



# Hartlepool

## The coalface of change

PART 3

A wider coastal town study of how ambition can replace poverty, including Cromer and Redcar

by Nick Tyrone

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**About the author:** Nick Tyrone is a journalist, author, researcher and Senior Policy Adviser at the Jobs Foundation. He has published several books, both fiction and non-fiction, as well as having written for most mainstream news outlets in the UK, most frequently and prominently in *The Spectator*. He was also the Executive Director of CentreForum, the liberal think tank most noted for publishing the Orange Book, as well as Director General of the Red Tape Initiative.

# Foreword

The origins of the Jobs Foundation go back to a conversation in 2020, when the two of us talked about the crucial role that businesses play in giving people a step up in life, through jobs and training. We kept circling back to this subject, and in 2022, we realised that there was a need for a charity that distilled the best practice from companies who excel at getting people from disadvantaged backgrounds into work, so companies who wish to introduce dedicated schemes to do this, can do so without going through the process of trial and error. The Jobs Foundation was granted charitable status in 2023 and launched later that year.

When we first began working on the Jobs Foundation, very few people were aware of the crucial need for a charity that helps get people into work. Fast forward to 2024, and it is front and centre of the policy debate. But missing so far has been the crucial role of business to make this happen, by creating and providing jobs, which is why Nick Tyrone’s report, which looks at the role that businesses play in their local communities, is so groundbreaking.

*Hartlepool: The Coalface of change* takes a deep dive into a coastal community with comparisons made with two other coastal communities, Cromer and Redcar. Hartlepool was an interesting area of study due to the long history of the town, some of the atypical aspects of it as a coastal community (while still facing several of the most common issues facing towns by the sea in Britain), and how interesting the place is in a political context.

Having been a Labour held seat essentially since 1964 (when it was known as “The Hartlepoons”), the Conservative party won the seat in 2021 by-election – yet it is once again a Labour seat. Redcar, which is only twelve miles away, offers an interesting insight into the similarities and differences we see there as compared to Hartlepool, in addition to being politically interesting in and of itself: it is one of the few seats in Britain to have had a Labour, Lib Dem and Tory MP within the last twenty years.

Cromer was chosen as a comparator because while it is very geographically removed from Hartlepool and Redcar, many of the same problems it faces are similar. One of the themes of this report is that coastal towns should not be simply roped into whatever area of the country they sit in, be it the North East of England or East of England, but rather should be considered within a “coastal communities” context, that being a unique set of challenges.

Our next report will focus on the rural economy, through the lens of a particular county. Following that, a master report which will bring together the lessons learned from a cross-section of the country. This final document will cover what businesses are doing to alleviate poverty via best practice in terms of hiring, training and apprenticeships, what institutions are helping businesses along this journey (and what is missing from that equation), all demonstrating that business is a societal good.

**Lord Elliott of Mickle Fell**  
President of the Jobs Foundation

**Georgiana Bristol**  
CEO of the Jobs Foundation



# About Hartlepool

- A town on the coast of the Northeast of England, 35 miles south of Newcastle Upon Tyne, 13 miles north of Middlesbrough. Despite being only twelve miles apart from each other across the Tees estuary, Hartlepool and Redcar are a pain to get between, requiring a car journey going into and out of Middlesbrough (unless one were to try and swim for it).
- Historically part of County Durham, now officially part of the Tees Valley Combined Authority.
- Population: 88,000<sup>1</sup>
- The town was founded in the 7th century. It was a fishing village for a long time before becoming a major port, transporting a great deal of coal from the surrounding region coming into Hartlepool and then out to the rest of the world.
- Hartlepool nuclear power station, actually located south of Seaton Carew, is the largest employer of the town's population.
- 96.6% of Hartlepudlians are white, 1.6% are Asian and 0.5% are black<sup>2</sup>.
- As of September 2023, 69.7% of people aged 16 to 64 are employed in the town. This is compared with a national employment rate for the same cohort of close to 75%.<sup>3</sup>
- Hartlepool is one of the most deprived areas of Britain. Over 60% of Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Hartlepool are in the top 20% most deprived in England in terms of Employment, Health Deprivation and Disability.<sup>4</sup>



