should consider increasing the fees by a minimum of 25% from £1.20 per week to £1.38 per week, given that fees have remained static for a number of years. This increase would bring the cost of allotments in line with the average charge among other local authorities with similar levels of deprivation.

- Given the high demand for plots and the costs associated with bringing vacant plots to a lettable standard, HBC should consider implementing a 50% increase in fees for new tenants from April 1st, 2025, with the expectation that there will be a 5% increase for all plots taken in subsequent years. **A full breakdown of the effects of the proposed price increases can be found in Appendix A of this review.**

- Where rents are to be increased, HBC should consider implementing concessionary rates. **For more information on typical concessionary rates and eligibility criteria, please see Appendix B.**

- HBC should consider implementing the Colony system or similar to streamline administration and support the Council to introduce new pricing structures such as concessionary rates and/or a tiered pricing system for new tenants from 1st April 2025.

- HBC should consider implementing rolling tenancy agreements to reduce administrative time.

- HBC should consider undergoing a scoping exercise with local stakeholders such as Parish Councils, Town Councils, allotment associations, and individual tenants, to establish appetite for alternative models of management.

- Once scoping is completed, HBC should consider implementing alternative management models. Specifically, HBC should consider the benefits of establishing a Charitable Trust as an alternative to association self-management.

- HBC should consider implementing increased visibility across sites and including regulations for fencing within tenancy agreements as part of this.

- HBC should consider implementing initiatives to better the environmental impact of their sites, for example through working in partnership with recycling centres to provide permits for tenants or considering ways to improve biodiversity.

- HBC should consider implementing improved and regular forms of communications with tenants. This could include fulfilling their target of distributing six newsletters per year, engaging with tenants more effectively via social media, and establishing an online feedback form that is reviewed regularly.

Appendix A

Effects of proposed price increases

Current Price				
Pence per m2	Yearly cost for 200m2 plot	Service charge	Total yearly cost	Total weekly cost
20p	£40.00	£25.00	£65.00	£1.20

10   Existing Tenants

Year 1 (25% increase)					
	Pence per m2	Yearly cost for 200m2 plot	Service charge	Total yearly cost	Total weekly cost
Price with proposed increase (25%)	25p	£50.00	£25.00	£75.00	£1.38
Year 2 (further 5% increase)					
Price with proposed increase (5%)	26.25p	£52.50	£25.00	£77.50	£1.44

Recognising that many existing tenants are likely to have held allotments for a number of years, and therefore took ownership of their plot prior to price increases and when rent was remarkably low, whilst also accounting for the need for HBC to increase prices in line with comparable local authorities, this review proposes a 25% initial increase for new tenants in Year 1 (25/26) with an additional 5% increase annually thereafter. Assuming that these changes would be implemented from next financial year, the next 5 year of rental prices for an average sized plot (200m2) for existing tenants would reflect the following:

Current (FY24/25): £65.00

Year 1 (FY25/26): £75.00

Year 2 (FY26/27): £77.50

Year 3 (FY27/28): £80.12

Year 4 (FY28/29): £82.88

The above rental charges would result in **an initial increase of £10 per plot** for HBC, with further **increases of roughly £2.50** each year thereafter.

11   New Tenants

Year 1 (50% increase)					
	Pence per m2	Yearly cost for 200m2 plot	Service charge	Total yearly cost	Total weekly cost
Price with proposed increase (50%)	30p	£60.00	£25.00	£85.00	£1.57
Year 2 (further 5% increase)					
Price with proposed increase (5%)	31.5p	£63.00	£25.00	£88.00	£1.62

However, new tenants who have not been predisposed to exceptionally low rents in previous years are more likely to recognise the existing value for money of allotment services, even where rents are increased significantly. It is therefore recommended that HBC charge higher rental prices for new tenants than for existing tenants, allowing them to maintain relationships with current plot holders whilst increasing income to help the service move to self-sustainability. Assuming that these changes would be implemented from next financial year, this means that the next 5 year of rental prices for an average sized plot (200m2) for existing tenants would reflect the following:

Current (FY24/25): £65.00

Year 1 (FY25/26): £85.00

Year 2 (FY26/27): £88.00

Year 3 (FY27/28): £91.16

Year 4 (FY28/29): £94.46

The above rental charges would result in **an initial increase of £20** per new occupant for HBC, with further **increases of roughly £3.00** each year thereafter.

Appendix B

Concessionary Rates

On average, local authorities across England charge between 40% and 50% less for allotment plots under concessionary rates. We recommend that if concessionary rates are considered in Hartlepool, discount should fall at the lower end of this scale, due to the considerable value for money the allotment service already provides. Similarly, other leisure services in Hartlepool (see for example, Active Hartlepool) offer a 33.33% concessionary discount on memberships. To reflect the above findings, **it is therefore recommended that HBC provide a 40% discount on rent for those tenants that meet concessionary eligibility requirements.** We propose that this discount should be deducted prior to the addition of the £25 service charge, so as to avoid further maintenance costs for HBC. We therefore propose calculating the new rates as follows:

(pence per m2 x size of plot) - 40% + £25 service charge = yearly concessionary charge.

Should changes be implemented, yearly costs for a standard sized plot (200m2) would be as follows:

	Existing Tenants		New Tenants	
	Standard	**Concession**	**Standard**	**Concession**
Current (FY24/25)	£65.00	£49.00	£65.00	£49.00
Y1 (FY25/26)	£75.00	£55.00	£85.00	£61.00
Y2 (FY26/27)	£77.50	£56.50	£88.00	£62.80
Y3 (FY27/28)	£80.12	£58.07	£91.16	£64.65
Y4 (FY28/29)	£82.88	£59.73	£94.46	£66.68

In the majority of cases, eligibility criteria include:

- Receiving State Pension
- Receiving employment benefits
- Registered disabled
- Being in full-time education

However, there are examples of allotment services such as York Allotments Charitable Incorporated Organisation (YACIO) that only consider being in receipt of means-tested benefits as eligibility for concessionary charges. This means that being in automatic receipt of State Pension benefits does not mean an individual qualifies for discounted rent.

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ADULT AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES COMMITTEE
5 SEPTEMBER 2024

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Subject:　　　HISTORIC PLACES PANEL REPORT

Report of:　　Assistant Director (Preventative and Community Based Services)

Decision Type:　Non-Key

1.　　**COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY**

Hartlepool will be a place:
-　where people are enabled to live healthy, independent and prosperous lives.
-　that is sustainable, clean, safe and green.
-　that has an inclusive and growing economy.

2.　　**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

2.1　The purpose of this report is to provide information on a visit to Hartlepool by the advisory group, the Historic Places Panel and proposed future actions subsequent to the publication of their report.

3.　　**BACKGROUND**

3.1　The Historic Places Panel, convened by Historic England, provides a broad spectrum of independent expertise and advice to help local authorities and others engage in the regeneration and revitalisation of historic places. Panelists have a strong interest in place-making, the historic environment and character of place.

3.2　Representatives from Historic England approached officers and requested a visit to Hartlepool in March 2023, to find out more about the proposals funded through Levelling Up Fund second round investment. Following the visit representatives contacted officers and outlined their intentions to put Hartlepool forward to the panel for a visit funded and resourced by Historic England. Officers considered that this was a positive opportunity to hear the views of experts on current projects in Hartlepool and to raise the profile of the town with individuals who may not have previously been engaged

3.3   Visits provide opportunities for formal and informal networking, presentations, tours of the area, and discussions involving a range of local stakeholder groups, panelists and representatives of Historic England. The panel typically visit three places per year, usually lasting two days and in 2023 Hartlepool hosted the Panel over two days in November.

