Sunniside
Sunderland

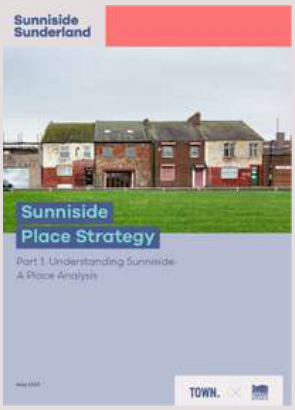
ANNUAL REPORT

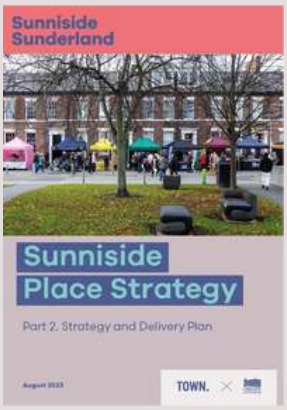
2024/25

Sunderland City Council

TOWN.

THE FIRST YEAR OF DELIVERY





In 2023, the Sunniside Place Strategy was created to drive change in this important part of Sunderland City Centre over the next ten years.

The Place Strategy set out a vision for Sunniside: a vision of a city neighbourhood for the creatives, entrepreneurs and urban pioneers of Sunderland; a place that supports the people that will innovate, create, take risks, and find solutions - strengthening the economy of the city of Sunderland.

The strategy sought to address the breadth of challenges that this inner-city area of Sunderland faced, a number of which felt urgent to the Sunniside community in 2023 and became priorities in the first year of delivery in 2024. The strategy also sought to begin to build the foundations of sustainable regeneration, protecting investment and creating conditions for further investment. This was described in the place strategy as a series of strategic moves:

- **Develop a Strong Sense of Place & Purpose**
- **Create a Safe Neighbourhood**
- **Activate the Neighbourhood**
- **Intensify Uses and Build the Population**
- **Coordinate and sustain change through Cooperative Stewardship**

Delivering this strategy is a multi-stakeholder, public and private sector collaboration. This document summarises the actions delivered in this first year by these many partners. The change in Sunniside from this first year alone feels significant. There is a feeling that the investment that people have made in the area to-date has been protected, and there is now growing excitement, aspiration and confidence in the potential of Sunniside.

The next year will be focused on securing investment in a number of strategic projects that emerged from the Masterplan exercise, each of which will deliver long-term change and have a significant impact on the city centre and for the people of Sunderland.

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SUMMARY OF

OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES

Total public sector investment in delivering the Sunniside Place Strategy's Early Actions	£183.5K
Total public and private sector investment in delivering development in 24/25	£9.1 M
No. development projects delivered through private investment	12
No. buildings brought back into use	8
Total public and private sector investment committed for developments in progress	£32.4 M
Attendees of UKSPF funded Sunniside events	55,000
Reduction in reports of ASB	17%
% of attendees who said their opinion of Sunniside was more positive as a result of attending an event	↑ 50%
Instagram Followers @Sunniside_Sunderland	1075

DEVELOP A STRONG SENSE OF PLACE AND PURPOSE

PROJECTS THAT ARE BUILDING PLACE IDENTITY

- Sunderland Music Promo Wall
- Sunniside Poet-in-Residence Programme
- Heritage Research & Promotion
- First edition of the Sunniside Zine

Projects Delivered **11**

Creatives Commissioned **11**

THE SUNNISIDE PLAYBOOK

Working with stakeholders in Sunniside, the Playbook was created as a manual for placemaking in Sunniside, celebrating the identity of Sunniside in all its diversity, and setting out a campaign for all Sunnisiders to support, changing how people see the neighbourhood and inviting them to be part of this place.

SUNNISIDE WAYFINDING

A series of large scale art murals that capture the uniqueness of the area and help people distinguish when they are in Sunniside, and which are the key routes through the neighbourhood.

@SUNNISIDE_SUNDERLAND INSTAGRAM CHANNEL

Posts **129**

Followers **1,075**

Snapshot of last 90 days

Reach **9,518**

Engagement **556**

SUNNISIDE MUSIC PROMO WALL

PROJECT

The music promo wall came about from a conversation with Laura Brewis, Director of We Make Culture (WMC). 130 young people are part of the development programme in the production studios in Villiers Street, developing their music talent and skills each year. You wouldn't know this to look at the buildings, with the studios hidden away from the risk of crime and break-ins.

WMC collaborated with a street artist to create a music mural on a vacant building on their street, then teamed up their young musicians with professional graphic designers to produce music promo posters for their new music to paste on the wall. The posters have QR codes on, so people can walk up to the wall and by scanning the code on their phones, hear the latest music coming from Sunderland talent.

OUTCOMES

- People get a sense of activity happening in the area, creating a sense of safety, interest and creativity.
- Young musicians feel connected to the area and their work and talent is celebrated.
- An important cultural organisation in the city is made more visible in Sunniside.