- Almost a quarter of adults in Hartlepool have no formal qualifications of any kind.<sup>5</sup> The national figure for the UK is 18%.
- The town had a Conservative MP, Jill Mortimer, after the infamous May 2021 by-election. Jill won by almost 7,000 votes, despite the area having had a Labour MP since 1964 prior to the by-election. The area now has a Labour MPs once again.
- Although Hartlepool borough has been mostly Labour controlled at local level for a long time, it had been under no overall control for five years before a strong Labour showing in the 2024 local elections gained the council for them.
- The town's dalliance with its own elected mayor was short-lived and strange. It was won three times in a row by Stuart Drummond, who ran in the guise of H'Angus the Monkey, Hartlepool United FC's mascot. He beat out the Labour candidate narrowly in 2002, by a huge majority in 2005, and then narrowly again in 2009 before the post was abolished via a referendum.



1. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6604194f91a320001a82b094/Hartlepool.pdf> (Accessed 14/05/24)  
2. Ibid  
3. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/labourmarketlocal/E06000001/#> (Accessed 14/05/24)  
4. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6604194f91a320001a82b094/Hartlepool.pdf> (14/05/24)

5. <https://www.hartlepoolmail.co.uk/education/the-number-of-hartlepool-adults-with-no-formal-qualifications-is-revealed-3984468> (Accessed 14/05/24)



# Harrison's story

“With Hartlepool, it’s a place where you’re either going to it or you’re not going to it. You don’t really drive through Hartlepool. So, you’re either here or you’re not.”

These words struck me as oddly profound as they were spoken by Harrison Smith, a young man who runs his own financial consultancy business out of an old mansion house in the south end of town.

*“The vast majority of my business, I don’t really do it in Hartlepool, despite being based round here. Maybe 20% of my client base is local.”*

Despite only being in his mid-20’s, Harrison has led an interesting life already. He was an academy player for Hartlepool United, which led to a scholarship to play soccer in America, where he attended Francis Marion University in South Carolina. Despite his post-secondary education in the States, Harrison was eager to

return to his hometown once his studies were complete. Although he did play football at a semi-professional level in Alabama after he graduated, it didn’t take him long to return to Hartlepool, which he did in 2018.

“I had another job lined up in the States. But I’d had enough. I wanted to come home.”

I asked him why he felt so strongly about returning to his hometown. He shook his head and thought for a moment before replying.

“Hartlepool people – we get taken away, but we always get drawn back here. It’s very rare that you leave and you leave for good.”

His first job upon coming back to Britain was at an ALDI supermarket, entering the job through a graduate scheme they were running at the time. “It was 60-70 hour weeks, running different stores. It was a lot to take on. I also figured out that retail wasn’t for me. I suppose that job put me in the economically fortunate enough position to be able to take a step back and ask myself what I really wanted to do with my life.”

It turns out the pandemic had an odd upside for Harrison as well.



Harrison Smith



Greenbank, from where Harrison runs his business

“Covid also strangely helped. Gave me some time to reflect and take stock of things.”

He became a development manager for an insurance company at that stage. It was during lockdown, so he still had a great deal of time on his own to think. That’s how he “stumbled”, as Harrison himself puts it, into his current role as his own boss. He has been a financial advisor on his own terms since July 2021, with a client list of around 100.

“The vast majority of my business, I don’t really do it in Hartlepool, despite being based round here. Maybe 20% of my client base is local.”

This is an interesting aspect of Harrison’s work - that despite being based in Hartlepool, so much of his business comes from elsewhere in England. This is both a reflection of the new, digital economy – that to some extent, you can be anywhere these days – and the fact that Hartlepool remains too economically deprived to provide many customers for a business such as Harrison Smith’s consultancy.



*“You’re either here, or you’re not.”*

Being solid in his work life, Harrison has space now to help those less fortunate than himself through charity work.

