

# WE ARE LEVELLING UP STOKE-ON-TRENT

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## LEVELLING UP REVIEW 2021-23



VIS UNITA FORTIOR



# FOREWORD

**Councillor Abi Brown**  
Leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council

It is two years since we published the Powering Up Prospectus in February 2021, in which we set out a shared strategy to bounce back from the Covid-19 pandemic, improve outcomes for people and businesses across Stoke-on-Trent, tackle persistent inequalities which have blighted lives and communities and undermined people's life chances for generations, and grow our economy to create jobs and prosperity. The prospectus made the case to Ministers that Stoke-on-Trent was the national litmus test for the Levelling Up agenda, and we threw down our challenge to government: 'If not here, then where? If not now, then when?'

We saw an opportunity in the Government's Levelling Up policy to do something transformative – and we seized it with both hands. To be clear, we were not asking for a magic wand to fix our city's problems. We wanted a collaborative partnership with government to unlock mutual benefits from economic growth. We had developed a set of credible, shared plans for our city's economic resurgence. We were clear about our significant strengths and our weaknesses, and about where we believed targeted investment would enable us to achieve our objectives and improve a wide range of outcomes for everyone in our city.

One of the greatest aspects of our Levelling Up work has been the way that partners and stakeholders have come together to support our plans and help to shape new approaches and solutions to the problems which have previously held us back. The establishment of the Stoke-on-Trent City Forum has been a key driver of this consensus, bringing together a diverse range of engaged stakeholders to share their vital knowledge and expertise on issues ranging from cultural development and heritage-led regeneration to education and skills and the need to improve the life chances of vulnerable young people, including care leavers. We have also worked incredibly closely with our city's three MPs to bring our plans and requirements to the attention of Ministers and civil servants in Whitehall.

Fast forward two years, and Stoke-on-Trent is firmly at the vanguard of the UK's Levelling Up places. We have secured well over £100 million of government investment, including the largest single Levelling Up Fund allocation from the 2021 Budget. And we are partnering with government departments on the delivery of ground-breaking interventions to help tackle health-related unemployment, support vulnerable families, transform early years development and school improvement and accelerate housing construction on brownfield sites. We have achieved a great deal in a very short time, and against a challenging backdrop of national economic and political instability. We are justly proud of our successes, but we are not taking our foot off the pedal. We are continuing to press government for the funding, powers and support that we need to achieve our aims and capitalise on the historic opportunities that lie in store for our great city.



**76.8%**

Employment rate



**2<sup>nd</sup>** for job creation  
in the UK  
with **1,975 jobs created**  
through inward investment since 2020



Almost

**1 million sq ft**  
of new commercial floorspace  
(2020-21)



**£68 million**

Transport funding attracted  
since 2020



**3,113 homes**

developed on brownfield land  
between 2018 - 2021



**8.3%** increase

in % of pupils attending a school  
rated good or better (currently at 85.7%)

Our citywide full fibre network covers

**1,168km**



connecting over 113,000 properties

# THEME 1 – TRANSPORT

## Our Levelling Up ambitions and rationale

We made the case to government that Stoke-on-Trent is superbly placed geographically, but lacks the intra-city connectivity to grow its economy effectively and enable its residents to benefit fully from economic development and job creation. We said that we needed to use targeted investment in improved infrastructure to connect to and build on the existing strengths in the city. We told Ministers that investment in rail and strategic road links was required to unlock Stoke-on-Trent's full economic potential, particularly with respect to HS2, the motorway network, air hubs and future freeports. We also argued for greater investment in environmental sustainability, including reducing emissions and improving air quality in relation to transport, saying that intracity public transport improvements needed to connect the population to economic opportunities in a sustainable way.

From the outset, we were clear that we see rail and bus service improvements as the key Levelling Up goals for transport investment. We set out our intention to work closely with the Department for Transport (DfT), National Highways and transport operators to secure targeted investment in specific improvement projects. Although we subsequently secured £31 million to deliver bus service improvements, the substantive investment needs in relation to rail connectivity and strategic road links are a focus of continuing discussions with Levelling Up ministers and the Department for Transport.

### Hydrogen Bus







### Levelling Up Ambitions

Explore feasibility of an integrated light rail system.

Explore potential to reopen local stations and Stoke-Leek railway line.

Improve bus routes; invest in transport integration and become the UK's first hydrogen bus city.

Prioritise improvements to East-West connectivity.

### What We Have Achieved Since 2021

Secured exploratory funding for rail connectivity improvements, including feasibility of a light/very light rail network. Completed and published the Strategic Outline Business Case.

- Allocated £1.7 million from DfT for initial work to reopen Meir station.
- Developed Strategic Outline Business Case for reopening the Stoke-Leek railway line.
- Commenced exploratory work and discussions on reopening Trentham rail station.

- Developed a new Transport Strategy focusing on improved intra-city connectivity and closer integration of bus, rail, cycling and walking.
- Secured £31 million of government funding for a wide range of bus service improvements.
- Worked with provider to carry out environmental upgrade work to 50 buses operating in the city.

- Working with local partners, National Highways and DfT to secure capital investment to deliver A500/A50 corridor upgrade.
- Developed plans for improved rail service frequency and reduced journey times.

## What we have achieved to date

### **Transport Strategy:**

Early in 2021, the City Council developed a refreshed Transport Strategy aimed at creating an integrated, high performing transport system to connect residents and businesses to the many economic opportunities that the city is creating, as well as enhancing wider access on the national road and rail network. It also set out our ambitions to establish a light rail system for the city.

### **Bus service improvements:**

In November 2021, we submitted a new Bus Service Improvement Plan to central government. This was developed jointly with local bus operators with the aims of reversing the trend of declining passenger numbers and improving service reliability. The objective was to secure a proportionate share of the Government's £3 billion Bus Back Better scheme to strengthen local transport infrastructure as the nation recovered from the impacts of the pandemic. The bid secured £31m of investment in service improvements, including reducing journey times, increasing service frequency and reliability and cutting ticket prices to encourage greater usage.