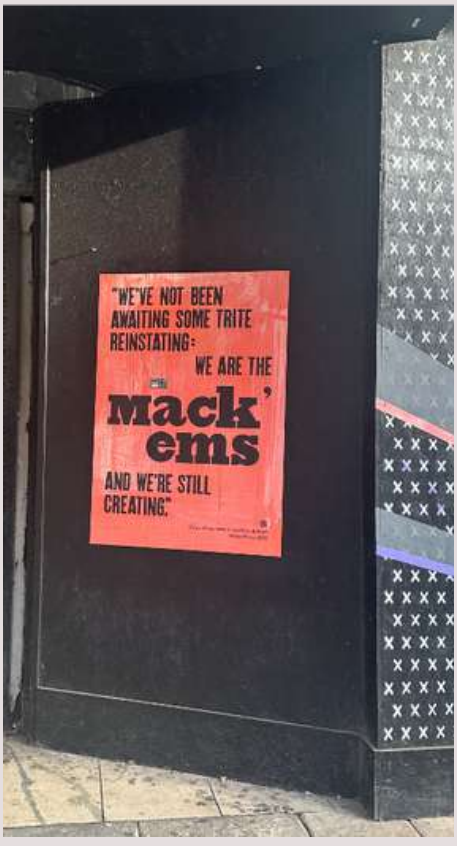
SUNNISIDE POET-IN-RESIDENCE

OUTCOMES

- Pedestrians and visitors that encountered the work were given a sense of the creativity of Sunniside
- Participants were given a sense of being part of a Sunniside community

PROJECT

The spirit of Sunniside is a fantastic one - but challenging to communicate. This commission invited Sunderland poet Helen Wilko to do just this. A Sunnisider and director of local spoken-word group King Ink, Helen collaborated with other Sunnisiders to capture the genius loci of the neighbourhood and put it into words. Published as a poetry pamphlet that was circulated around the local businesses and venues, extracts were also used as posters that were pasted-up around the streets. Reels of the poems were made and shared on the Sunniside Instagram.



A HERITAGE OF ACTIVISM AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION

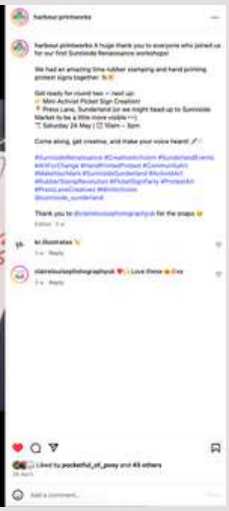
PROJECT

An open call for a researcher to take a deep dive in to Sunniside led to the commissioning of political journalist Auburn Langley, and a piece of work that traced the areas heritage of activism, radical thinking and cultural production back to the early 1800's when Sunniside first emerged.

The work showed a surprising comparison between the attitudes of the Sunniside community of the 1800's and the attitudes and culture of the neighbourhood now: the relentless ambition for socially minded enterprise; the attitude to creating and nurturing communities of interest and curiosity; and the valuing of cultural production to the wider city.

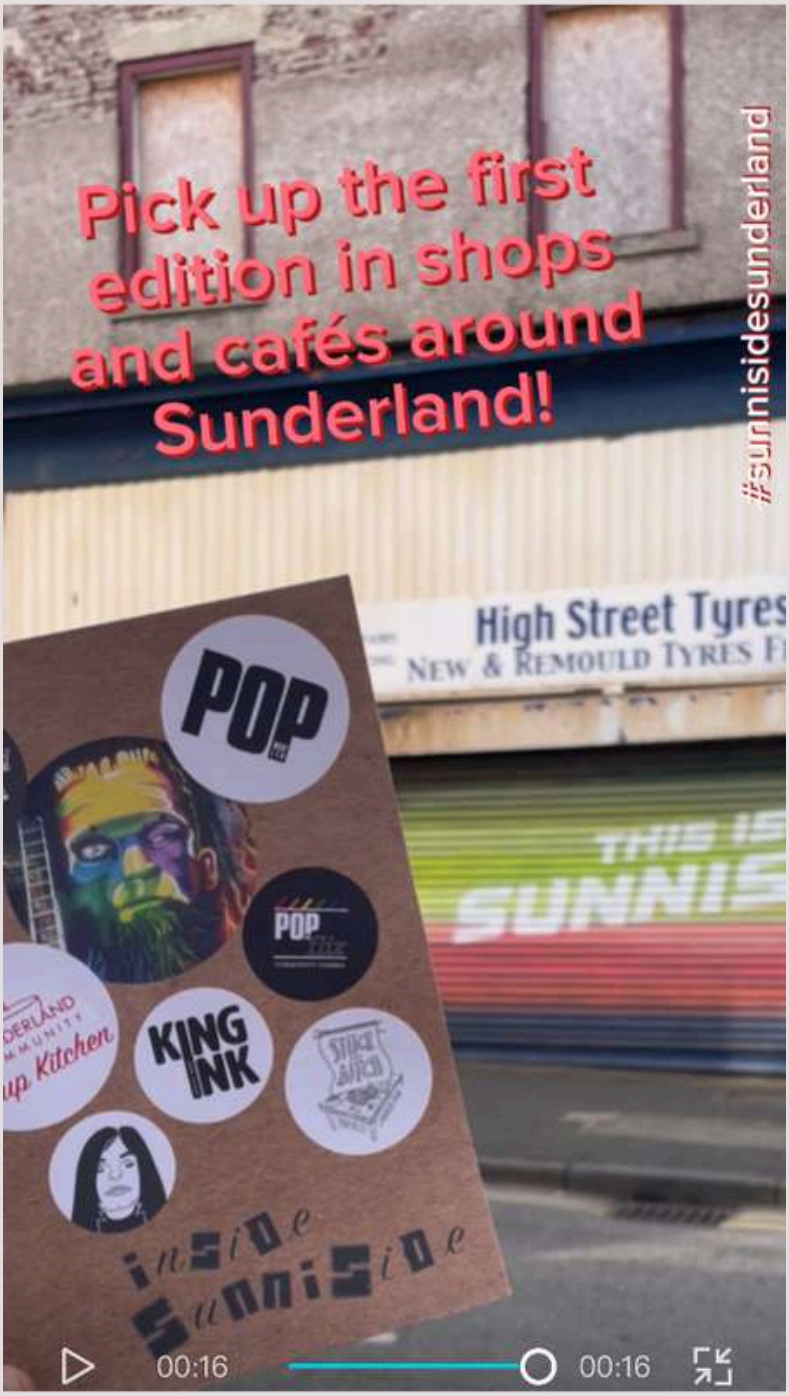
Other outputs included: Radical Reading Room boxes mounted on lampposts in the neighbourhood for people to exchange printed materials. and radical poster print workshops in Press Lane, the original home of the Sunderland Echo.