3.4   Prior to the visit the panel chair, in consultation with the officers and Historic England, set a series of questions that the panel would look to answer during their time in the town.

4.   VISIT

4.1   The visit covered a board range of topics and places. Whilst the panel based themselves at the BIS, time was also spent at Hartlepool Art Gallery, the Northern School of Art, the Northern Studios and the National Museum of the Royal Navy.

4.2   The format included presentations on a variety of topics, for example officers provided general information on Hartlepool and current investment whilst Tees Valley Combined Authority / Hartlepool Development Corporation spoke about their regeneration proposals within the town centre area. There was also background provided on the Art Gallery, Waterfront Schemes, including the Highlight, and an opportunity for the National Museum of the Royal Navy to present their aspirations for their Hartlepool site. Alongside this, walking tours of Church Street, the Waterfront and town centre took place, as well as a visit to the Headland Town Wall for context.

4.3   The Panel invited a variety of local stakeholders to take part along with representatives from national organisations such as Arts Council, National Lottery Heritage Fund and Visit England who joined discussions at varying times during the two days. Local stakeholders who contributed included the Heugh Battery Museum, Love Hartlepool, Thirteen Group, Civic Society and Hartlepool College of Further Education.

4.4   The balance of formal presentations, the chance to walk and talk around areas, and discussions over dinner with invited guests gave the panel the opportunity to obtain a range of views and opinions in order to address the questions they had been tasked to answer.

5.   OUTCOME

5.1   The final report was published on Historic England's website at the start of August and can be found at **Appendix 1**.

5.2   After the publication, the chair of the panel made a follow up visit to Hartlepool with a small number of panel members and Historic England staff, to discuss

the outcome of the report, and reflect on how the recommendations had been received.

5.3   The report acknowledges the transformation which is underway, at speed in Hartlepool. A number of recommendations are made, set out in a short, medium and long term format. These are all positively framed, and discussions with Historic England have suggested that they would be willing to work together to support the delivery of these.

5.4   It is recommended that officers involved in the work form a task and finish group to further explore these recommendations and options for delivery. Hartlepool Borough Council have led the invitation, implementation and follow up of the Historic Places Panel but are unable to implement all recommendations due to the multi-agency approach being taken to the regeneration of the Borough. Officers will now work with Historic England and key stakeholders to advocate for the opportunities that this report presents and consider how further investment can also be secured when opportunities arise.

5.5   There are a number of influential strategic investment 'Boards' or networks that are leading the regeneration, investment and growth of Hartlepool including Hartlepool Development Corporation Board, Production Village Board (Levelling Up), Long Term Plan for Towns Board and Town Deal Board to mention a few. It is proposed that the Historic Places Panel report is presented to each board to ensure a coordinated approach to exploration of the opportunities and recommendations that have been made.

5.5   The visit from the Historic Places Panel was a chance to strengthen links with Historic England and other partner organisations. It was a unique opportunity to gain independent expert advice and guidance which can shape future discussions, and will provide added value to the strategic development proposals which are currently being delivered.

6.   OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

RISK IMPLICATIONS	The report provides advice and guidance based on best practice and there are no risks associated with delivery or non-delivery of recommendations. Consideration will be given to managing relationships across all stakeholders involved in the visit and those who will be influential in delivery of recommendations to ensure issues are managed sensitively in accordance with competing priorities.
FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS	The report provides advice and guidance, based on best practice. There are no expectations regarding financial commitment to the implementation of the

	recommendations. Instead it is about considering 'how' we do things with existing investment and resource already secured and how the report can contribute to a case for future investment or stakeholder engagement.
LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS	The local authority has a statutory duty under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 Section 71(1) to 'formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas'. The report makes recommendations which cover Church Street, Headland and Seaton Carew Conservation Areas. These recommendations can be considered in future work programmes and detail of the report has been shared with planning colleagues.
CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY	No considerations / implications.
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS	Inclusivity and accessibility was considered as part of the visit and is already a key consideration in existing and future schemes.
STAFF CONSIDERATIONS	The visit was arranged in consultation with the Head of Service (Heritage & Open Spaces) who will continue to liaise with Historic England and co-ordinate the Action Plan. The report has been shared internally with a wide range of departments and has an impact cross organisationally.
ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS	The report includes advice and guidance regarding properties owned by HBC which will be considered as these are developed in the future.
ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS	Environmental factors are considered in all projects and schemes in line with HBC policy. Further recommendations and considerations were discussed extensively as part of the visit and will be built into future actions.
CONSULTATION	The panel invited a number of national and local organisations, some outlined in para 4.3. The discussions with these parties have informed the report and the report has been shared with all individuals and organisations who have contributed to the process.

7.   RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1   It is recommended that Members
- note the content of the report and support the development of an action plan in partnership with key stakeholders and 'Boards' to ensure opportunities are maximised based on the expert advice that has been received.
- agree to officers continuing to work with Historic England and other key experts who were part of the panel to explore progression of wider opportunities to benefit Hartlepool's heritage.

8.   REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1   The local authority has a statutory duty under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 Section 71(1) to 'formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas'. This report will assist in shaping future work programmes within conservation areas in Hartlepool.

9.   BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1   None

10.   CONTACT OFFICERS

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Sign Off:-

Managing Director	Date: 13/08/24
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 13/08/24
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 13/08/24

Historic England

Historic Places Panel Review Paper

Hartlepool, November 2023

Contents

Cover Image: The Panel on Church Street, Hartlepool © Historic England

1. Introduction

1.1 Hartlepool is a town rich in history with a striking collection of characterful set-piece townscapes found across a wide, distinctive urban area with huge placemaking potential. Crucial to England's history more than once in its long life, Hartlepool has faced socio-economic decline in the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries like so many northern towns, illustrated by worrying education, health, worklessness and poverty statistics. Today, it is a town with many opportunities to see improvement in local people's lives, driven by inward investment from government funds and the private sector, focused on cultural enterprise, improving transport links and great waterfront development potential.

1.2. Overall, the Panel were supportive of Hartlepool Borough Council's plans and projects and were optimistic about the future of the town. Local people are set to benefit from many viable and exciting capital and revenue projects which, provided they are strongly linked to a wider industrial strategy for town and region, will help lift the community's economic and social fortunes. The Council are to be congratulated in choosing to use investment funds to capitalise on the town's heritage assets as part of their strategic plan.

1.3. The Panel heard much about "putting the heart back into Hartlepool". This emerged during the visit as a strong theme, both physically knitting the town's fragmented urban realm back together, and also by improving the way local communities are positively engaged with and actively able to contribute to the town's revival.

1.4. The Panel were asked to address six questions, and short, medium and long term recommendations are set out under each below. These follow several central themes:

- 1.5. The need for all stakeholders to be working towards a shared vision of how the town's socio-economic performance can be enhanced, requiring improved collaboration between delivery and policy players to avoid risks of duplication, misaligned priorities and silo-working.

- 1.6. Better public participation in devising and delivering projects and programmes, seeing beyond the rapid pace required to deliver short-term funding towards a strategic vision of sustainable placemaking with people.

- 1.7. The importance of history in a much-altered town: the need to understand and use the town's big story, as a tool to inspire rootedness and pride in the future of the place, and as narrative 'glue' where historic buildings are gone.

- 1.8. Plentiful historic buildings in need with great promise; strong joined-up visitor potential; streets and spaces with potential yet in need of a strategy to unlock and enliven them; and some of the best dockland potential on the east coast.