“I recently did a golf day for a local charity. Reached out to them November time last year to see if I could do anything. We got to chatting and I suggested a golf day as they hadn’t held one actually in the town, and I had a few ideas around how to do it effectively. I went ahead with it and we got a great turnout. We’re talking about doing it as a yearly thing now.”

I had recently been to a few coastal towns in East Anglia – Cromer, Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft – and I told Harrison that a lot of the problems I had seen in those places, I could see in Hartlepool as well. He smiled in recognition.

“Most coastal towns in England are just a mirror image of each other. Hartlepool is getting a little more infrastructure these days, to be fair. I mean, if you’d been here 15 years ago, it would have looked completely different. Having said that, the people of Hartlepool are the people of Hartlepool.”

He then grinned at me before repeating the sentiment expressed earlier.

“You’re either here, or you’re not.”



# Hartlepool and the wider coastal communities issue

When you get off the train at Hartlepool and exit the station, you soon find yourself on Church Street, a road with pubs, restaurants and shops. At least, that's what there is occasionally; the first place you come upon when entering Church Street from Station Approach is Sorrento Pizzeria, a no longer extant establishment that has several of its windows smashed in. Sadly, it is not the only space on Church Street that is currently vacant.

*Hartlepool is an old place. An abbey was built here in 640 by Hieu, an Irish nun who had settled in Northeast England.*

I headed to the marina, north of the station, immediately after I arrived in town. I saw potential there, with nice cars dotting the car park in front of the yacht club, although one gets the distinct sense that the owners of those vehicles – both the automobiles and the boats – are out of towners, people with nice houses in rural County Durham who come to Hartlepool strictly to make use of this particular patch of water.

Hartlepool is an old place. An abbey was built there in 640 by Hieu, an Irish nun who had settled

in Northeast England. The abbey no longer exists, but St Hilda's church rests in its place, a large building that was built upon and around the abbey over the decades, with its most modern features being erected in the 20th century. Yet for most of its existence, Hartlepool has been somewhat of a backwater. At the dawn of the 19th century, the town had less than 1,000 inhabitants in it.<sup>6</sup>

The industrial revolution changed the place a lot. For a start, it became two places, with the new town of West Hartlepool being established. The old port and the new town merged to become modern day Hartlepool in 1967. Locals told me again and again that the two towns still have very separate cultures and it's still easy to see where the break between them lies more than 50 years post-merger; although, I must confess, walking around the town for several days, the borders between the two places never seemed obvious to me.

In the mid-19th century, Hartlepool became a reasonable sized industrial port, shipping coal that had been mined from villages inland. Like a lot of towns in the north of England during the 1980s, the death of nationalised coal hurt Hartlepool a great deal. Today, it's an economically deprived place, which is obvious in the statistics and on the ground. Around 30% of adults in the town are economically inactive, compared to around 21% across Great Britain.<sup>7</sup> £35k is the median salary in the UK; it's almost ten thousand pounds lower in Hartlepool.<sup>8</sup> Child poverty stats are also grim in the town.