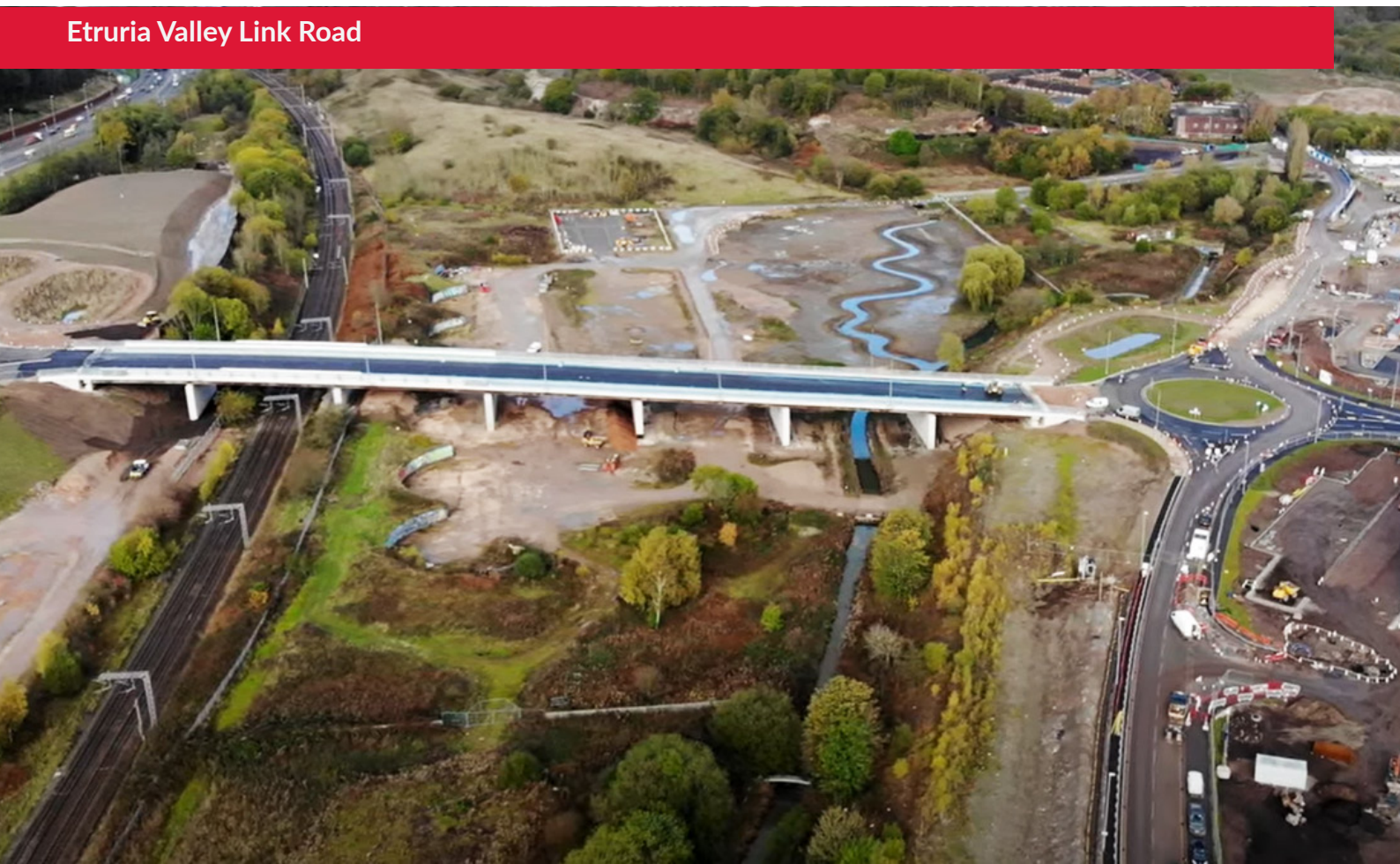
### **Environmental sustainability:**

Making public transport more sustainable was one of the City Council's Powering Up goals. Working with provider First Bus, the City Council enabled 50 buses to be upgraded to high environmental standards to help to reduce citywide carbon emissions and air pollution levels.

### **Strategic road links:**

The £42 million Etruria Valley Link Road was completed and opened to the public in January. The new route will open up development and employment sites on the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone and improve connectivity at the key northern gateway to the city.

### **Etruria Valley Link Road**







Station Gateway

### **Rail network solutions/improvements:**

During 2022, Stoke-on-Trent secured £1.7 million from the Government's £15 million Restoring Your Railways fund to carry out exploratory work and develop more detailed plans for reopening Meir Station, which has been closed to passengers since 1966. The funding is being used to develop a full business case and delivery study for the project, which aims to reduce road traffic at a key eastern gateway to the city. A strategic outline business case has also been developed to reopen the Stoke to Leek railway line in order to improve connectivity to a key commuter town within the Stoke-on-Trent City Region. Exploratory work is also taking place around the potential reopening of Trentham Station, which would improve links to the employment area around Trentham Lakes, as well as the Trentham village and nearby leisure attractions.

### **Our focus for the future**

We are continuing to make the case to government and national transport bodies regarding the critical importance of transport infrastructure investment, as well as devolved powers and funding, to the growth of our city's economy and the overall success of our Levelling Up strategy. In January, we put our case to Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove and other senior government ministers during a summit at 10 Downing Street focusing on the city's Levelling Up needs and priorities. We achieved support for the City Council's transport improvement plan, including the development of a pipeline of projects focusing on roads, public transport, active travel and safety improvements.



## THEME 2 – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Our Levelling Up ambitions and rationale

The Powering Up Prospectus made the point that Stoke-on-Trent had been among the fastest local economies to rebound from the last recession, and that the city had continued to outstrip swathes of the UK in terms of economic growth, job creation and innovation up until the pandemic. However, it also argued that a lack of access to private sector investment was continuing to hamper the city's credible plans for growing the local economy and creating employment opportunities. It set out an ambition to drive economic development by fostering high growth sectors and creating high-skilled, well-paid jobs.

Our Levelling Up ambitions were to attract inward investment and support business growth by providing the right mix of commercial space, regenerating the City Centre and town centres, and developing more high-quality housing on brownfield sites. We also set out plans to capitalise on the city's improving digital infrastructure and connectivity to create more skilled jobs in the labour market.



## Levelling Up Ambitions

Ensure the ongoing provision of a diverse range of affordable commercial and light industrial space to support business growth and attract further inward investment.

## What We Have Achieved Since 2021

- ▶ Delivering more than five hectares of additional employment space annually.
- ▶ Achieved the 50 per cent development milestone for the wider Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone, with all of the city sites either occupied, being developed or in the planning pipeline.
- ▶ Delivered four new enterprise centres using resources from the Get Building Fund.
- ▶ Completed construction of the Etruria Valley Link Road to connect the enterprise zone to major road networks and population areas.