Subsequent to this commission, the researcher, Auburn Langley, has gone on to launch the New Sunderland Literary and Philosophical Society, hosting monthly events to talk about current topics in the city.



OUTCOMES

- Local people have been given a new perspective on the heritage of Sunniside that reinforced the attitudes and culture of today's neighbourhood.
- People have the opportunity to come together to discuss important topics in Sunderland.

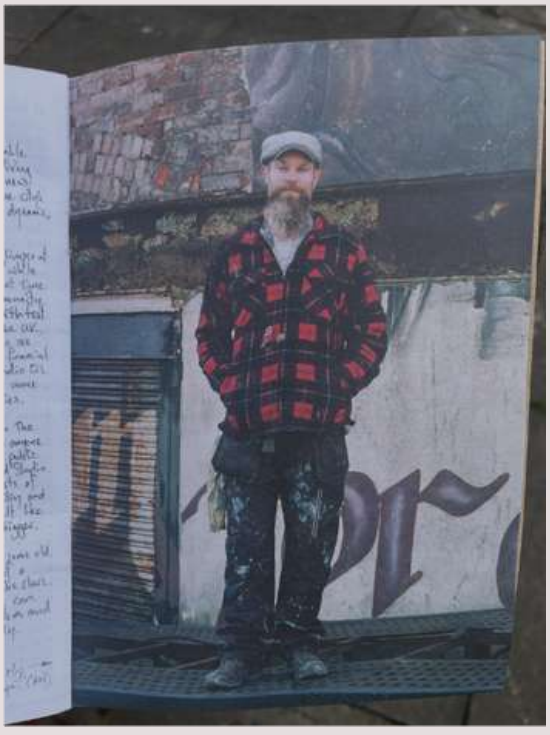


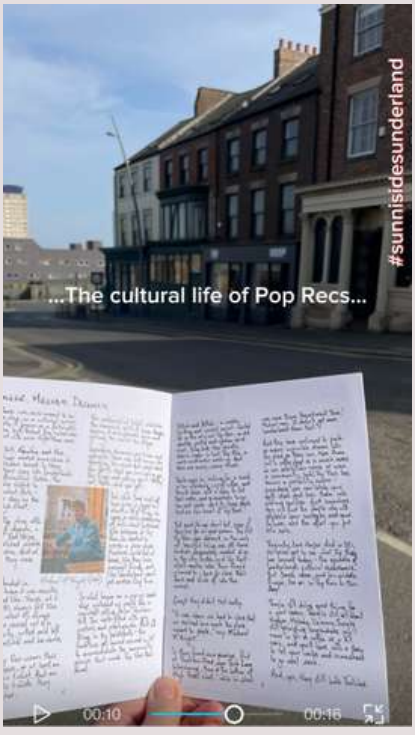
INSIDE SUNNISIDE ZINE EDITION #1

PROJECT

Giving people an insight in to Sunniside, the place, people, life of the neighbourhood was a big part of the pilot zine commission. Writer James Whitman produced this first edition which has been circulating around the city centre.

Going forward, the project will commission other guest writers with the objective of encouraging more people to celebrate and share their experience of Sunniside.





OUTCOMES

- People visiting the city centre have been given an insight into the character of Sunniside.
- People understand where Sunniside is, and who is here.

THE SUNNISIDE PLAYBOOK

PROJECT

Working with stakeholders in Sunniside, the Playbook was created as a manual for placemaking in Sunniside, celebrating the identity of Sunniside in all its diversity, and setting out a campaign for all Sunnisiders to support, changing how people see the neighbourhood and inviting them to be part of this place.

OUTCOMES

- Stakeholders contributed to identifying the character of Sunniside and how it can be described and celebrated.
- Local businesses and individuals have been able to influence how Sunniside is promoted.
- Stakeholders have a greater sense of where Sunniside is and who is part of the community.

NEXT STEPS

Stakeholders will develop a campaign to create collective noise about Sunniside and roll this out over the course of 2025.

SUNNISIDE WAYFINDING

PROJECT

Key sightlines and gateways around High Street West have been creatively transformed into wayfinding murals, part-funded by UK Shared Prosperity Funding.