- 1.9. Hartlepool Borough Council must remain focussed on strategic outcomes for local people when delivering at pace, working closely and constructively with partners. Heritage, culture, tourism and leisure can only be the medium for this as part of a complementary programme to integrate skills and learning with a clear industrial strategy.

2. The Visit

2.1   The Historic Places Panel arrived in Hartlepool by train, many using the direct rail link from London. Panellists immediately became aware of current investment in the town both at the railway station, where a new platform and footbridge were under construction, and in the Church Street Revival Townscape Heritage scheme, which has delivered new public realm in the quite intact Victorian high street, one of the focal points of the visit.

2.2.   As context, Panellists were taken by minibus to the Headland, the town's earliest nucleus. As well as briefly admiring Grade I St Hilda's church, the Borough Hall and attractive historic housing, Panellists got their bearings from the scheduled Town Wall where views south highlighted heritage assets in a town of two centres, a port juxtaposed between them, and a location close to both Teesside heavy industry and the North York Moors. Panellists were immediately struck by the town's diverse offering including industry and business, high quality historic architecture and great waterfront potential.

Figure 1 View from the scheduled Town Wall from the Headland © Historic England List Entry Number: 1006761

2.3.   The Panellists' base was the BIS, the recently created shared workspace for creative businesses in a former Victorian Post Office, managed by Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC), the Panel's hosts for the visit. Day 1 started with insight into the town and its future from officers at HBC and Hartlepool Development Corporation (HDC), including an overview of current strategies and masterplans. A walking tour of the town centre followed, and a visit to the town's Arts Gallery in the Grade II* listed former Christ Church. The day finished with a working meal at Hartlepool College of Further Education's Flagship training restaurant. Day 2 took in the Northern School of Art (NSA), the Northern Studios, the waterfront and the National Museum of the Royal Navy. Panellists met many other local stakeholders including from the Hartlepool Town Deal Board, Big Town Tidy Up, Hartlepool Civic Society, Thirteen Group housing association, Jomast property developers and the Heugh Battery Museum. National stakeholders including Visit England, the Arts Council, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and The King's Foundation (previously the Prince's Foundation) were also present.

2.4.   HBC is a small, geographically compact local authority which, since June 2023, works alongside HDC, a mayoral development corporation set up by Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA). HBC works hard to seek new development and growth opportunities, often working with TVCA, and now shares planning services with HDC (with Lichfields acting for HDC day to day). The town has high deprivation (25th most deprived local authority area in England out of 317), with insufficient jobs and career opportunities causing particular challenges. The number of out-of-work benefits claimants amongst 18-21 year olds is more than twice the national average. The Panel also heard about problematic health, wellbeing and crime factors.

3. The Projects

3.1   Overall, the Panel were supportive of HBC's plans and projects and were optimistic about the future of the town. Much good work has clearly taken place in recent years, developing viable and exciting projects which, when delivered, should be of enormous benefit to local residents and businesses. HBC is evidently keen to develop pride of place amongst Hartlepool's townspeople. The challenge now is for projects to be delivered through effective collaboration, to their full joined-up potential, and to deliver socio-economic outcomes so badly needed in Hartlepool.

3.2.   In recent years, parts of the town have benefitted from very high levels of investment from central government through the Town Deal, Levelling Up Fund and, most recently, is now anticipating further investment from the Long-Term Plan for Towns, as well as from mayoral investment funding via Hartlepool Development Corporation. This is driving a distinctive and growing culture-based offer, primarily channelled through the NSA and Northern Studios with a proposed screen production village to help address socio-economic challenges and develop a viable plan for future growth. This culture-led plan, which includes enterprise support and training programmes, sits alongside other major strands of growth including engineering, health services and the Freeport.

3.3.   It is of great credit to HBC's strategic foresight that they chose to use Levelling Up and Towns Deal investment to capitalise on and champion the town's heritage so directly. Resolving key heritage at risk sites and bringing to the fore some of the town's most cherished historic assets such as the Art Gallery is a commendable approach which the Panel welcomed.

4. The Partners

4.1   The Panel were hugely impressed by the HBC staff they met, a remarkably motivated team with optimism, energy and talent to help foster a good regeneration culture. In particular, the Panel were struck by the imaginative, collaborative attitude of Gemma Ptak and Georgina Ascroft, who spoke about the Highlight Centre and Art Gallery amongst other things, and by Sarah Scarr and Paul Taylor's enthusiasm for locally distinctive regeneration and placemaking. They go above and beyond for Hartlepool despite operating in a challenging environment, so the Panel flagged the need to ensure staff are retained to bolster successful delivery of HBC's plans. There seemed to be a real risk of job-related stress, low agency and poor job satisfaction creating a risk of staff leaving and thus project momentum being hindered.

4.2.   Areas of overlap raised questions on how roles and responsibilities are managed between HBC, HDC and Lichfields, not least strategic direction and design quality. There is overlap in the two live masterplans, with the slightly different objectives of the parties (eg. for Middleton Grange Shopping Centre) harming clarity on vision. Other overlaps include growth strategies and destination management plans, which may confuse local stakeholders and incoming investors. The Panel were of the firm view that more collaboration and open, constructive communication is urgently needed between HBC, HDC and Lichfields, including agreeing on a clear, shared vision. Otherwise effective momentum will be harmed.

4.3.   Panellists were very impressed by Hartlepool's success in securing large-scale funding and the number of complex projects that are being delivered. They shared HBC's concerns about tight delivery timescales from funders which impact on meaningful engagement with local people and partners. They were concerned that the pace of delivery may be impacting on quality, opportunities to better connect various investments, and the long-term sustainability of development.

4.4.   Similarly, priorities need to be more selective amongst the wide range of projects planned. It appeared that, admirably, HBC are working hard to deliver many projects as a high priority. The Panel was concerned this could be harming delivery with fast-paced projects being less well designed and developing without sufficient community input. There is a real risk of key issues being overlooked and sound strategic visioning underplayed without a shared vision, including for the historic environment. The Panel was shown the detail of projects but little on overall objectives. Socio-economic outcomes, as informed by local people's input, must be positioned as the key outcome of all work in the area, whether from culture-led regeneration or the wider industrial strategy of which it must be part.

4.5.   The Panel's views on priorities are that the production village focus on Church Street and the current town centre projects should lead in bringing jobs and changing perceptions, creating a better place for local people and momentum in the screen industries. Development at the waterfront and of the wider tourist offer should follow. These will complement and be supported by a more sustainable town centre and slowing them down will also give time for meaningful engagement.

4.6. The importance of stakeholder engagement should not be underestimated. Harnessing local place pride and creating a sense of ownership improves project sustainability. This approach appeared notably lacking in production of HDC's masterplan. More open community engagement and co-design are needed, enabling buy-in. This includes mainly local residents, businesses and groups, but also developers, housing associations and agencies including Homes England and Historic England. Improving this is likely to mean extending project timescales so projects can be sure to deliver long-term socio-economic outcomes over and above short-term impact. It was reassuring to hear how the timescale of the Highlight project was reassessed, taking longer than initially envisaged in order to better engage with its future users. This should be seen as an exemplar; it will be a better development for it.