Continue at least the current rate of provision of new market homes on brownfield land, with increasing levels of quality

- ▶ 984 new homes either built or under construction since April 2021.
- ▶ Secured a new partnership agreement with Homes England to enable the city to bring forward an expanded pipeline of brownfield housing developments.

Tackle the next stages of the city centre regeneration based on the opportunities created through improving public transport and previous investment.

- ▶ Continued to expand the Smithfield commercial district, including completion of the Clayworks apartment development and a new multi-storey car park.
- ▶ Started work on the Etruscan Square development in the City Centre.

Etruscan Square







The Goods Yard

## Levelling Up Ambitions

Regenerate the main towns across Stoke-on-Trent through distinct plans and investment based on repurposing key assets, new residential provision.

Reap the benefits of full-fibre gigabit broadband connectivity, attracting and growing digital and technological businesses to create high-skilled jobs and to enhance the local education and skills offer.

## What We Have Achieved Since 2021

- Start of work on The Goods Yard development, in Stoke, following allocation of Levelling Up funding.
- Levelling Up money secured for the renovation of Tunstall Library and Baths building.
- Funding secured to deliver the Crown Works heritage-led housing development in Longton.
- Plans developed and approved for further expansion of the Spode site, in Stoke, to create housing and business units.
- Delivery of the Stoke Town Centre Heritage Action Zone, in partnership with Historic England.
- Completion of several significant residential developments in Fenton (Rialto Court, HRA properties along City Road) which complements the QEII housing development and the remodelling of Albert Square.
- Completion of feasibility work in relation to key assets in Burslem.
- Completed installation of the UK's first citywide full-fibre, gigabit-enabled network.
- Delivering the Silicon Stoke prospectus, which set out how the city will benefit from enhanced digital connectivity and infrastructure.

## What we have achieved to date

### Levelling Up Fund investment:

Following the submission of detailed bids to the Government's Levelling Up Fund in February 2021, Stoke-on-Trent secured £56 million in investment in the October 2021 Budget. This was the largest single allocation from the Levelling Up Fund as well as the biggest single investment of government funding in Stoke-on-Trent for more than 30 years. The funding comprised:

- £20m for the Etruscan Square project on the former East-West Precinct site in the City Centre;
- £16m for The Goods Yard, a £60m heritage-led regeneration project in Stoke;
- £20m for smaller-scale heritage regeneration projects at the Crown Works, in Longton, Tunstall Library and Baths, and new commercial spaces and homes on the Spode site, in Stoke. Together, these developments will play an important role in repurposing and strengthening town centres through the provision of new housing and increased footfall to stimulate trade and economic prosperity.

Stoke-on-Trent has also been named in the 2023 Budget as one of 20 areas nationwide which will host a new Levelling Up Partnership and share in £400 million of Levelling Up funding. The City Council will work with key stakeholders to drive economic growth, unlock barriers to attracting inward investment and develop bespoke regeneration plans to address local needs.

### Etruscan Square:

Site clearance work was completed in spring 2021, following a £6 million investment by the City Council. Cabinet approved contracts for infrastructure and enabling works in December, enabling site investigation work to commence. Plans for the City Centre site include new homes, restaurants, leisure facilities and a 144-bedroom hotel all set within attractive outdoor spaces. A 3,600-capacity arena will provide a striking focal point and host a range of events, attracting more people into the city centre which will be the final phase of the development.

### The Goods Yard:

The City Council secured £16 million from the Levelling Up fund in October 2021, and appointed specialist social mission developers Capital & Centric as its delivery partner on the project, which will see the former Swift House council offices transformed into a striking £60 million canalside urban quarter linking Stoke town to the railway station and nearby University Quarter. Construction work commenced in October last year. The completed development will ultimately feature 174 new designed homes for rent, along with edgy work spaces, indie bars, cafes and shops, as well as a new green outdoor space which will be open to the public.

### Home Office relocation:

Within weeks of publishing the Powering Up Prospectus, the Home Office announced that it would be opening a hub in Stoke-on-Trent, bringing around 500 new skilled jobs to the city, including a number of apprenticeships and digital roles. In January, the Home Office signed the lease on offices at the City Centre's Smithfield commercial district, where the innovation centre will be based.

### Digital infrastructure:

Spring 2021 saw the completion of the UK's first citywide full-fibre network. The 113 km network provided the platform for an extensive 5G system for the city. The network has been delivered to support our Silicon Stoke plans to use digital innovation, infrastructure and skills to transform Stoke-on-Trent into a Smart City where digital enterprise can thrive.



### **Heritage-led regeneration:**

A partnership project involving the City Council and Historic England saw work take place during 2022 to restore historic buildings and shop fronts in Stoke town centre. Under the Stoke High Street Heritage Action Zone initiative, owners of eligible buildings were able to apply for grants to cover up to 75 per cent of the cost of restoration works. The restoration work focused on individual buildings in Glebe Street and Church Street. The improvements complemented similar restoration work which was carried out on part of the Spode site, making Stoke-on-Trent the first city to have two Heritage Action Zones programmes being delivered simultaneously.

### **The Spode Site:**

Work to convert the historic pottery works into a new creative village has progressed rapidly during the past two years. The site will benefit from a Levelling Up project to provide additional residential and commercial space. Future phases of the Spode site project will deliver incubator units for small businesses and start-ups, with the possible addition of a state-of-the-art gymnasium.

### **Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone:**

The ongoing expansion of the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone since its inception in 2016 has been one of the key forces driving the development of affordable and accessible commercial and employment space in Stoke-on-Trent. January marked not only the achievement of the 50 per cent development milestone across all six enterprise zone sites, but also the completion of the Stoke-on-Trent sites, with all the available development sites either occupied, being developed or in the planning process. Ceramic Valley has generated a £48 million uplift in GVA in the last seven years and created more than 1,300 new jobs – a figure which is forecast to exceed 5,000 in the next two years.

### **Homes England partnership:**

The City Council has entered into a strategic partnership agreement with Homes England to increase the number of new homes being built on brownfield sites in the city. Stoke-on-Trent was one of the 20 places identified in the Levelling Up White Paper in relation to housing provision and has identified a portfolio of 15 sites for delivery. The ground-breaking agreement, which was struck in June last year, was linked to the development of a comprehensive delivery plan to boost confidence in Stoke-on-Trent's housing market and help sites to be completed with greater assurance. The partners are committed to developing a flexible portfolio of potential housing sites to be delivered over seven to 10 years based on robust business cases that use co-developed feasibility studies and detailed appraisals. They will also create a shared governance structure to deliver the work through the creation of a Levelling Up Stoke-on-Trent Housing Programme Board.