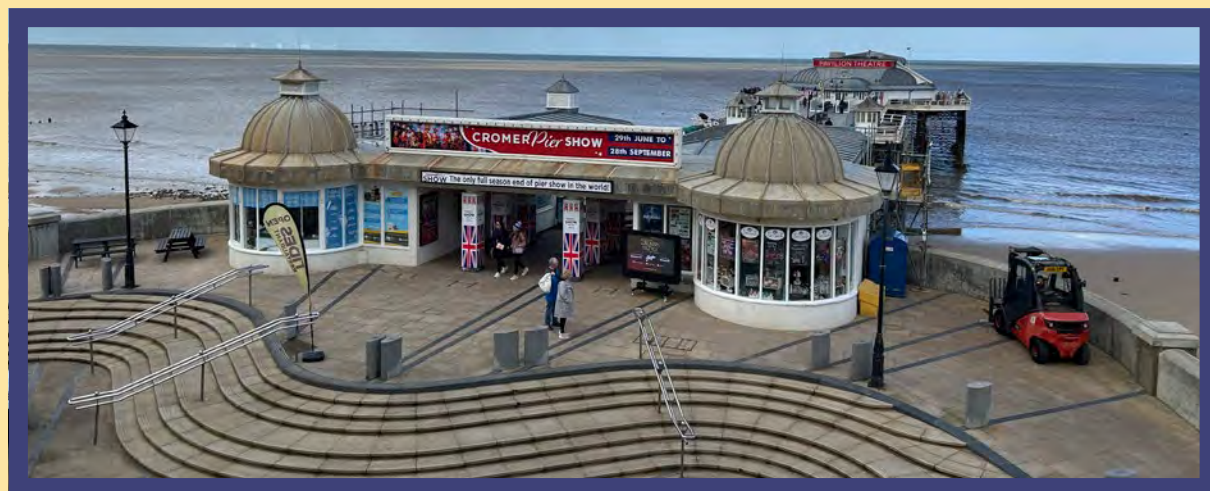
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All of this should be seen through the lens of England's larger coastal communities' problem. Although in some ways Hartlepool is atypical of many towns by the sea in Britain – it doesn't have a pier or a promenade and was never a tourist destination – it shares many of the same problems that blight other coastal communities.



6. <https://www.thisishartlepool.co.uk/history> (Accessed 23/04/24)  
7. <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157059/report.aspx#tabeinaact> (Accessed 23/04/24)  
8. <https://www.payscale.com/research/UK/Location=Hartlepool-England%3A-Cleveland/Salary> (Accessed 23/04/24)





# Case study: Cromer

"I was born here, raised here, went to school here, never left here...still here."

This was said by Sam Grout, the owner and operator of the Old Rock Shop Bistro, a restaurant in the centre of the town of Cromer, which rests on the coast of northern Norfolk. The "still here" was said slightly sardonically, earning him assorted giggles around the room. He was part of a group of businesspeople who had gathered at the Cliftonville Hotel, a Cromer institution that sits above the beach, a short walk from the town's pier.

Sam talked to me about his recruitment process. "We hire pretty much exclusively local people. My typical new employee will be a person who grew up in the town." The bistro even had one of its staff go onto the Master Chef programme at one point a few years ago – although he sadly didn't do very well, according to those around the table. "I think he needed his ego trimmed a little," one of the roundtable participants said with a cheeky grin, reminding me that in a small town, everyone knows each other.

I was extremely impressed with the story of how Sam came to run the Old Rock Shop. He worked there under the previous owner for a few years, essentially becoming the de facto manager of the place before buying the owner out – using his own money, all at the age of 21. I asked him what he does to keep hold of his staff once he's hired them.

*"We try hard to look after them. We give them opportunities for progression. Hospitality is one of the main areas which you can thrive in around here."*

"We try hard to look after them. We give them opportunities for progression. Hospitality is one of the main areas which you can thrive in round here."

Other businesspeople gathered at the table that day in Cromer told a slightly different story, talking about their problems in getting and retaining employees. A lot of it had to do with seasonality – the need to flex the size of your staff dependent on the time of year. Deb Lewis, the events and bookings manager at the Cliftonville, put it starkly.

"Young people in Cromer can go to Norwich and earn more money. So, it's tough recruiting young people in this area. If you have the ethos that you want to develop your young staff for bigger roles in the future, that's really difficult. As soon as they're 18, so many of them, they'll go to Norwich or London.

*"You can go through a whole recruitment process, interview someone a couple of times, get to the point where you think you've found someone who's right for the job, you offer it to them...and they ghost you."*

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She gave one specific example that put it into perspective for me.

"In 2017, I was working on Cromer pier, and we did a sort of speed hiring event. All the employers were looking for different things, so we were trying to match the people we had coming for jobs up with the right companies. Over 100 people turned up to that. That event was repeated in 2021...and we had 15 turn up."

I asked if perhaps Covid had something to do with that – not only Deb but everyone around the table agreed that the pandemic had hit the town hard. In fact, this was something I often found in my travels: the smaller the community, the more it was still trying to recover from the effects of Covid-19.