4.7. Panellists heard many positive words from the local stakeholders they met, but there was concern that small and medium-sized businesses had limited agency, and that community groups seemed under-represented on the visit. More could be done to map and engage with this positive private and third sector resource. The Panel was pleased to hear of a new business forum but was concerned it seemed only to represent seven businesses. The group's purpose and ambition should be clarified, aiming for it to be proactive as well as a sounding board. Widening active agency in the town increases capacity beyond a tight public sector, so with a level of autonomy others could, for example, confidently run a 'shop local' campaign or devise better connected culture, leisure and tourism businesses on the Headland. Empowered community groups could do credible engagement. Art Gallery staff have shown they are already well equipped and experienced in working creatively with people.

5. The Potential

The importance of the story in a much-altered town

5.1. Hartlepool has many fine historic buildings, from prominent listed buildings to everyday terraced housing, and many interesting historic spaces, including streets, parks, the docks and the sea front. Together these give the town a strong character, distinguishing it from neighbouring settlements and making it somewhere that people should want to live, work and visit. It has a long, important history and many stories to tell, although some can no longer be felt on the ground, due to the level of change in the town's historic environment over the centuries. There can be a narrative in the region that fixates on this high level of change and loss, but this narrative tends to downplay the level of interest in surviving assets, a risk exacerbated in Hartlepool by their separation and dislocation across the remodelled town.

5.2. It is therefore vitally important to recognise the surviving value of Hartlepool's historic environment, both for the contribution it already makes and the extra placemaking potential it offers through keeping and attracting people in the town, supporting distinctive local business, providing a foundation for growth and inward investment, and for offering solutions to social challenges. The value is both financial, supporting jobs and businesses, and social, engendering pride of place and contributing to wellbeing. To this point, the Panel agrees with the stance that culture, and heritage as part of it, should underpin wider investment as a "critical enabler" capable of telling a compelling and attractive story of the place to justify and support investment.

5.3. HBC should develop a role in curating the story of Hartlepool, using history to connect key fragments together where the much-altered place cannot. This helps make the scale and value of heritage clearer as a whole. Developing a narrative to tell Hartlepool's 'big story', and position today's period of change and investment within it, could reinforce roots, strengthen pride, and springboard off the past to inspire a sense of community regrowth. This can be used in place-branding to position Hartlepool's identity and to inspire investment, such as reopening the Art Gallery's viewing platform as a counterpoint to the views from the Town Wall.

Figure 2 Historic photograph of Victoria Terrace, Customs House and Dock Offices (c) Historic England Archive

Historic buildings in need and with great promise

5.4   Church Street currently looks tired and quiet; in stasis at best and perhaps still declining. The Panellists heard that low property values mean maintenance and improvement can be seen as not worthwhile, leading to short term cosmetic fixes rather than long term asset management. This has led to escalating, deep-set historic fabric needs. The recent Church Street Revival Townscape Heritage scheme struggled to attract interest with a 75% grant rate; in some cases contract value was more than the property value. Nonetheless, Panellists saw firm evidence that confidence from public sector investment was encouraging the private sector, with recent and current refurbishment of several buildings around Church Street. New uses (ranging from production studios to escape rooms) demonstrate the flexibility of historic town centre buildings like these, a key attribute to be exploited.

5.5.   HBC should initiate proactive conversations with building owners, users and the wider community about how the historic environment can serve the town in the 21st century. An understanding of historic buildings' embodied energy, their high-quality original materials, the financial reward from good maintenance, and opportunities for retrofit improvements can help position them as part of the solution for tackling climate change. Education on how to look after historic buildings in comparison to modern ones is likely to be key; partnerships with schools and colleges should raise awareness and equip future property owners with knowledge and skills to make the most of this valuable resource.

5.6.   Creating momentum requires the buy in from businesses and residents, and the Panel were concerned the poor appearance in and around parts of Church Street, and the distinct lack of footfall, hinders perceptions and ambition. The area needs to look cared for and temporarily active to visibly demonstrate to the public that change is afoot. Short term activity such as festivals and takeovers can be powerful tools. As well as capital, HBC need to be sure they have sufficient revenue funding to support their aims and facilitate short-term activation and to support community action.

5.7.   Church Street Conservation Area has seen recent investment through the Townscape Heritage scheme, HBC's recent purchase of properties in the area, the BIS, the Northern Studios and the Northern School of Art. Plans for the regionally significant screen production village – positively linked to similar investment in Sunderland – are very strong. This is a courageous move strongly welcomed by the Panel. The potential to attract high profile and valuable film and media work has knock-on benefits for the creative sector including students on the same street. This major move has the potential to revive Church Street as a direct outcome, ensuring the historic character of the buildings being used is enhanced, their reuse brings life to the street, and local people, businesses and students see direct impact. It has potential as a very distinctive filming location, so enhancing architectural character and appearance would support industry as well as benefit local people. There needs to be a prioritised list of future investment projects, which should include Church Street properties backing on to the station, the former Shades Hotel, the terrace north of it, the former Athenaeum, the former Royal Hotel and the level crossing. This will help generate private sector confidence in the area and stimulate further investment.

5.8. The Panel heard more is planned to maximise the potential of the Art Gallery, reopening the viewing platform in the tower, improving the café's offer and bringing the Gallery out in to Church Square and Church Street. This is welcome and will be especially important when the building shuts for refurbishment, maintaining the momentum and customer base that the Art Gallery has developed over the last decades. The Gallery's offer is not apparent from outside the building so its impact is limited only to those venturing in. Its impact could be spread further, in vacant shop windows or through largescale exhibitions of street art, both of which would encourage new visitors, boost town pride, and enliven forgotten spaces, as well as raise awareness that art is for everyone. Artists' creativity should be trusted and supported to change perceptions of Hartlepool as part of a place-branding exercise, with strong social media presence a target.

5.9. Alongside the Northern School of Art's formal learning channels, the Art Gallery can deliver more informal arts engagement, yet the Panel heard little about community-led arts projects and private sector creative business development. A very impressive exhibition of work by Hartlepool Art Club was on display during the Panel's visit, highlighting a significant local talent. Hartlepool's creative talent could be better used and promoted, helping it to become more embedded in the future of the town.

Potentially exciting streets and spaces in need of a strategy

5.10. The value and strategic purpose of public open space, including streets, is as important to the town's future as the buildings. Local residents use them every day, and they're the first thing experienced by visitors. The design of spaces influences how they're used and by whom – so a priority must be to make them feel welcoming and safe. As the town's best places are quite spread out and disconnected, improving ease and pleasure of movement between them is very important. The Panel heard about plans to create new spaces outside the BIS and at the waterfront museums, but the purpose for these and their strategic fit in a public realm network – and indeed the need for yet more open space in the town – was not clear. An audit of existing spaces should be carried out, including engagement with local communities to understand current usage and need, leading to a coordinated approach to existing and new urban streets and spaces that meets the needs of local people, underpins inward investment and delivers good urban design. Without this there is a risk of an ad hoc approach and continued disconnection.

5.11. Such a new approach to understanding, knitting and adapting the historic road/block plan should improve connectivity and accessibility, and can also help decarbonise the town by incorporating active travel and grey-to-green moves. Being relatively flat with a centrally located rail station and some attractive streets, there should be many opportunities to increase walking and cycling. There is a clear conflict to this in the A179 and A689, cutting Church Street and the waterfront off from the rest of town and helping to disconnect these from the Headland. The physical barrier and the level of traffic are at odds with aspirations

for activity and re-use on Church Street, and the historic environment presents the chance to create new appealing walking and cycling routes.