The Sunniside wayfinding projects has led to a series of large scale art murals that capture the uniqueness of the area and help people distinguish when they are in Sunniside. Located at key gateway sites, these first wayfinding murals are helping to contribute to the sense of being in Sunniside, and directing people along the key route in to Sunniside Gardens from the arrival point of Sunniside car park.

OUTCOMES

- People have an improved sense of where Sunniside is and the character of the area
- People feel the area is cared for and that people are positively investing in the quality of the place
- Locals have an increased sense of pride and belonging in the neighbourhood

CREATE A SAFE NEIGHBOURHOOD

SAIL

The Sunderland Altogether Improving Lives initiative has been invaluable in reducing ASB and Crime in Sunniside and restoring people's confidence in the area and sense of safety.

A partnership between Sunderland Council, the police and Sunderland BID, the teams have targeted issues that were preventing people from feeling safe in the area and directly impacting on businesses staying viable and open.

Funding for this initiative had now been extended, creating a greater window of opportunity for businesses to establish themselves and for projects to develop, providing longer-term natural surveillance of the area.

SHIP

The Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP) is a government-funded pilot initiative that Sunderland City Council have been delivering citywide to improve the quality and value of supported housing in the city. Poor quality support within these accommodations have been linked to the ASB experienced in Sunniside, where a number of these accommodations are located. Early interventions by the SHIP team have worked to address key problem properties in the Sunniside area and residents have reported feeling the positive impact.

SAIL OUTCOMES REPORTED YEAR NOV 23- OCT 24:

Overall ASB is down	**17%**
Public order incidents are down	**7%**
Youth ASB down	**48%**
Serious Youth Violence is down	**9%**

ACTIVATE THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

EVENTS

A full programme of events were delivered by Sunderland BID with funding from UK SPF and there is a growing programme of activity being delivered by local businesses.

- Sunniside monthly food markets
- Sunniside Nights
- Urban Fest
- Lunar New Year
- Threads Clothing Market

Events Delivered **125**

Properties Activated **11**

PROPERTY ACTIVATION

- Tenant / space matching service
- Meanwhile Use Options Appraisal
- Property Audit
- Sector Development Plans

MINI MASTERPLANS

A masterplanning exercise was used to identify strategic development that would catalyse further investment and development in the next ten years. The process reframed these opportunity areas as three distinct areas for economic growth and neighbourhood regeneration: Sunniside High Street, Villiers Street Creative Hub, and Sunniside Gardens.

UKSPF FUNDED EVENTS IN NUMBERS

Events delivered between June 23 -March 25
125

Attendees that went on to visit the city centre **88%**

People brought in to the Sunniside area
55,000

UKSPF funding awarded for events programme **£269,000**

EVENTS

ACTIVATION AND ANIMATION

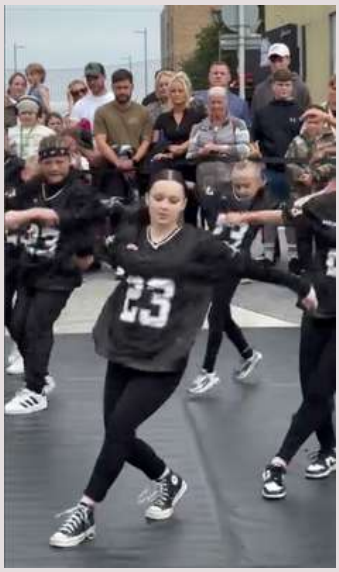
Sunderland BID secured UK Shared Prosperity Funding to deliver and commission a programme of events to animate and activate the Sunniside area, with the specific purpose of increasing the footfall in the area and reducing anti-social behaviour.

The hugely successful programme this year included:

- The monthly **Sunniside Food Markets**
- **Distinctly Sunniside**, a grant based programme to seed fund local businesses to develop and deliver events;
- **Sunniside Nights**, a performing arts based takeover of buildings in the neighbourhood,
- **Threads**, a pilot clothing market co-developed with local businesses;
- **Urban Fest**, a weekend of street based arts and entertainment

Funded by UK Government

Sunderland's Business Improvement Districts



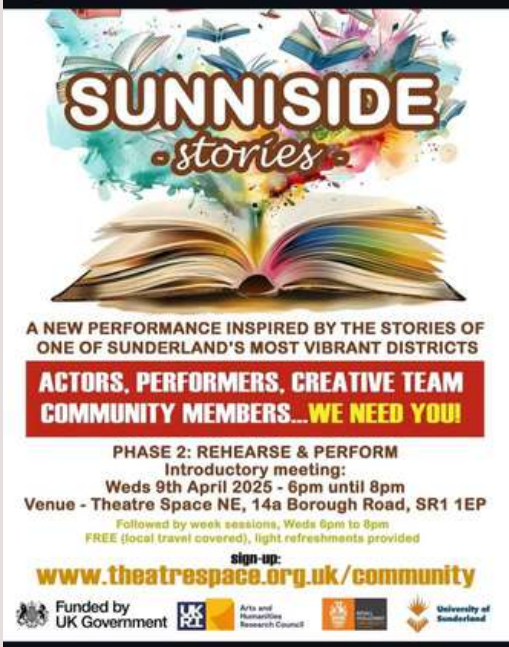
EVENTS

LOCALLY-LED EVENTS

Local businesses and entrepreneurs in Sunniside are putting on more and more of their own events which we aren't counting yet - but here's a snapshot of the range of independent events that happened in the neighbourhood in April 2025:

Weds 9 April, 6-8pm – Rehearsals begin for Sunniside Stories, Theatre Space @theatrespacene
Thurs 10 April 6-8pm – Grown-Up Colouring in, Port Independent @harbour.printworks
Thurs 10 April 6-9.30pm – King Ink/Born Lippy @poprecs @king_ink_spoken_word
Sat 12 April – Deadline to submit an original song to @sunderlandlitandphilsociety music competition
Sat 12 April 11am-1pm – Punk-inspired Flower Pressing Zine Workshop, Port Independent @harbour.printworks
Weds 16 April, 6-8pm – Sunniside Stories rehearsals @theatrespacene
Weds 16 April, 7pm(ish) – Fortnightly music quiz with our gorgeous pals at @thebridgehotelvaults
Thurs 17 April 6.30pm – New Sunderland Lit & Phil at Pop Recs featuring @musiccity.uk @poprecs @sunderlandlitandphilsociety
Fri 18 April – Good Friday Bottomless Brunch at @thesofia.sunderland £35pp (Brunch plus bottomless Prosecco!!)
Fri 18 April 8pm-late – Burning Down the House @burningdownthehouse.ne @poprecs
Fri 25 April 6-8pm – Drink & Draw, Port Independent @harbour.printworks. £10
Fri 25 & Sat 26 April 7pm – UNMISSABLE Cheese and Wine Nights @fatunicorn £60pp
Sat 26 April – Sunniside Local Heroes Food Market @localheroesne
Sun 27 April 10am-2pm – Queer Pages: A History of LGBTQIA+ Zine-making, Port Independent @harbour.printworks
Fri 25 April 7pm–late – Comedy Night @diegosjoint £15
25-27 April – Catch our neighbours as they represent Sunniside @wemakeculture and @dance_jam in Public Record @firestationsun @sunderlandculture @nationaltheatre @rgtmillard

30 6
Liked by __insunderland and others
harbour.printworks Workshops at Harbour Printworks this April... more
theatrespacene



14 2
Liked by __insunderland and others
theatrespacene Actors and performers of Sunderland and surrounding areas! We're seeking talented community members to form a cast that will... more
fat.unicorn
Fat Unicorn Delicatessen

34 3

CASE STUDY:
DISTINCTLY SUNNISIDE WE MAKE CULTURE

As part of the Distinctly Sunniside commissioning brief, We Make Culture (WMC) was awarded a £1250 micro-commission to explore how their Young Musicians Project (YMP) could engage more deeply with their Sunniside neighbourhood, promote the creative activity of the programme, and draw in new audiences to Sunniside venues with a fresh offer.

CALL TO ACTION

We Make Culture's YMP groups aim to offer a safe and nurturing environment for young people to make music in Sunderland, providing performance opportunities, training and development, and a supportive social network.

The Sunniside Project asked for commission holders to host events that expressly encouraged new audiences to come to Sunniside, and this aligns with WMC's organisational aims of developing opportunities for young people to perform and develop leadership and events planning skills.

WHAT HAPPENED

This light-touch funding opportunity enabled the organisation to test new performance formats, strengthen local partnerships, and support the progression of young musicians into public performance in a meaningful and accessible way.

The Stripped Back Social was a new performance format that offered young musicians the chance to share original music and covers in a relaxed, low-pressure environment. The event was hosted at Port, a coffee and clothing venue just a short walk from WMC's Villiers Street studio. Scheduled directly after a YMP session, the group walked through Sunniside together, helping young people develop confidence in navigating the area - a key step in claiming public space.

Another outcome of the commission was a new collaboration with The Bunker, a local music organisation and venue based near Park Lane. Recognising a divide between their participant groups - geographically and culturally - WMC facilitated three pre-meetings between young people from both organisations. These sessions empowered participants to take ownership of their event, which took place at Pop Recs in Sunniside, from programming to marketing design. For many of The Bunker's participants, this was their first visit to "that end of town," a powerful reminder of how even small projects can shift perceptions and open new pathways.

OUTCOMES & OUTPUTS

- The Stripped Back Social was sold out, welcoming 40 audience members and showcasing four acts.
- The collab event at Pop Recs was also sold out, and brought together musicians from YMP and The Bunker to perform alongside one another for the first time.
- For many participants and audience members, the venues were new to them, and a first exposure to Sunniside's wider creative community.
- The success of the event has prompted WMC to commit to delivering quarterly Stripped Back Socials as a regular feature in the YMP calendar.
- We Make Culture think of themselves differently as a result of the commission - now they consider themselves a Sunniside organisation and part of the fabric of the area.

CASE STUDY:
DISTINCTLY SUNNISIDE WE MAKE CULTURE

Distinctly Sunniside was funded by UKSPF through Sunderland BID.

Building on the momentum created by the commission, WMC also participated in the Diego's Music Social, which brought community musicians from Pallion and Hendon into Sunniside for a daytime event. While the performances took place indoors, the adjacent Sunniside Gardens provided a welcoming, flexible breakout space that allowed families to move freely - especially valuable for children and younger audiences.