### **New homes to be built on brownfield sites**





Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone

## Our focus for the future

It is crucial that the City Council and development and investment partners are able to maintain the city's economic momentum in the face of challenging national economic conditions. We are continuing to have a constructive dialogue with central government regarding a number of aspect of our economic development plans. These include the future of our Investment Zone bid, and the need to agree on an investment model that will enable us to deliver the arena element of the Etruscan Square development. We have asked ministers for help in upgrading public realm sites and developing bespoke solutions for complex development sites, such as projects involving listed buildings. Most importantly, we are keen to pursue possible changes to our strategic partnership agreement with Homes England to better address the local challenges that exist around brownfield land regeneration in order to de-risk key projects and make sites more attractive to private investors.

During the Downing Street Levelling Up summit, it was agreed that government departments and relevant agencies would work with the City Council to:

- Identify further suitable brownfield housing sites and ensure that quality homes get built on sites that have already been identified.
- Develop bespoke solutions for the development of brownfield sites which include listed buildings, or which entail significant abnormal redevelopment costs.
- Prioritise recruitment within Stoke-on-Trent to fill the 500 new jobs being created by the Home Office Innovation Centre.
- Enable businesses and universities in the city to access research and development funding for key industries and sectors.
- Examine how Levelling Up projects could be used to develop a training and skills pipeline that will enable more local students to secure employment in the construction industry.

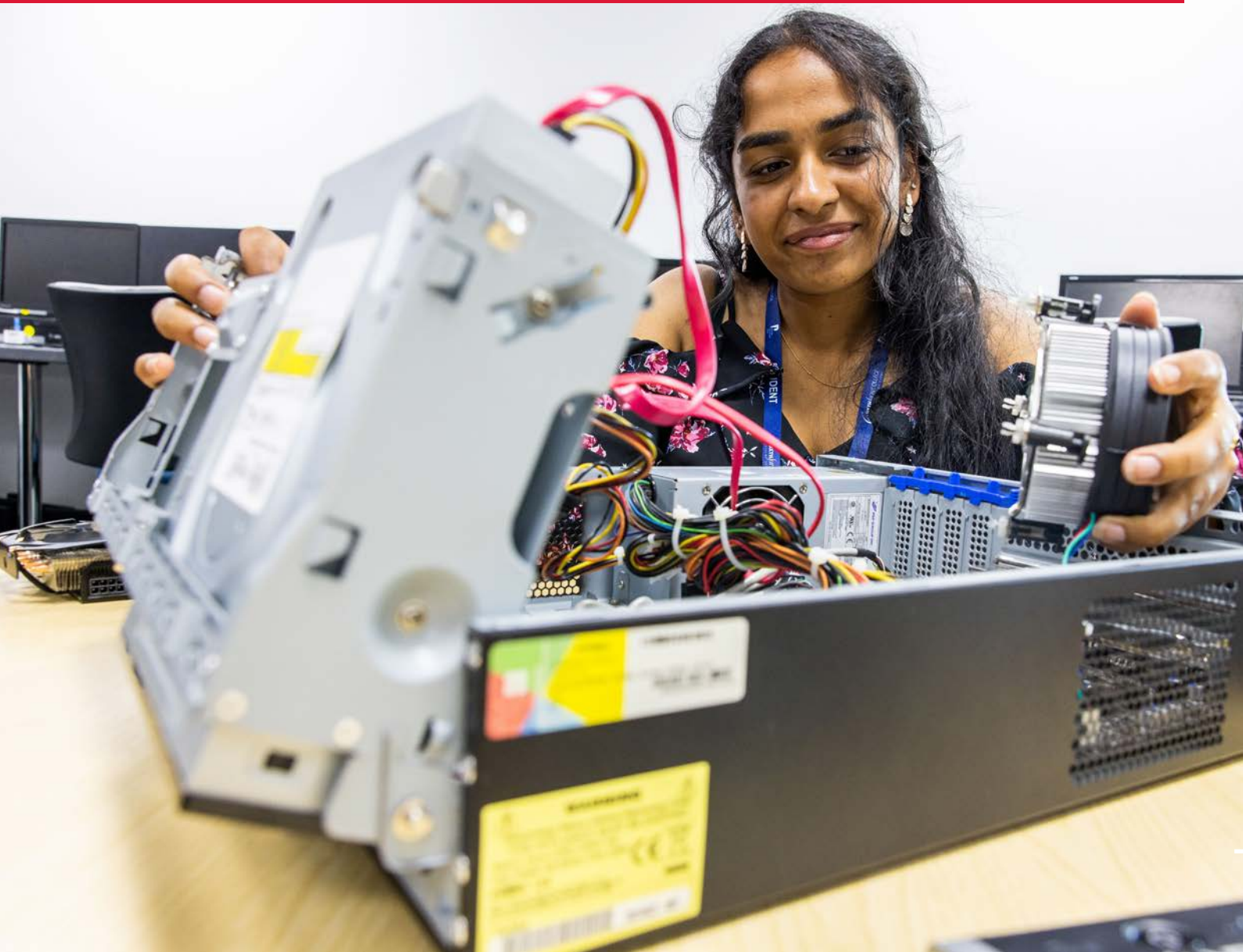


## THEME 3 – EDUCATION AND SKILLS

### Our Levelling Up ambitions and rationale

Reducing educational inequalities and transforming skills provision were two of the most important goals contained in the Powering Up Prospectus. Job creation on its own will not deliver the required step-change in economic outcomes unless the city's vocational skills offer is adequately strengthened and aligned more closely to the needs of local employers. We set a challenging target of closing the gap to the rest of UK by at least half in relation to school readiness at age five and breaking into the top 100 local authority areas for Key Stage 4 attainment. Digital skills, in particular, are vital to achieving the city's plans to grow its emerging digital and technological clusters and create an expanded range of career opportunities in Stoke-on-Trent's expanding digital creative industries. We aim to become renowned nationally for our ambition and progress on specialist digital education and skills pathways and to develop one of the best technical education and skills offers in the country.

### Focus on expanding digital skills







## Embedding digital skills

### Levelling Up Ambitions

Build on the work of the Stoke-on-Trent Opportunity Area with a new Education Challenge Area to drive up educational standards across the city.