5.12.   The Panel found wayfinding to be poor with little to suggest attractions to visit only a short distance from the town centre. There was also little to indicate how to get from the town centre to Seaton Carew or the Headland. There is little in the town centre to suggest water is nearby, either the urban waterfront experience or the seaside resort of Seaton Carew. Exploring what a coastal market town with potentially iconic waterfront means in the 21st century would help build Hartlepool's brand and increase pride of place.

The best dockland potential on the east coast?

5.13.   Much of Hartlepool's historic waterfront presents unique and distinctive opportunities for new use and development on a scale rarely found on the east coast. Since regeneration began in the 1990s, most development has underplayed that potential leaving residential, leisure, hotel and retail of little character or quality, not context-led, and creating little sense of place. Many historic buildings have been lost, including a group of large-scale warehouses not unlike Liverpool's Albert Dock, and the small number of high-quality historic buildings left, important though they are, are sufficiently dispersed to add little weight as a townscape anchor.

5.14.   Public realm work has somewhat improved the waterfront, and vital events such as the waterfront festivals and 2023 Tall Ships Races have raised its profile. Yet the urban realm is heavily car dominated, discouraging getting to or lingering in the area, worsened by the scale and exposure of tracts of fallow land. It is cut off from the rest of the town by the scale and placelessness of highway engineering, by the railway, and by the impenetrability of the Port of Hartlepool that hinders connectivity with the Headland.

5.15.   The main draws are the busy, stimulating marina, and the National Museum of the Royal Navy and Museum of Hartlepool, impressive beacons offering immersive historical context to the town, historic vessels, and exciting maritime character. The Panel heard that both museums are looking to invest, refreshing their offer, adapting their buildings and increasing access to the waterfront. Nearby, HBC's forthcoming sport, leisure and healthcare facility, the Highlight, also has powerful potential.

5.16.   The waterfront is a hugely significant asset for Hartlepool with acres of developable land an exciting USP. It is the largest dockside waterfront opportunity between Leith and Hull, and of huge

Figure 3 The Heritage of Coastal Towns. Hartlepool, Tees Valley. Entrance to Hartlepool Maritime Experience Museum © Historic England Archive

regenerative and placemaking opportunity for the region. Whilst the realities of development economics will be key, the scale of ambition should reflect the scale of the place. It is the strong view of the Panel that development must be much more ambitious than currently envisaged, be of much higher architectural quality, more cohesive in its urban design, and bring clear long-term public benefit to Hartlepool's deprivation factors. This contrasts with much of the existing development that has been opportunistic, with short term design characteristics and some with questionable regenerative impact. A more contextual approach is especially needed for housing (suburban culs-de-sac are not right for urban waterfront), and good comparators are needed to inspire the right homes and mixed-uses.

5.17. Much of the high-level masterplanning work has already been carried out, yet it is not clear that either current document is sufficiently ambitious or measured for the significant potential on offer. HBC and HDC should now develop together a more finely detailed plan for the area to help unlock the potential and quality. An holistic view of existing and proposed developments is essential for successful placemaking, rather than considering developments separately or reactively.

5.18. The Panel would also encourage innovation by seizing the opportunity to extract heat from the harbour's water to create a sustainable heat network, helping to deliver HBC's NetZero strategy. This could heat buildings around the docks including the Highlight and museums, housing (reducing fuel poverty) and businesses (increasing resilience). It might also be possible to include Church Street where the Panel heard a high street entrepreneur was closing their business due to unaffordable gas bills.

Wider, joined-up visitor potential

5.19.   The Panel was impressed by HBC's presentation on the visitor potential of the town's historic Headland and the seaside offer at Seaton Carew. The Panel felt a coherent approach across these Hartlepool honeypots could bring economies of scale and a weightier sense of purpose.

5.20.   The Panel felt the recent direction of travel for the Headland is fundamentally sound with no need to reinvent the wheel. The successful Townscape Heritage Initiative (2001-2006) highlighted two issues yet to be resolved: connectivity with the rest of the town and the vacant Friarage Manor House. There is sound strategic direction and well-considered, deliverable actions in both the 2013 (then) Prince's Foundation community planning report, and HBC's Headland Heritage Strategy, both prepared with local people. Historic England's current support to prepare a Conservation Area Management Plan will bring this potential back to the fore, and focus it on place-based wins for local people such as opportunities for health and wellbeing, community cohesion and growing place pride. This may be particularly important for the Friarage Manor House, where re-use as something other than housing could help unlock the Headland's potential for economic regeneration.

5.21.   A similar approach should be taken with Seaton Carew, where a management plan is also being prepared, following a 2015 masterplan. A strategy is needed that meets the needs of local residents, business and groups (such as Hartlepool Parkrun, Hornby Park and the Golf Club) and, as with the Headland, leads to an action plan of deliverable investment and partnership working opportunities. The King's Foundation may again be able to assist with this.

5.22.   A critical mass of local visitors is needed to sustain businesses, so building this at the same time as promoting the place to visitors from further afield is important. Focussing on making wider Hartlepool somewhere that local people want to be will help resilience and out-of-season trading. It will also ensure local communities feel included and valued in the growth and development of their town, keeping the focus on their needs. In Bishop Auckland, an externally focused drive to increase visitor numbers has, at times, left local people feeling disconnected from the direction and impact of the town's growth. In time, the benefits to local people can be opened up to a wider tourism offer, for example by developing the Friarage as a culture and heritage node alongside St Hilda's Church and Heugh Battery Museum, an approach that the Headland Heritage Strategy shows local people would support.

5.23.   This wider potential for characterful destinations across Hartlepool can also support the regional film production agenda discussed above. Other parts of town have a distinctive location offer that has already been used (eg. Vera, 2023; Victoria, 2018) and more can be utilised, for example with Seaton Carew's Art Deco bus station, an architectural style relatively rare in England and thus potentially prized as a film set.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. Following on from this narrative is a series of recommendations using the structure of the six questions posed to the Panel for the visit.

Q1. Value of the historic environment

"How do we better communicate the economic value of Hartlepool's historic environment including the contribution it makes to our decarbonisation pathway?"

6.2. **Short Term**

6.2.1. Tell the big story of Hartlepool. Hartlepool can genuinely claim to have been one of the most important towns in England at more than one point in its long and rich history. Conserving Hartlepool's heritage is as much about telling this story as it is about conserving the fabric. The story can help connect the large fragments that survive (Headland, Church Street, town centre, waterfront, etc) to tell a bigger story than each can alone. Due to town remodelling and erosion of some surviving buildings, streets and other, each component is itself a rare fragment, so adding them together via an overall narrative reveals more and creates critical mass. Protecting and celebrating the big story can drive local people's pride in place. This approach has been used in Navigator North's project, which uncovered heritage stories from the buildings, people and places in Middlesbrough town centre to build a broader narrative about the creative story of the town.

6.2.2. Engage with local people and groups on the social value and potential of the historic environment, and to highlight placemaking and place-branding opportunities. The intense delivery pressures of recent projects have not allowed enough time for meaningful engagement or influence on some projects. This is not unique to Hartlepool, but its absence was felt given the ambition to "put the heart back" into the town. Perhaps due to different pressures, the Art Gallery team do appear well integrated with the community and have a highly commendable attitude to co-design, making them well placed to help more widely with this. The experience of slowing delivery of the Highlight centre to allow closer design development with future users is a great example.

6.2.3. Develop a shared vision between HBC and HDC with a mutual understanding of the value of the town's historic assets, including stories of its past, and the town's position in the strategic level thinking of TVCA. The Panel were concerned that communication seemed to be poor between the layers of local governance and delivery, with local distinctiveness not necessarily being prioritised and no agreed understanding of historic place significance to underpin investment. For example, there are differing views about the significance and future of the disused former Odeon cinema, a public clash of policy and approach that could be avoided through dialogue, including with Historic England.