Another issue that was brought up a few times was the lack of immigrants coming to the area. No young people coming in combined with no immigrants means that finding suitable employees at a wage level the businesses in Cromer can afford to pay is a constant challenge.

The town is one of the oldest communities by median age in the country, with the constituency it is in, North Norfolk, having the highest median age in England.<sup>9</sup> This is an issue for coastal



communities around the UK, but it is acutely felt in Cromer, where the demand for young people is not met with enough supply.

But there are a lot of reasons to be optimistic despite these challenges. Sam has just bought and opened a new business down the road from the bistro – a café called the West Street Deli. He beamed as he talked about what he felt was a bright future for the town he had called home for his entire life.

"The sense of community here is huge. You see it in people who were born and raised here, leave for a bit to do something else – but then come back when they're a little bit older. When they want to settle down and raise a family, they come back to where they were raised."

Deb Lewis told me the Cliftonville Hotel was finishing its exterior renovations this year, having done the interior overhaul a few years ago.

"We're trying to turn the Cliftonville into less of just a hotel and into a venue for everything – a casual drink, a big event like a wedding. It's going really well. The weddings market is gathering pace now particularly. North Norfolk is underserved in the wedding venue market. The seafront is a big draw. Exciting days ahead."

9. From <https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/20744991.norfolk-constituency-officially-oldest-country/>, backed up by ONS statistics (accessed 11/04/24)



# Gary Riches and Jane Reed



Gary Riches

I arrived at Hartlepool College of Further Education fifteen minutes early. I wanted to hang back and wait until the appointed hour before going inside, so as not to seem overly keen, but a stiff breeze was being felt, coming from the unseen sea and the cars whizzing by on the A689, so I decided to duck for cover indoors. Waiting for me already was Gary Riches, the Vice Principal at the FE College, with a smile and a handshake. We sat down in the coffee shop area near the front of the building and began our chat.

Gary was born and raised in Hartlepool. In fact, he grew up in one of the town's more deprived areas.

"I started working here in 2012. Before that, I was an electrical engineer. My wife is a teacher and we had a three year old daughter at the time – and we just found out we were expecting twins. So, I thought, I'd quite like to get into teaching to



have a better work/life balance, although working is FE is demanding."

It was a wonderfully self-effacing explanation for why Gary works at the college, but it didn't take me long to figure out that this guy does what he does for a living because he deeply cares about his students and the FE's role within the community.

The college does a lot for Hartlepool, filling a tremendously large series of gaps the best it can. It offers post-16 education to those in their mid to late teens, with around 1,200 students in this age range. It also caters for around 2,400 adult learners, as well as offering 1,100 apprenticeships at companies dotted around the Northeast. The College also has around 450 students following high quality technical higher education programmes. This is where one of the key challenges Hartlepool faces comes into play.

*"We get £2.51 a day from the government to feed each of the 16-18 year olds on bursary. Often times, that's the only meal they'll get that day. So, what we do is, we bump that up out of our own coffers, subsidising the meals out of our surplus because it will allow those students to have both lunch and a dinner. It's usually only a sandwich, but to these kids, it's a whole other meal they wouldn't get otherwise."*

"Because public transport is so dire, we send a mini-bus to collect people to bring them from their workplaces in the morning." These mini-buses are hired by the college to get people from their place of employment to the centre of town where the college is located, as there is no way they could get there otherwise. This policy doesn't just apply to those on apprenticeships either.

"This is their future," Gary said with passion. "It's even to the point where the principal of the college has been out in his car, picking students up so they can sit exams. It's not something we want to shout about, obviously, but the public transport needs to be better."