Fulfil the conditions to secure the Wave 14 secondary free school development on the old Longton High School site and advance a Wave 15 digital academy.

Offer world class education to students across North Staffordshire with the potential and drive to make a significant contribution to the growing digital sector.

### What We Have Achieved Since 2021

- ▶ Established the Education Challenge Board to improve educational standards and leadership.
- ▶ Stoke-on-Trent has been designated as a Priority Education Investment Area by the DfE.
- ▶ A new citywide Education Improvement Strategy has been developed with education partners, leading to more schools in the city being rated 'Good' and 'Outstanding'.

- ▶ The proposed Florence MacWilliams Academy has been approved in principle for the Longton High School site and will open to pupils in Sept 2024.
- ▶ Staffordshire and Keele universities and Stoke-on-Trent 6th Form College have developed plans for a new Digital Academy 16-19 free school which will be located within the University Quarter.

- ▶ Staffordshire University has developed a Digital Academy, based at the new Catalyst building, which specialises in games and visual effects.
- ▶ Creation of a new, dedicated Digital & Creative Hub at Stoke-on-Trent College.
- ▶ Secured money from the Community Renewal Fund to deliver digital skills training projects.

## Levelling Up Ambitions

Deliver an integrated early years development programme as a national exemplar for a holistic model.

Provide intense support to improve the quality of the further education offer in the city, including securing an Institute of Technology.

## What We Have Achieved Since 2021

Thrive at Five programme launched in 2021 to reduce gaps to the rest of the UK in relation to child development and school readiness.

A new Young People's Learning & Skills Strategy was developed and published in 2022.

Supported Stoke-on-Trent College to achieve significant improvements, now rated 'Good'.

DfE approved a £13m bid to establish a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Institute of Technology in December 2021.

## What we have achieved to date

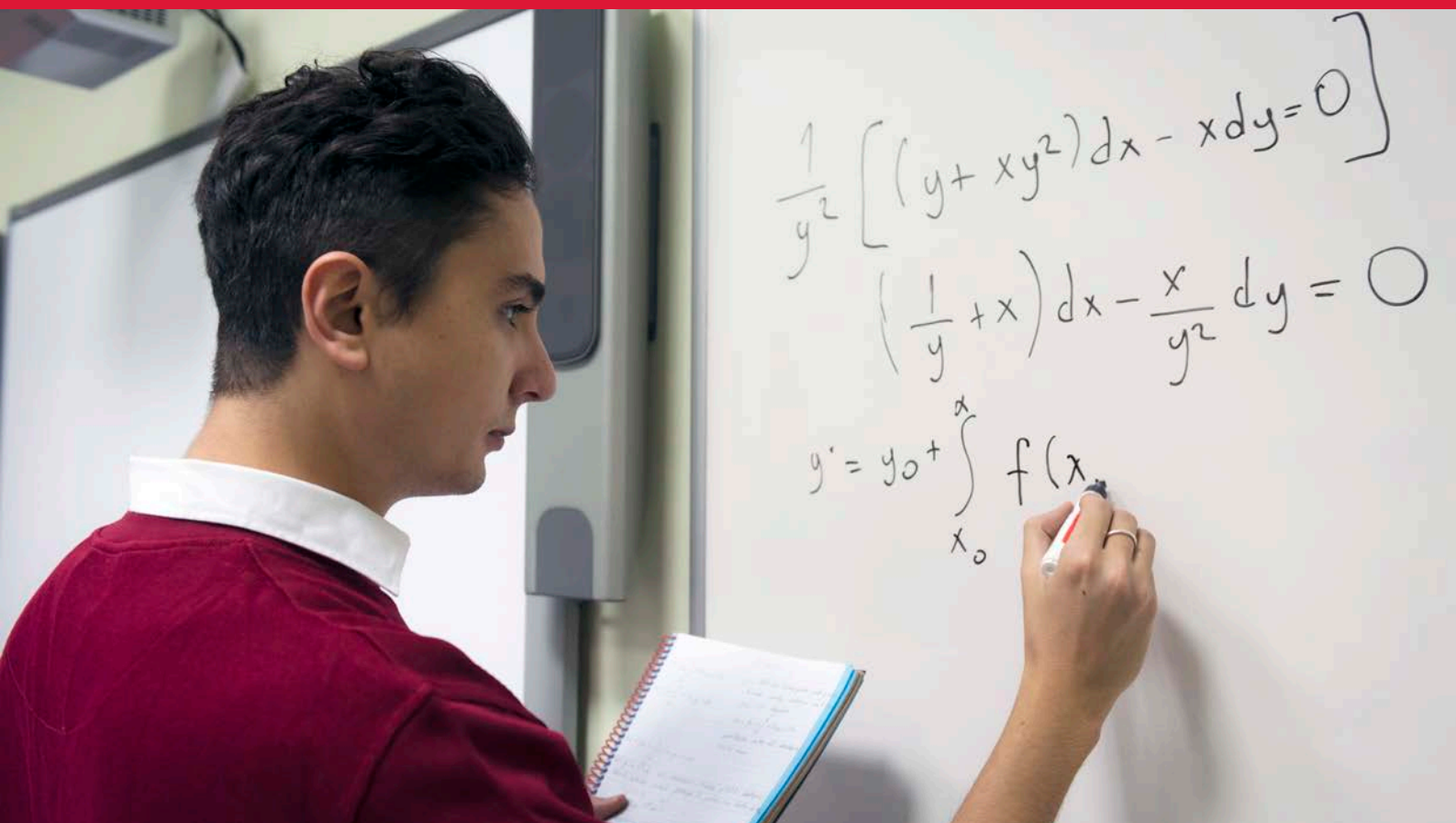
### Early years development:

Stoke-on-Trent was one of the first places in the UK to adopt the Thrive at Five programme to improve child development and school readiness in spring 2021. The initiative was designed to help children in their early years develop strong foundations for life and learning. It also helped to build capacity in communities by supporting parents and carers, and enabling collaboration across the public, private and voluntary sectors to achieve sustainable change in early years outcomes.

## Closing the gap on school readiness at age five







## Improving educational outcomes

### Education improvement:

The 'Aspiration and Achievement for All' Improving Education Strategy was developed and approved in April 2021. The strategy identified the key actions required to help create a high-support and high-challenge culture that would give schools the best chance to succeed and support leaders, teachers and other education staff to contribute fully to the improvements needed to improve outcomes for children and young people in Stoke-on-Trent. The 10 actions included a focus on tackling disadvantage and promoting inclusion, ensuring the right provision across the city, ensuring all children leave school with clarity on next steps whether that is education, employment or apprenticeship as well as working with schools to broker school-to-school support.