6.2.4. Review Hartlepool's streets and spaces before investing in new urban spaces. A review of existing grey and green streets and spaces is needed, both historic and modern. The modern spaces between the various historic nodes are problematic, and the historic spaces at those nodes often feel forlorn. Admittedly on what was a cold winter's day, some spaces the Panel saw were unused and uninviting. A review would identify existing spaces' potential and the need for new ones. It should also be used to inform long-term planning to tackle how the A179 and A689 work within the town. The review should assess urban design principles such as connectivity, legibility, accessibility, safety, enclosure, greenness, sustainability, scale, exposure/microclimate, liveliness, etc. Sheffield has done much work to assess and plan for walking routes, with strong grey-to-green credentials. Bristol Temple Quay's spatial framework is evidenced on a sustainable urban mobility plan and public realm guide.

6.3. Medium term

6.3.1. A demonstrator project on Hartlepool's high quality 19th century buildings, which are a great asset for the town, including its terraced housing stock. To help highlight the embodied energy in existing buildings and create educational opportunities to upskill building owners, built environment professionals and tradespeople, it would be beneficial to run a demonstrator project, carrying out renovations and upgrades to improve thermal efficiency in a historic building, showing how inherently sustainable such buildings are. Historic England can assist with technical advice and, if this is done with housing, Homes England should be engaged as part of this project. This also would be a good opportunity for partnership working with local colleges and tradespeople.

6.3.2. Carry out maintenance both to publicly owned buildings and the public realm. It is hard for people to understand the value of built heritage when it is in poor condition or looks uncared for. Following this up with encouragement and, if possible, support for others to maintain their own properties (such as a 'cherry-picker day' offering shared action for rainwater goods in a terrace). In County Durham, the council has spent time understanding the scope of historic property in its own portfolio, helping to focus resources and skills where it was needed to avoid historic assets becoming at-risk from lack of, or ill-informed, maintenance and repair. Newcastle City Council recently updated its local heritage at risk strategy including a prioritised most-at-risk list; 6 of the top 10 assets were owned by the council, focusing attention on steps towards repair and reuse or disposal.

6.3.3. Invest in a clear wayfinding to raise awareness and help navigate the spread of Hartlepool's offer for locals and visitors alike, particularly walkers and wheelers. Community groups can highlight their preferred active travel routes and the desire lines for new ones. This can be linked both to the connectivity of streets and spaces in the town but also the recommendation to tell Hartlepool's big story, where all components work together to create a critical mass.

6.3.4. Plan for what happens after Historic England's Heritage Schools offer ends in 2026. The programme runs for two years from January 2024, training teachers in how to use local

heritage resources to teach Hartlepool's history. Use this momentum to devise educational opportunities to highlight the value of heritage. Plan for the end of the programme to explore how the big story of Hartlepool can continue to be told in class and in the townscape around, helping children value their local area and generate a sense of pride in Hartlepool from a young age. Devise ways to use heritage and history in training for the creative sector. This can help reinforce rootedness in the town and encourage students to stay once they enter the industry. Product design students at Northumbria University have successfully used Aydon Castle as a place for inspiration and exhibition.

6.4.   Long term

6.4.1. Resolve physical connectivity issues to reconnect Church Street, the waterfront and town centre, and to better connect those to the Headland. There is a need to stitch the historic settlement back together, both physically and notionally. This must prioritise addressing the barriers presented by the A179, the A689 and Middleton Grange Shopping Centre, and should follow on from the streets and spaces review recommended above. It will require significant long-term planning and investment rather than attempting change through short-term spot projects. While the ultimate aim should be to reduce the level of traffic, in the medium term it should be possible to improve connectivity using improved public realm, adding trees and by slowing the traffic down. Oxford Road, Manchester, has replaced vehicles with cycles as part of strategic movement planning. Poynton High Street created shared space to ease pedestrian movement with economic wins. New Islington. Manchester has seen radical highway remodelling to create a people-focused place. The Catharijnesingel project in Utrecht replaced a multi-lane urban motorway with green-blue space for movement, nature and leisure. Tackling this issue underpins so much of the future in Hartlepool. A stronger creative sector on Church Street relies on it not feeling cut off from the town centre; the town centre and waterfront offers must actively complement each other without 1990s dual-carriageways getting in the way; developing the waterfront's tourism potential should inspire an easy visit to the Headland. Radically and strategically addressing the challenging road network is key to Hartlepool's future.

Q2. Shared delivery at pace

"How do we ensure a shared vision and successful delivery of high quality placemaking and regeneration at the speed required when there are multiple public, private and third sector partners working in Hartlepool?"

6.5. Short term

6.5.1. HBC and HDC should run a programme of internal collaborative workshops between them to discuss their ambitions for regeneration, planning and development in Hartlepool, aiming for a shared vision. Workshops should include the historic environment, urban design and placemaking themes. The process may require third party facilitators and should include mutual information sharing, mapping, role definition and visioning. In particular, it is important to address challenges in development management between Lichfields and HBC as local planning authority, and to discuss the scope and implications of a change in public asset ownership, particularly where assets are key to delivery of placemaking outcomes. Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Homes England are piloting a strategic place partnership, a new approach to relationships aimed at housing growth.

6.5.2. HBC and HDC should decide on their shared priorities, those projects – such as the screen production village and adapting the town centre – that can lead to further investment. Time should be allowed to deliver these properly, engaging with stakeholders so that the private and third sectors can bring forward their own complementary projects. Later priority projects – such as waterfront regeneration – can be brought forward more slowly to allow strong project development and investment planning to ensure better outcomes. The two current competing masterplans for the waterfront, neither of which seems to focus enough on realistic delivery, suggests this kind of more considered approach is needed.

6.5.3. Map out community groups and activity for public engagement, making sure reach is as wide as possible. Groups might also be able to support delivery where HBC capacity is a challenge, so placing more trust in the third sector can bring rewards, especially on small community projects. In Wavertree, a Liverpool suburb, local conversations created a genuinely grassroots group focusing on changing the place's grim local image through community spirit and a sense of caring for people and the place they live in. Within two years they had won funds to give out community grants and open a community shop, as well as running everything from litter picks to car-free days. The Love Wavertree project is in a conservation area – it is not driven by heritage yet it has hugely benefited the place's historic environment, and it is clear that pride of place and the strength of roots in a long-established neighbourhood have been key motivators.

6.5.4. Bring in external expertise and resource for community engagement as this was acknowledged to have been insufficient so far for some projects. This need not mean hiring expensive consultants; the Panel highlighted how good use of local knowledge and expertise can represent better value and sound longer term outcomes. Local history, rootedness and

memories can be powerful hooks for people to actively participate in the future of their town. This has been demonstrated well in recent years at the Headland, where an active, keen community is using heritage for community development goals at St Hilda's Church and the Heugh Battery Museum. Officers' skills to creatively reach wider audiences should be developed. Local people could also be rewarded for engaging with proposals, recognising the financial constraints that many face. Thinking Place have supported several places including Carlisle, Hull, Coventry, and Torquay to find a local 'coalition of the willing' by strengthening relationships, finding shared purpose, and empowering stakeholders to act together. Kirklees have worked with Beam Arts UK on cultural engagement as part of town centre revitalisation.