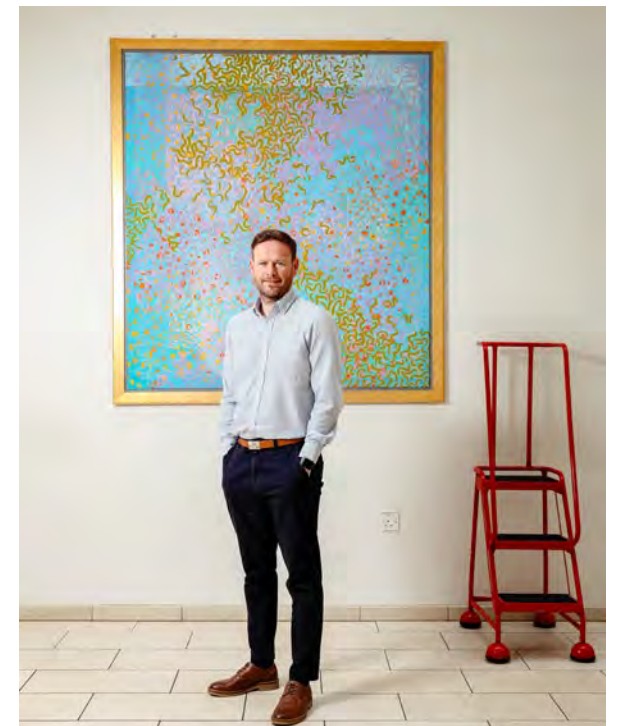
This goes hand in hand with the levels of deprivation in the area. Gary told me that around 95% of the 16-18 year old students at the FE college will qualify for a bursary, in other words, free school meals.

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"Some, sadly, have been known to take the sandwich we give them home to share with their family members, because that's the only meal the whole household is getting. So, that's the levels of deprivation we're facing. That's the here and now within the college."

It puts into perspective the need for jobs to take people out of poverty – and how difficult joining all the dots can be, as well as the role played by institutions like the Hartlepool College of Further Education.

"We've got a council ward just there, about 100 yards away, that's one of the most deprived areas in the country. Then we've got another council ward, just the other side of the town centre, with the highest levels of domestic abuse in the country....that's where a lot of our students will come from."





That said, the College does amazing things. Its main campus is a £53m stylishly designed building in the heart of the town. It has also recently spent £3m refurbishing its fabrication & welding facilities, which is probably one of the best facilities of its kind in the North of England. More recently, it has been deemed “Outstanding” by Ofsted for apprenticeship provision<sup>10</sup>, something of which Gary is immensely proud. It is one of only thirteen apprenticeship providers to earn this accolade throughout the country, and one of only five FE colleges to be considered an “Outstanding” provider of apprenticeships.<sup>11</sup> What makes Gary even more proud of this achievement is that he himself was a former apprentice at the college.

“I was a student here, started in 2000 on an engineering course. Was fortunate enough to get an apprenticeship as well. I stayed on in night school, always through here, until I went to Teesside University.”

What Gary considers of the utmost importance to what the college provides, particularly given the socio-economic background of so many of the students, is focusing on things like behaviour, attitude and confidence – understanding what the students backgrounds will not have naturally provided for them, that nonetheless remains vital to obtaining and then staying in employment.



“We have five student behaviours that we model. We base it on the mnemonic, HARTS. Hardworking. Ambitious. Resilient. Thankful. Self-regulating. We want them to have manners, make them understand the social element of succeeding in life.”

South down the A689 from the FE college, hanging a right at the roundabout onto Stockton Road and then further west along Blakelock Gardens, brings me to Hartlepool Sixth Form College, where another set of people trying to figure out what they want to do with their lives are studying. There I spoke with Jane Reed, the Campus Principal of the school.

Jane is originally from Sunderland, coming to Hartlepool and the sixth form college two and a half years ago. She told me about how pleasant she found settling into the town had been.

“The community is fantastic. When I came here, I wasn’t just welcomed into the normal stuff I would have expected – what was unique is that people reached out in an informal basis, one on one, to welcome me here in such an amazing way. You don’t have to be here long. It has a really strong voluntary sector. It’s buzzing in that respect. People who really care.”