The City Council and partners established an Education Challenge Board to oversee and shape improvements in the city's schools and academies to ensure that our children and young people can access the best teaching and learning. This innovative initiative has built on the achievements of the Opportunity Area programme and brought together leading figures from the City Council, the Department for Education (DfE), local academies, Ofsted and the regional schools commissioner to focus on improving educational outcomes in the city. The board's work has involved drawing on the expertise of the most successful trusts and schools already working in Stoke-on-Trent, bringing in expertise from outside the city, and working collaboratively with schools to understand their improvement needs and help to drive up standards of teaching and leadership.

Stoke-on-Trent has been named as one of the Government's new Priority Education Investment Areas aimed at improving educational outcomes and life chances for children and young people. The announcement, in February last year, coincided with the commencement of the Education Challenge Board's work in the city to transform educational outcomes for pupils.





### Digital Skills at Staffordshire University

#### Digital skills:

Staffordshire University has officially opened a brand new, high-tech facility to deliver higher-level apprenticeships to help meet employer demand for digital skills. The Catalyst opened its doors in March at the Leek Road campus. The £43 million, 8,800 square metre landmark building provides state-of-the-art teaching and learning facilities, as well as events and community spaces and areas for socialising. The Catalyst will be used to deliver an estimated 6,300 higher degree apprenticeships by 2030.

Stoke-on-Trent College is also playing an important role in digital education and skills provision through the development its Digital and Creative Hub and the establishment of the Full Fibre Academy. The purpose-built Hub will ensure that young people in Stoke-on-Trent will have the chance to secure the high-value, highly-skilled employment opportunities that the expansion of our digital sector will create. The Full Fibre Academy is a collaboration between the college, the City Council and employers VX Fiber and Serco, which aims to create a skills pipeline to support delivery of the citywide full-fibre network. The college has also been developing plans for a new IT academy which will focus on improving adult skills, as well as supporting work around developing gaming and esports sectors. Successful bids to the Government's Community Renewal Fund in 2021 included:

- Staffordshire University's Discover project to tackle digital exclusion in the city. The project secured £616,520 to provide equipment and training to help disadvantaged and digitally excluded people to access online services.
- Digital skills training provider Wavemaker was allocated £599,015 to help deliver a digital innovation and education hub in the city. Wavemaker, which is based at Hanley's Mitchell Arts Centre, helps small businesses to identify digital solutions and provide training for local people in the use of new technologies.

The City Council has worked in partnership with Stoke-on-Trent's education and business leaders to develop a new strategy to transform education and training provision for 14-25 year olds. The Young People's Learning and Skills Strategy is focused on tackling inequality, raising aspirations and creating improved employment opportunities for the city's young people. Elements include creating specialist digital education and skills pathways, improving the local technical education offer and working with employers to strengthen vocational training and employment pathways.

#### **Silicon Stoke:**

Last year saw the publication of the prospectus for the Silicon Stoke programme, setting out how Stoke-on-Trent will build on its newly-developed citywide full-fibre gigabit network with a package of projects designed to make the city the most digitally advanced in the UK. The potential benefits of delivering Silicon Stoke include expansion of the provision of digital vocational skills linked to employment opportunities, as well as enhancing the city's educational offer through improved digital connectivity and the development and delivery of the highest-quality digital education provision in the UK. The Silicon Stoke programme also aims to contribute up to £625 million to the local economy over the next 15 years by improving the productivity and competitiveness of local businesses, attracting inward investment, creating additional jobs and enabling local services to become more accessible, responsive and efficient.

#### **Improving adults' skills:**

Successful bids to the Government's Community Renewal Fund in 2021 included:

- The Sector Hub Action Research Project (SHARP) secured £516,787 to procure a training provider to deliver a pilot to enable care sector providers to work together in more collaborative ways in order to address skills shortages across adults' and children's social care services and the domiciliary care sector.
- The Youth Employment and Skills (YES) Consortium also successfully bid for £527,466 to enable YMCA North Staffordshire to work with local partners to help young people to overcome barriers to education and employment.

### **Our focus for the future**

The City Council will continue to work with local and national partners and stakeholders to drive improvements around education and skills, particularly in relation to transforming life chances for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those who have been in care. We will also press government for additional funding and support to develop and deliver more innovative approaches to child development, educational improvement and digital education and training. Our work with the Home Office in relation to the proposed innovation centre will seek to use the creation of hundreds of skilled jobs to catalyse the transformation of our labour market by creating a high-skill, high-value employment and skills ecosystem in the city which will pull in talent and accelerate wage growth



Supporting people into employment

## THEME 4 – HEALTH AND PRODUCTIVITY

### Our Levelling Up ambitions and rationale

The Powering Up Prospectus highlighted an important opportunity for the city's health partners to deliver improved outcomes which will not only transform the quality of people's lives, but also help the city to achieve its economic ambitions. It set out plans to tackle harmful and persistent inequalities in relation to health outcomes, particularly around mental health and long-term conditions that force people out of employment.



## Levelling Up Ambitions

Invest in a city-wide Health & Work programme to prevent and address long-term unemployment through ill health and provide intensive back to work support.

Demonstrate benefits of Integrated Care System by accelerating delivery of integrated care and population health measures across North Staffordshire, backed by capital investment in provision of integrated health and care hubs.

Designate Stoke-on-Trent a Mentally Healthy City, based on delivery of an agreed multi-agency strategy and improvement plan for North Staffordshire, delivered through the Integrated Care Partnership. This should cover public mental health, maternal mental health, early years development, support to schools, liaison and diversion services, improvements in access and waiting times for common conditions and integrated crisis care.

## What We Have Achieved Since 2021

- DWP Restart programme to support long-term unemployed residents into sustainable work.
- Secured Community Renewal Fund money to deliver employment support projects for long-term unemployed people (Support to Work / SWITCH).

- The Integrated Care Partnership and Integrated Care System have been established to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals and to use their collective resources more effectively.
- A new Health and Wellbeing Strategy has been developed with partners to address health and wellbeing inequalities and barriers.