6.5.5. Develop a temporary Urban Room in a vacant building on Church Street, a place to engage and co-design the town with local communities. Creating a physical space would capitalise on the Art Gallery team's proactive approach to working with residents and would reinforce the value of collaboration on projects. Bringing this activity on to the high street is a positive step in its own right. While the Art Gallery is being refurbished, it could tie in with bringing art and culture on to the high street in a shop unit in public ownership. Something similar at the Highlight could exploit the presence of the NHS to bring gains. The Masham Hotel in Middlesbrough, run by Navigator North, re-uses a former Victorian pub as a project space to find out about Middlesbrough's past and future. Nottingham's Urban Room in a refurbished historic high street shop ran from 2014 to 2020, successfully moving online when funding for the shop ended. Birkenhead's Place is a community space to share views on long-term regeneration of a historic area undergoing significant change. York's Common Room run by Street Life York gave residents and visitors a chance to engage with placemaking and heritage-led sustainable development in the city. Reading's urban room, Your Place Our Place, has a wider focus on quality of life and community development as well as town centre regeneration. Newcastle's Farrell Centre is a leading model for urban rooms, inspired by the man who devised the idea.

6.6. Medium term

6.6.1. Develop the Business Forum to include membership of a wider range of businesses, including small businesses in and around Church Street. This can help with businesses support, making sure that it is focussed where it is needed the most, and with the delivery of projects, particularly in the town centre. Develop the forum to align with place-branding objectives to give the business sector strong agency in the message and identity that can be conveyed both to local people and the world through social media.

Q3. The Waterfront: connecting existing and new

"How do we encourage a sustainable, high quality and distinctively Hartlepool townscape in the large areas of developable land at the Waterfront?"

6.7. Short term

6.7.1. Develop a clearer, shared, ambitious vision for the waterfront with stakeholders including residents, community groups, HDC, TVCA, the museums, PD Ports, Hartlepool Marina, developers, Homes England, Historic England and others. This should clarify and improve the masterplans and design code for the area. It should promote commercial development complementary to the town centre (including redeveloping existing commercial development where it would achieve better placemaking); residential development appropriate in density, typology and quality for a central waterfront location; and public realm that is attractive and inviting for pedestrians not vehicles, encouraging greater footfall and longer dwell times. It is more important to get the right development on the waterfront than fast development.

6.7.2. Set up a Design Review Panel, and agree how responsibility for design quality is shared between HBC and HDC. The quality of historic waterside development and case studies of successful design from elsewhere should be used as the benchmark, rather than Hartlepool's waterside architecture from recent decades. Gosport's deprived and historically significant waterfront is seeing extensive masterplanning and design work. Smith's Dock in North Shields and The Decks in Runcorn have added striking modern homes to historic waterfronts. The Malings in Newcastle upon Tyne is award-winning waterfront family housing at a human scale. Hull's waterfront saw a major competition to explore its potential in 2019. The vision for Shoreline Crescent is transforming once deprived waterfront in Folkstone. Site visits to comparators can help visualise the potential.

6.7.3. Develop detailed plans for public access to the water's edge to as much of the entire harbour as possible, including areas currently behind pay barriers or otherwise inaccessible. This should follow on from the streets and spaces review and should be developed together with the NHS, Sport England, active travel interests, disability / equity interests and others.

6.7.4. Secure more joined up working between the Museum of Hartlepool and the National Museum of the Royal Navy, especially during refurbishment. This should include joint procurement of design and contractors to achieve a more holistic approach, selecting quality over price and setting high expectations for low carbon building design and people focussed public realm. Opportunities for more firmly combining both museums' offer should also be explored.

6.8. Medium term

6.8.1. Plan for comprehensive improve to the public realm based on the outcomes of the streets and spaces review recommended above. This should consider the seaward location but include greening and high quality materials, and consider the balance between longevity and sacrificial investment that might provide short-term impact before future redevelopment. Walkers and wheelers should take priority in the design with vehicle provision sensitively designed around them. It should follow a holistic approach to well-informed contextual design, providing for the whole waterfront rather than discrete, piecemeal projects, using a long term plan that can withstand changes in delivery.

6.8.2. Investigate the opportunity for a water-source heat pump in the dock as a renewable energy source. This could provide a heat network for waterside development and potentially the wider town centre to improve sustainability. Gateshead (operational) and Seaham (planned) have district heating systems using mine water as energy.

6.8.3. Provide free access to the National Museum of the Royal Navy for local people. The Panel heard that less than 10% of visitors come from Hartlepool, so this would not have a detrimental effect on revenue and would encourage local visitor growth. The Hepworth in Wakefield and the Minster in York offer free entry to local residents. The Royal Navy's own Fleet Air Arm Museum offers discounted tickets for local people. Leeds Industrial Museum offers £1 entry for locals.

6.9. Long term

6.9.1. Address the impact of the closed nature of the port's land, alongside addressing the linear connectivity issues from roads and railway. The waterfront is technically within easy walking and wheeling distance of the Headland as well as the town centre, so improved connectivity will be necessary to ensure maximum benefit to each of the three and the three together. Better active travel infrastructure should consider the opportunity for a pedestrian route carved through part of the Port.

Q4. Tourism growth

"How do we draw on the success of the investment in Church Street and the waterfront to recognise the critical mass of wider assets including the Headland and Seaton Carew?"

Figure 4 The Panel on the waterfront © Historic England

6.10.   Short term

6.10.1. Continue availability of the Art Gallery's offer during refurbishment. The number of vacant properties on Church Street should make it possible for meanwhile activity of the Gallery's retail, café and outreach offer. This will help support local artists and makers and continue community provision. Explore how this off-site retail offer can continue after the Gallery reopens, giving more exhibition space in the building, and an enhanced, curated exposure for local artists. This ties in with the urban room recommendation above.

6.10.2. Actively pursue recommendations in the Headland Heritage Strategy using an action plan with the community. This should be linked to the emerging conservation area management plan that sets the spatial and development objectives and context and formalises the vision.

6.11. Medium term

6.11.1. Work to address Heritage at Risk. This includes St Hilda's Church, a Grade I listed asset that should draw visitors but is currently in poor condition and has very limited opening times. The Church Street, Seaton Carew and Headland Conservation Areas are all on the national Heritage at Risk register and their various problems will hinder perceptions and discourage repeat visits. Historic England can advise on how to combine action to reduce risk to investment in these areas.

6.11.2. Develop a forum for visitor attractions, helping them to develop a joined-up approach. This should include culture and heritage attractions including the Art Gallery, National Museum of the Royal Navy, Museum of Hartlepool, St Hilda's Church, the Heugh Gun Battery, and non-heritage attractions such as Hartlepool and Seaton Carew golf clubs and the marina, and key regular events such as the waterfront festivals. Working together to build critical mass and momentum will be key, including on regional and national promotion of a joined-up heritage/culture offer aimed at Tees Valley, the North East and beyond. Raising awareness of clustered assets strengthens critical mass as a reason to visit. The Panel saw more tourism leaflets for attractions further afield than for those in the town, so marketing of the local visitor resource should be improved.

6.11.3. Invest in a programme of cultural and community events and activities that draws people to the waterfront, Headland and Seaton Carew as well as Church Street (see below). These may be small scale and low budget but offer a reason for repeat visit. The national cultural programme run by Historic England in its High Street Heritage Action Zones has achieved excellent impact through cultural programming in over 60 historic town centre settings since 2020, with many examples to explore.