<sup>10.</sup> <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50224455> (Accessed 01/05/24)  
<sup>11.</sup> <https://www.hartlepoolmail.co.uk/news/people/hartlepool-college-of-further-education-earns-apprentices-elite-expert-status-from-department-for-education-4481884> (Accessed 01/05/24)

Despite the sixth form college only being a 20-minute walk away from the FE college, it feels like it’s in a different town, one not quite as badly blighted by poverty. Jane told me that when she arrived at the school, there was a bit of an idea that the sixth form was thought of as a place for the more academically minded, with the FE college being where you learn to take up a trade. Just as Gary is fighting to make the FE college seen for its vocational qualifications having a parity of esteem with more academic qualifications, Jane was going the other way.

“When I arrived, it was my intention to make it a much more inclusive college. If anyone wanted to study here, why should we not let them?”

She was clear that she did not want the college to academically suffer, and that it should definitely still be a place where people who want to go onto a Russell Group university can do so, but that it would also cater more broadly to the community’s needs.

Like so many other people in the town, Jane praised the people of Hartlepool, their resilience, their ability to stick together in the face of adversity – while recognising some of the reasons the town is struggling at the same time.

“It hasn’t quite got its identity right yet,” Jane told me. “There’s a lot of deprivation, as you know. It’s not quite good enough in selling itself yet. It’s such a unique town in terms of what it’s got. But Hartlepool doesn’t boast about itself. It should.”

Jane was quick to stress that although the FE college and her own institution have moved closer to one another in terms of mission statement, they were anything but in competition with each other. My sense is that Hartlepool certainly has enough room for two colleges; indeed, these two institutions are absolutely vital to the town. Calling them oases in a desert seems an extremely harsh analogy – but not entirely inaccurate one either.

They are both key in terms of taking people, particularly young people, out of poverty – often in Hartlepool, extreme poverty – and getting them into work. Not only are the education and the apprenticeships these institutions offer vital, so are the mini-buses and the sandwiches.

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# The roundtable

*“We don’t want people having to travel in and out of town, preferably, particularly given most of our employees are working 15 to 20 hours a week.”*

The BIS is a building which sits on Whitby Street, a five-minute walk from the train station. It stands out as a decent looking structure in what, even by Hartlepool standards, is a pretty run-down area.

“It’s all due for an overhaul,” one of the Hartlepool councillors I met told me about the BIS’s surroundings. “Town’s fund and levelling up funds are part of that. The whole area will be redesigned and rebuilt.”

I was there for a roundtable event with local businesses, talking about what they do, how they are finding business at the moment, as well as trying to discover any best practice they employ in terms of hiring and training staff.

It was an eclectic bunch that gathered in Room Two of the BIS that Tuesday morning. There was Alan Teather, who runs his own quilting business; Jamie Shires, who has a pizza place called Stupid Good; Jonathan Graham from Optimisation Solutions, a company that provides support to existing and start-up businesses; Kevin Boffy who runs a tech company; Joann Smith from Bespoke Bears; and Troy Hundisides, who has his own energy consultancy.



*“We are always looking for a saviour here. Even when one never arrives, we keep hoping.”*

## The main points raised were:

### Hiring staff and apprenticeships:

- The website Indeed.co.uk is used by most employers in the town as their preferred method of recruitment (“Works great, I only use that website, really. We have tried other avenues.... but come back to Indeed.”)
- Almost everyone they hire lives in Hartlepool, almost all of them born and raised there (“We don’t want people having to travel in and out of town, preferably, particularly given most of our employees are working 15 to 20 hours a week”)
- Retaining staff is a challenge (“A lot of people drift from job to job round here.”)
- Apprenticeships are seen as a challenge, as well as risky to use (“You can spend time finding apprentices only for them to turn up to the job and find that it’s not something they really want to do after all.”)