- Secured the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme to deliver bespoke support to vulnerable households and boost children's early development.
- Set up the Changing Futures pilot to help residents to overcome multiple disadvantages in their lives.
- Established Thrive at Five programme to transform early years development and school readiness levels.
- Launched the NDTi programme to provide improved support to people with learning disabilities and autism.

### What we have achieved to date

#### **Health outcomes and inequalities:**

Working closely with health, public and voluntary sector partners, the City Council developed a new Health & Wellbeing Strategy aimed at addressing early years and best start, economic growth and social inequalities, lifestyle and health inequalities, and mental health. The strategy also focused on reducing the incidence and impact of conditions that are preventing people from working.

The Thrive at Five programme will work with children and families in the most deprived wards in Stoke-on-Trent to help ensure that most children are ready for school at the age of five in terms of their development. Evidence indicates that the school readiness development level is a significant indicator of a child's life chances in adolescence and adulthood, and that improving development at five is vital to enabling Stoke-on-Trent's children to go on to perform well at school and fulfil their potential in later life.

The City Council and partners have also launched a collaborative, citywide pilot project to help vulnerable residents in Stoke-on-Trent to overcome multiple disadvantages. The Changing Futures pilot is part of a £64 million government-backed programme being run across 15 partnership areas in England over the next three years. The innovative project aims to design local support services around the lived experiences of real people with multiple disadvantages, such as homelessness, addiction, substance misuse and offending, and involve them in governance and decision-making. The Stoke-on-Trent approach is jointly led by the City Council and Expert Citizens, which champions the welfare and experiences of adults with multiple disadvantages.

#### **Health and social care integration:**

Our work with NHS partners to improve the integration of health and care services at community level has continued to gather pace, earning Stoke-on-Trent national recognition for its highly innovative and collaborative approach.

#### **Health-related unemployment:**

In August 2021, Stoke-on-Trent secured a role in delivering the Government's Restart programme. The initiative, which is delivered by the council's Jobs, Enterprise, Training (JET) Team in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), aims to offer extra support to enable Universal Credit claimants who have been out of work for nine months or longer to find jobs in their local area. One of the scheme's main goals is to help people to overcome health barriers to working. The programme runs until 2025 and is being delivered via three hubs (north, central and south), and involves working with health providers and the voluntary and community sector to address mental and physical health issues that are preventing people getting and staying in work.

Employment support was also a focus of two of the six successful bids to the Government's Community Renewal Fund. The Support to Work initiative received £78,675 to deliver a new advocacy service to help negotiate work placement opportunities for people with disabilities and support participating employers to become disability confident. A further £442,000 was allocated to deliver the SWITCH project to provide unemployed and economically inactive adults with mentoring and cognitive training to help improve their employability and enable them to find work.



**Family support:**

The Government announced in February that Stoke-on-Trent is to benefit from a new holistic support programme focusing on the needs of children and families in the city. The city has been allocated more than £3.5 million over the next two years to deliver the Family Hubs and Start for Life initiative. The City Council will use the funding to invest in support designed to help improve children's educational attainment, wellbeing and life chances, as well as addressing issues such as poor mental health and unemployment. Family Hubs will bring together services, parent champions and community groups to offer guidance and advice on a range of topics including infant feeding, mental health support, health visiting and support for parents and carers. They will also bring together wider wraparound services that can make a huge difference to people who need extra support – such as advice on getting into work, relationship building and stop smoking services. The Family Hubs and Start for Life programme will bring together a range of local services to offer joined-up support from conception through to age 19, or up to 25 years old for children with special education needs and disabilities.

**Digital infrastructure:**

Spring 2021 saw the completion of the UK's first citywide full-fibre network. The 113 km network provided the platform for an extensive 5G network for the city. The network has been delivered to support our Silicon Stoke plans to use digital innovation, infrastructure and skills to transform Stoke-on-Trent into a Smart City where digital enterprise can thrive. Working with private sector partners, we have since extended the initial network to 1,168km, connecting more than 113,000 properties.

**Family Hubs**



### **Our focus for the future**

The City Council's primary goal in relation to health and productivity remains securing vital funding from the Government to invest in the proposed citywide Health and Work Programme to reduce long-term unemployment.

We are also still committed to our ambition of developing and operating a multi-agency approach to improving mental health provision and securing Mentally Healthy City status for Stoke-on-Trent.



# CROSS-CUTTING THEME – CULTURE

## Our Levelling Up ambitions and rationale

Stoke-on-Trent is a cultural city with a rich heritage that blends industrial expansion, innovation and cultural creativity. Culture is embedded in the city's DNA; it continues to influence local attitudes and identity and it is a hugely important, yet largely untapped, asset in terms of Stoke-on-Trent's economic growth ambitions. The Powering Up Prospectus set out our plans to use Levelling Up to develop Stoke-on-Trent's cultural and creative offer, but our vision for culture has since become more focused on opportunities that Levelling Up can create around cultural development and placemaking, as well as the role of culture and creativity in fostering greater pride in our city, celebrating our unique heritage, influencing external perceptions of Stoke-on-Trent and raising our citizens' aspirations. Culture has also become an important element of the Government's Levelling Up policy agenda in terms of addressing geographical disparities and inequalities that exist in deprived areas. Culture, heritage and sport is identified as an area of focus, with particular emphasis on heritage conservation and regeneration and cultural investment.

Our main aims for culture and Levelling Up include:

- Helping to create a stronger sense of place and improving the quality of life for residents and workers in the city.
- Contributing to local economic growth, productivity or prosperity (e.g. through tourism, creative commercial enterprise, or education and employment opportunities).
- Helping to define a distinct cultural identity for Stoke-on-Trent which people can relate to and actively participate in, and which improves the way that residents and visitors feel about the city.
- Contributing to the wider work around tackling persistent inequalities and improving outcomes in areas such as education, health and life chances.
- Working with national cultural organisations to secure vital investment to develop the city's offer as a cultural destination and enable greater grassroots participation in our communities.
- Protecting and celebrating our heritage and exploring opportunities to capitalise on the city's many heritage assets.
- Delivering the digital creativity and skills elements of the Silicon Stoke vision.





Big Feast 2022 at the City Centre

## Levelling Up Ambitions

Develop the city's cultural and wider creative offer.

## What We Have Achieved Since 2021

- Designated as an Arts Council England Priority Place, securing additional investment in cultural development.
- Secured almost £9.5 million through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, including funding for cultural development.
- Launched the Heritage Congress to coordinate efforts to protect, conserve and utilise the city's heritage assets.
- Secured £5m investment through the Cultural Development Fund to help deliver a new vision and investment prospectus for the city based around the expansion of the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery.