6.11.4. Develop the café at the Art Gallery, bringing it out into the attractive public realm that surrounds the building with additional planting to give shelter. This will help animate the space, advertise the Gallery's presence and attract people to Church Street. York Art Gallery's café offer has enlivened Exhibition Square. Carlisle Cathedral's award-winning café extension has opened up access to the cathedral and attracted new visitors. Norwich Cathedral's refectory is a dramatic civic addition to precious ecclesiastical ground. The Lewis Carroll Centre is a cultural extension to Grade II* All Saints Church in Daresbury, Cheshire.

6.11.5. Reopen the Art Gallery's tower viewing platform. This has the potential to be a key tourist attraction in the town centre and a great counterpoint to views of the town from the Headland's Town Wall. It would be a great tool for visually connecting the various places on offer to visitors, and should be part of the Gallery becoming a central visitor point for the town.

6.11.6. Agree reuse for the Friarage and fuller use of Borough Hall to benefit local people and add to the Headland's offer to local people and visitors. Historic England can offer advice and potentially grant support, as well as championing assets with other funders. The BIS is an excellent exemplar for creative reuse of a disused historic building, helping reduce risk to the

conservation area it sits in and demonstrating what can be achieved to an award-winning standard.

6.11.7. Develop a visitor and heritage investment plan for Seaton Carew, potentially working with the King's Foundation to engage local residents, businesses and community groups.

6.12. Long term

6.12.1. Develop health and wellbeing indicators that feed off heritage and placemaking. Examples include specific KPIs, a focus on social prescribing, exploiting opportunities for active living such as caring for historic open spaces, or increasing opportunities for active participation linked to the town's heritage such as volunteering at a site or completing a heritage walk around the town. For example, creating additional local interest and dwell points along the regional Way of St Hild can provide benefits for people in Hartlepool using only part of it for local active travel between the Headland and Seaton Carew.

Q5. Creative industry potential

"How could the current investment in the Northern Studios be harnessed strategically to generate a stronger local creative, cultural and tourism industry?"

6.13. Short term

6.13.1. Work with local partners to develop a programme of events in Church Street to bring people to the area and animate the street. The street's strong architecture and enclosed setting provides an ideal backdrop to festival-style programming, and the street is in need of life. The success of events such as the Tall Ships Races and Hartlepool Folk Festival shows that there is appetite for larger-scale events and regular smaller-scale events, such as markets (such as Sunderland's pop-up makers market) or perhaps a dance festival that uses the rich setting and a popular local pastime to bring the streetscape to life. Such activities raise the profile of local creativity, encourage repeat visits and could support the business forum's campaign.

6.13.2. Use the Art Gallery more to promote local creativity alongside the BIS and the other growing offer. The gallery is a great public face for the creative sector and has potential to be higher profile in the town, for example being used as a visitor hub to introduce the town centre and Church Street offer. Bringing the building's life out in to street and nearby premises (as above) will be important to demonstrating the creative potential of the town.

6.13.3. As part of work to address heritage at risk, speak to Historic England about the potential for investment in the former Shades building and surrounding buildings on Church Street to enhance the planned investment of Levelling Up and other funds.

Figure 5 Panel in discussion outside of the Shades Hotel on Church Street List entry: 1250114 © Historic England Archive

6.13.4. Market Northern Studios heavily to develop an awareness of the facility. Work with BFI and North East Screen to host, for example, a location agency week or a film and media conference. This should be done in conjunction with the Fulwell 73 studios in Sunderland to demonstrate a wider North East offer. Also, occasional tours of the studios would encourage local people to feel engaged. Suggestions from panellists with experience in this sector include putting together a package of locations alongside the dry hire white box space, to simplify the offer and hiring process, plus having a designated Film Officer at HBC so production companies have a single point of contact to smooth delivery.

6.14. Medium term

6.14.1. When considering new incubator or similar space needed for the growing creative industry, prioritise the re-use of historic spaces around Church Street, building on the successful re-use of the former post-office to create the BIS.

6.14.2. Empower local artists and creative talent by inviting ideas for the Church Street area. This could include murals on well-chosen side and rear elevations (Hastings' America Grounds mural, Nuart in Aberdeen and the Rochdale Uprising mural festival are good comparators) or interesting ways of temporarily enlivening front facades which also enhance historic character (such as Lumiere in Durham or Waltham Forest's 2019 projections). Shop windows of buildings in public ownership should display work by local artists and makers, helping to support them, create visual interest and advertise the nearby Art Gallery. Weston-Super-Mare's shop windows project saw artwork displayed in vacant windows to great effect.

6.14.3. Establish a process for temporary pop-up and meanwhile use in buildings owned by landlords keen to keep their assets in use whilst they plan long term. Collaborating with the local community can support small businesses and students as well as bringing street life. Offers aimed at children brings families to Church Street to expand on the Art Gallery's success in such an offer. The Fruit Market in Hull and the Make & Trade project in Derby are good comparators.

Q6. Future momentum

"How can the momentum of existing plans and visions be sustained to ensure continued high-quality development as they are rolled out?"

6.15. Short term

6.15.1. Be confident that Hartlepudlians deserve the best, thinking long-term with community engagement. To achieve this, projects should be slowed down where possible, carrying out careful and early public engagement to ensure public value of investment will address socio-economic need. Practice at the Highlight should be emulated in other projects. It is recognised that recent government funds have emphasised delivery at pace, and that local residents and leaders are ambitious for change, but the borough has an important role in championing longer term thinking, inspiring high ambition for quality, and achieving genuine public engagement beyond consultation. Local support from the private and third sectors improves the sustainability of public projects and powers greater momentum through parallel delivery. The urban room and cultural programming recommendations above support this theme.

6.15.2. Support HBC staff to encourage staff retention, making them feel valued, able to deliver, and addressing work related stress. Without the excellent staff that are currently in place it will be very hard to follow through on existing plans and deliver projects.

6.15.3. Ensure a clear focus on longer term socio-economic outcomes when deliver existing strategies and plans. Socio-economic outcomes should remain even if delivery priorities and phases change. Investing in heritage and placemaking can help achieve these outcomes, just as investing business development or skills training can. The focus should be on forecasting the improvement to local people's lives that will flow, whatever the investment agenda.

6.16. Medium term

6.16.1. Develop a clear creative place brand for Hartlepool as part of HBC's emerging destination management plan. Go beyond marketing to focus on Hartlepool's identity, reputation and perceptions for investment, business, talent, living and visiting. Use the town's big story to shine local distinctiveness and substance without the need to resort to nostalgia or cliched heritage tropes. The Burnley Bondholders branding programme has helped turn round a declining population in a marginal northern town seen as boring, changing internal and external perceptions and inspiring homegrown and incoming talent, employers, investors and developers. Thinking Place helped post-industrial St Helen's merge arts, culture and heritage investment to become the first Borough of Culture for Liverpool city region. Historic England can provide advice on using heritage in place branding.

6.17.   Long term

6.17.1. Investigate the potential for a Business Improvement District to support and grow town centre businesses over and above the capacity of the Business Forum. While there may currently be inadequate critical mass, this should be a long-term target. BIDs can engage in capital work as well as programming and cultural activity, and so in time could support delivery of wider placemaking objectives beyond raising the profile of the town through programming.

6.17.2. Work with Arts Council England to establish a National Portfolio Organisation or Investment Principles Support Organisation in Hartlepool, as appropriate. Establishing a foundation for long term planning and leadership in a key arts organisation will help underpin growth in the wider cultural and creative sector, raising the place's profile and ability to attract further investment and partnerships.

The Historic Places Panel provides a broad spectrum of independent expertise to help local authorities and others engage in the regeneration and revitalisation of historic places.

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