PART OF SUNNISIDE

WMC has a long-standing presence in Sunderland, but this commission made them feel a stronger identity as a Sunniside-based organisation. "We realised that part of our work is not just about making music here," noted Project Director Laura Brewis, "but about actively bringing people into Sunniside - helping them feel part of it."

In Laura's words: "This small pot of funding helped us do something we've wanted to do for years - and prove that it works." This seed-funding commission enabled WMC to test out an idea to decide whether it was worth continued investment - in a low-risk way.

The project deepened connections across the city and laid the groundwork for further activity, including the ambition to launch open-air music events in Sunniside Gardens, building on the success of initiatives like Art in the Park.

April 2025

PROPERTY ACTIVATION

ACTIONS

Tenant / Space Matching Service

A coordinated service to connect landlords with potential tenants, promoting Sunniside's commercial property listings as the primary platform for finding available space in the area.

Meanwhile Use Options Appraisal

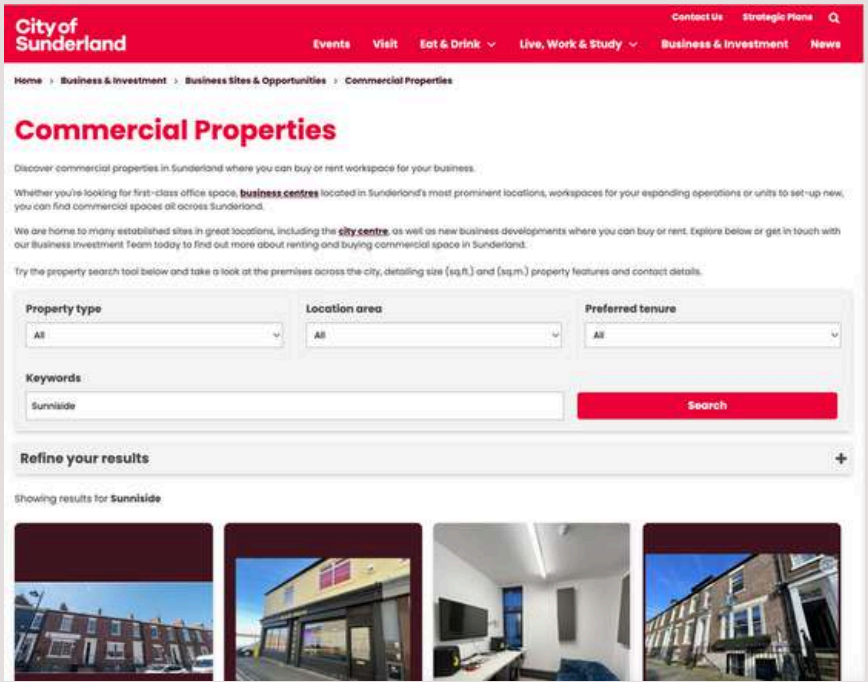
A strategic assessment of vacant or underused spaces in Sunniside suitable for temporary or meanwhile uses. Biscop House and the Tyre Shop on Sunniside High Street have been identified as key sites for activation in the next phase of development.

Property Audit

A comprehensive review of all ground-floor properties in Sunniside, examining ownership, current use, and physical condition to inform strategic planning and regeneration efforts.

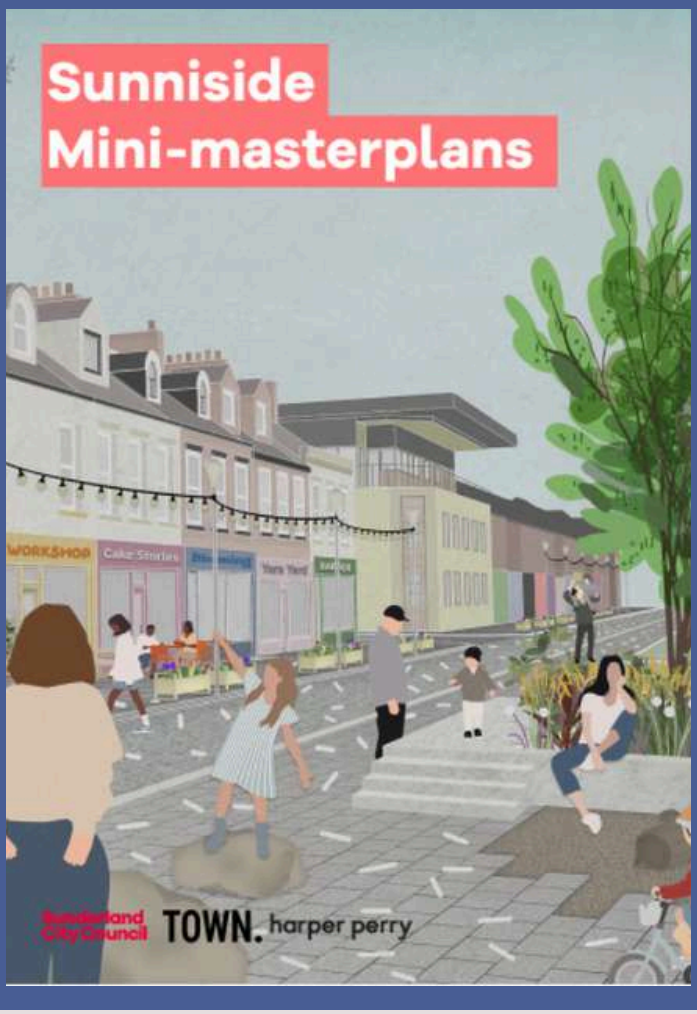
Sector Development Plans

A set of expert-led studies exploring the growth potential of key sectors in Sunniside, including the Creative Industries, Food & Beverage, Leisure, and Social Enterprise.