Key national cultural and heritage bodies to join with the city to form a Creative City Partnership to improve the cultural offer and make the most of the city's heritage assets.

- Establishment of the Creative City Partnership, including representatives from national and local cultural organisations.
- Development by the Creative City Partnership of a refreshed Cultural Strategy for the city which reflects the importance of cultural development and placemaking within the Levelling Up agenda.

Improving footfall in town centres through new learning, leisure and cultural activities.

- Completion and opening of the Spitfire Gallery at the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery (PMAG).
- Delivery of Heritage Action Zones to restore and conserve historic and architecturally significant buildings in town centres.
- The submission of plans for the development of a creative village on the historic Spode pottery site.
- Completion of renovation work on the historic Tunstall Town Hall building.



## What we have achieved to date

### Cultural development:

Stoke-on-Trent was selected to become one of Arts Council England's 'Priority Places', securing vital investment to promote and grow the city's cultural and creative offer. The city is also benefiting from increased guidance and support regarding cultural development and efforts to improve residents' engagement with culture and the arts locally. The aim of the project is to understand what communities and cultural organisations in these areas need from the Arts Council in order to achieve their cultural ambitions. Arts Council England has recently announced its support for nine national portfolio organisations working in the city, up from three, doubling investment to over £6m to the city to support our culture and heritage.

The City Council and key partners from Stoke-on-Trent's cultural sector have designed and approved a new six-year blueprint for boosting culture, heritage and creativity in the city. The refreshed Stoke-on-Trent Cultural Strategy was developed by the Creative City Partnership, which combines local cultural organisations with national institutions such as Arts Council England, Historic England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Canals and Rivers Trust. The strategy focuses on ways in which culture can contribute to Levelling Up in the city and commits to unlocking the potential of creativity and culture to transform life chances and foster greater pride in Stoke-on-Trent.

### Heritage:

The city's Levelling Up Fund allocation provided capital funding to bring forward heritage-led regeneration projects in Longton, Tunstall and Stoke town centres, including work to restore and redevelop the Grade II listed Tunstall Library and Pool building to create new business accommodation and homes in the heart of the town, as well as the expansion of the former Spode pottery works redevelopment project, in Stoke, to create new commercial and leisure spaces.

The City Council also worked closely with local and national partners to secure vital funding to restore historic buildings for future generations. Funding from Historic England, matched by the City Council, provided £600,000 to support improvements to historic buildings in Longton town centre in 2021 through the creation of a new Heritage Action Zone. The project built on the success of a similar Heritage Action Zone covering Stoke town centre. The initiative enables building owners to apply for grants to carry out improvement work to eligible premises which contribute to the local townscape.

Tunstall Library and Pool





## Tunstall Town Hall

The City Council has also established a new group to support its ongoing work to preserve and enhance the city's rich heritage. The Heritage Congress, which was launched in June last year, brings together the public, private and community sectors to promote enjoyment and understanding of historic buildings and work to ensure a future for the city's past. The group is currently progressing plans for the formation of a Stoke-on-Trent Heritage Trust, which will be able to use its charitable status to access alternative sources of funding for heritage development projects.

The official reopening of Tunstall Town Hall, in August last year, marked the completion of one of the city's most ambitious heritage-led regeneration projects. Work on the historic Grade II listed building had begun in April 2020, and involved uncovering, repairing and preserving many of the original heritage features. The restoration project cost around £4 million. The finished building is home to the town's library, the local centre and the city's first Family Hub, as well as additional office space.

### Museums:

September 2021 saw the official opening of the newly-completed Spitfire Gallery at the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery. A VIP launch event was held to unveil the restored Spitfire aircraft, which is displayed in the stunning £5.4 million gallery. The iconic warplane was painstakingly refurbished over the course of three years at a specialist restoration site in Kent before being returned to the city to take pride of place in the prestigious glass-walled gallery, which also houses an exhibition about the Spitfire's Stoke-on-Trent-born designer, Reginald Mitchell.

The gallery is the first stage of the proposed expansion of the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery as part of a new vision and investment prospectus which was launched in December last year. The City Council has since secured £5 million through the Government's Cultural Development Fund to bring these plans forward. The improvements will create an opportunity to reappraise and reinterpret the museum's other galleries and reserve collections to more accurately reflect, and explore, the city's rich cultural diversity and history in ways that will appeal to modern audiences, including through the use of interactive experiences. The vision also set out plans to create a new International Ceramics Centre which will bring together important physical and virtual collections of pottery produced in the city.



### Cultural placemaking:

Stoke-on-Trent has secured almost £9.5 million from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to help the city to achieve its Levelling Up objectives. The money, which has replaced European structural funds that the city received through the European Union, is intended to fund activity to build pride in place, boost productivity, pay and living standards and increase life chances. The money will be allocated by a dedicated investment board, which will look to support initiatives and projects which complement or build on existing approaches to Levelling Up. One of the focal points of the Shared Prosperity Fund is around strengthening social fabric and fostering a sense of local pride and belonging through investment in activities that enhance physical, cultural and social ties and amenities. It is therefore likely that culture will be a key beneficiary of the new funding mechanism.

### Our focus for the future

Stoke-on-Trent has a once in a lifetime opportunity to deliver a transformational cultural programme which includes ambitious plans for the development of the City's Cultural Quarter. At the heart of this vision will be an exciting redevelopment of The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery which will celebrate our City's reputation for both technological and manufacturing innovation. The museum will become the heart of the City Centre's Cultural Quarter, creating a distinctive hub to better welcome a growing stream of visitors. We envisage PMAG as the hub for the development of Stoke-on-Trent as an International Centre for Ceramics on a par with other key global manufacturing centres, and participating as part of that wider network.

Following January's Levelling Up summit at 10 Downing Street, Ministers have given a commitment to:

- Develop Stoke-on-Trent as a leading global centre once again for ceramics.
- Explore opportunities to capitalise on the city's digital connectivity to drive economic regeneration and growth in relation to creative sectors.
- Build on the citywide Cultural Strategy through opportunities such as the modernisation of the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, the regeneration of landmark historic buildings and the development of an International Ceramics Centre.
- Explore opportunities for involving cultural organisations in the renovation and re-use of historic buildings in the city.

### Chinese New Year at the Spitfire Gallery





City of  
**Stoke-on-Trent**

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