MINI MASTERPLANS

IDENTIFYING STRATEGIC PROJECTS FOR INVESTMENT



PROJECT

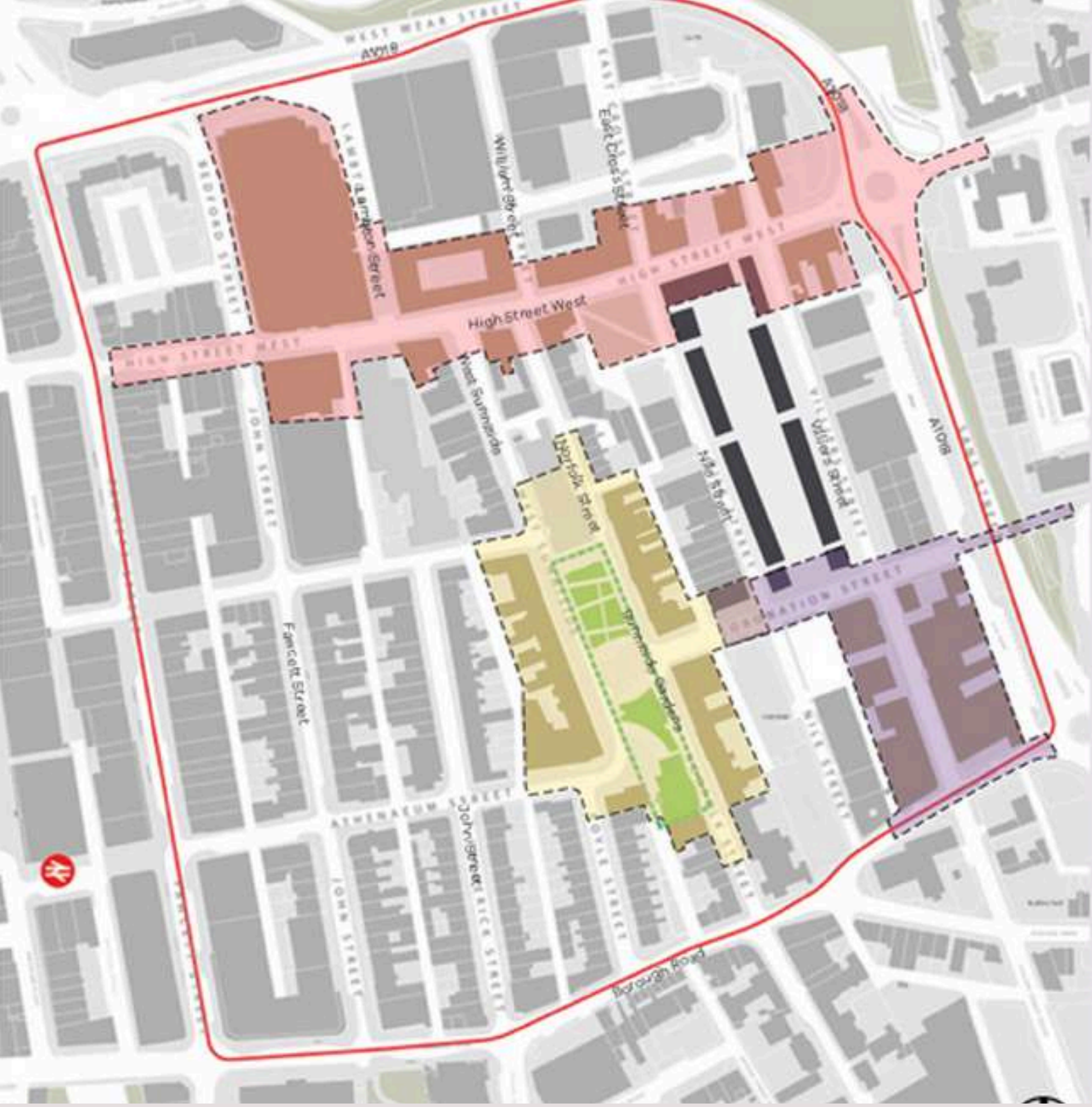
The 2023 Place Strategy identified five key nodes within the Sunniside area where strong partnerships and development opportunities exist (see map, left).

Building on this, a masterplanning exercise led by Harper Perry used these nodes as starting points for strategic development aimed at unlocking further investment. Through this process, the five nodes were refined into three focus areas for economic growth and neighbourhood regeneration: Sunniside High Street, Villiers Street Creative Hub, and Sunniside Gardens.

Like the Place Strategy, the masterplan adopted a systems-based approach, considering layers of change across systems, culture, and capital investment. It proposed a series of targeted interventions designed to drive economic growth and support community development, laying the groundwork for long-term regeneration.

OUTCOMES

The interventions proposed as part of this exercise have formed the basis of the 2025/26 delivery plan, and focuses on longer-term 'Activate the Neighbourhood' and 'Intensify Uses and Build the Population' workstreams with feasibility studies and investment planning.



THREE AREAS OF FOCUS

HIGH STREET WEST

Sunniside High Street will be a distinct and liveable high street that serves a sociable and entrepreneurial neighbourhood of resident and workers, and has a vibrancy that attracts visitors to spend time and money here.

VILLIERS STREET

The hub for the creative industries in Sunderland.

SUNNISIDE GARDENS

Sunniside Gardens will be the sociable heart of this city neighbourhood for all Sunnisiders, a multifunctional green space for different kinds of play and to retreat and relax in the city.

INTENSIFY USES AND BUILD POPULATION

INCREASING THE USE OF VACANT OR UNDERUSED PROPERTY

PROJECTS IN DEVELOPMENT

Investment in property in Sunniside is growing with a number of key developments in progress:

- Sunniside Social, Former Sunniside Leisure commercial units
- Nile & Villiers Street housing development
- 15 and 16 Nile Street
- Sunniside Car Park renovation project
- Norfolk Hotel redevelopment
- Former Harry's Game Shack frontage renovation (delayed to 2025/6)
- 176 High Street West sale with renovation due 2026
- Former Tyre shop
- Former Job Centre redevelopment into student accommodation.
- Former Havershams, Fawcett Street as the Art Cafe
- Harbour Print Workshop
- Former HSBC bank, Fawcett Street

Estimated Investment to date **£9.1M**

Properties brought back in to use **8**

Properties / Projects in Development **10**

Investment committed to date **£32.4M**

AQUISITIONS

Further strategic acquisitions have been made in Sunniside that manage risks to the area and create opportunities for intensifying uses in the area.

PROPERTY BROUGHT BACK INTO USE

- Lambton House and The Bridge Vaults Hotel on High Street West by Arrow Commercial
- Further units renovated within Mackie's Corner by Kirtley & Co.
- The city centre cinema on Lambton Street by Omniplex
- 137 and 138 High Street West as Tribeca and Alberts Place and 29 E Cross Street as Funky G second hand clothing shop by Sunderland Community Soup Kitchen
- The Townhouse creative enterprise studios by Marengo Estates
- Former AdventureLand on the High Street renovated as a restaurant

PROPERTIES BROUGHT BACK IN TO USE

The private sector has made a significant contribution to the development of Sunniside in the last year. There have been a number of properties brought back in to use, two significant ones are noted here.

- Lambton House is a Grade II listed building that is part of the social heritage of Sunniside. It was formerly a pub but more recently the offices for the Youth Offending Service until 2021.
- In 2023, Arrow Commercial secured planning for a change of use to the ground floor and in late 2024, The Bridge Hotel Vaults pub opened its doors again to the public and the upper floors are now offices, occupied by community focused organisations.

LAMBTON HOUSE & BRIDGE HOTEL

High Street West

Investment:

£300K approx.

- This city centre cinema was formerly operated by Empire until the chain went in to administration in 2023.
- In 2024, Omniplex secured an agreement to operate the cinema and are now investing heavily in improvements to this leisure destination that serves the city centre and beyond.

OMNIPLEX CINEMA

Lambton Street

Investment:

£4M approx.

DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

There is a pipeline of projects in development through both public and private sector investment.

- The former Tyre Shop on High Street West was made water tight in 2022/23 by Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust with the support of Levelling Up funding from Central Government.
- Further investment and a long-term tenant is being secured to bring this important corner unit on Sunniside's High Street back in to use.

MIXED-USE COMMERCIAL AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SPACE

FORMER TYRE SHOP

177 High Street West

Project Timescale

2025-27

- The former Norfolk Hotel is an important heritage building in Sunniside. Beginning as a educational institution in the 1800s, in more recent years it was used as a hostel until it closed in 2019.
- Marengo estates are now investing in renovating the building, transforming it in to studio spaces for creatives and independent enterprises. The first phase completed in 2025, with the Townhouse containing the first 12 units.

CREATIVE ENTERPRISE STUDIOS

FORMER NORFOLK HOTEL

Norfolk Street

Project Timescale

2025-27

NILE AND VILLIERS HOUSING SCHEME

FORMER BROWNFIELD SITE

Project Timescale

2025-27

Nile + Villiers is a residential-led scheme that started on site in January 2025, redeveloping a gap site in the centre of Sunniside and delivering quality homes.

The development has been a long-term ambition for the Council with land assembly for the project beginning back in the 2010s. TOWN acted as development managers, delivered the scheme to planning.

The project has been significantly funded by central government through the Levelling Up programme, winning a grant in 2023.

The scheme will be an important contributer to the growth of the population in Sunniside and will be a flagship scheme for demonstrating the living and working potential of this neighbourhood within the city centre.

- **75 high-quality homes for sale and rent**
- **575 sqm of commercial space along High Street West**
- **Shared central garden**

Funded by UK Government

Sunderland City Council

TOWN.

xsite

Sunniside Sunderland

WHAT NEXT 2025/26

The delivery programme in 2025/6 is focused on securing further investment into the area. The mini masterplans has focused on priority areas that when unlocked will support further private sector investment, economic growth and a neighbourhood fit for city centre living.

The Sunniside regeneration project will continue to depend on trusted stakeholders and partners for delivery at pace, and the project will continue to shape plans for a stewardship model that builds on the progress, investment and ambition of stakeholders and offers a long-term solution to sustain the drive towards a successful city neighbourhood.

www.sunnisidesunderland.com

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