### Hartlepool:

- People are proud of the place and love it but are worried about its future. Things feel like they are getting worse, not better. (“We are always looking for a saviour here. Even when one never arrives, we keep hoping.”)
- The state of public transportation was brought up as a huge issue. It makes everything about doing business in the town more difficult. (“People can’t get to the jobs. Whether it’s people in Hartlepool trying to get to Middlesbrough or Redcar or Sunderland for a job, or people from outside trying to get in to work here, the lack of the transport makes it extremely difficult.”)
- The feeling that the odds are stacked against the town and that no one outside of it really feels like it needs the attention it clearly does, even within devolved institutions, nags at most business owners in Hartlepool (“It feels like the money and jobs go elsewhere in the region. It sometimes feels like Hartlepool lacks a voice, getting the things the town needs.”)

Of all the roundtables I have hosted across the country, this one felt the bleakest. Yet there were green shoots of hope here still. Kevin Boffy’s firm employs scores of local people and has no plans to relocate, despite Kevin’s clear irritation at what he feels is the neglect Hartlepool receives from all levels of government. The sense of community and pride in Hartlepool still shone through the discussion, from all the participants. There are entrepreneurs here, battling on and making a go of it, even in difficult conditions. The question is how we encourage more people in places like Hartlepool to create jobs in the area – and how we support the job creators already there.





# Case study: Redcar



Teesworks, under construction

*“The complete anchor for the town for a longtime was the steelworks. You can make the mistake that people in Redcar have an attachment to steel or any other specific industry. It’s the sense of purpose those jobs brought with them. That was the connection. That was what was taken away.”*

The seaside town of Redcar is only twelve miles away from Hartlepool as the crow flies, yet it takes more than half an hour to drive between the two towns. The only way to do it is to go into Middlesbrough and out again. Redcar and Hartlepool are separated by the mouth of the Tees River; despite talk down through many years about building a tunnel or a bridge across the estuary, there is still no direct route between the two towns.

When I arrived in Redcar, it was a sunny day. I got myself a lemon top, the ice cream for which the town is famous, and loved it enough to get several more during my stay. Yet walking through the centre of Redcar, one can feel the poverty that’s embedded in the place – the closed up shops on the high street, the lack of name brands being a depressing sign of deprivation (Redcar recently lost its M&S).

I was taken on a tour of the town and the surrounding area by Harland Deer who works for the council. On the day of our rendezvous, it was sadly chucking it down in biblical fashion – however, Harland dealt with it expertly and still managed to put me in front of a range of local business owners.

I met Liz and Holly, a mother and daughter team who run Blonde Creative, a brand strategy consultancy. When I asked about their client base, the answer interested me as it echoed a lot of what I’d heard from companies in Hartlepool.

“It’s a mixed bag, to be honest. We do have local clients, although the majority are spread out across the UK. We also have US clients, Swiss clients.”

In a sense, it’s a wonder of the current age that you can have a business in a small coastal town and yet serve clients thousands of miles away. It will be interesting to see how this dynamic plays its part in regeneration of more deprived areas across Britain.

I also spoke to Ryan, the part owner and MD of the local football club, Redcar Athletic.

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This neatly brings us to the biggest game in town, which is Teesworks. It is a massive (4,500 acre) site, where the old steelworks were located, before they shut down permanently in 2015. In its place, one of the largest green energy hubs in the world is being built. It has already brought hundreds of jobs back to the area and will create tens of thousands of jobs by the time it is complete. Despite this, there has been some controversy around Teesworks, although most of it seems to be built on politics of the pettiest type.

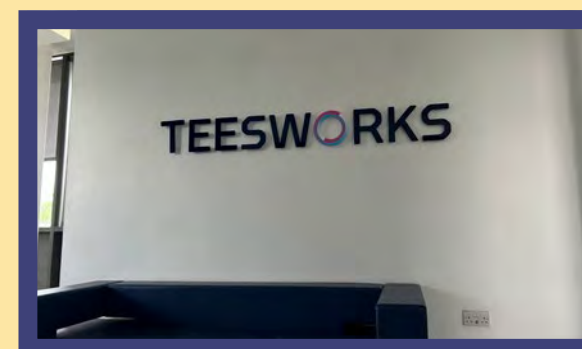
The land was in public hands until it was bought for £15 million by a private company, Teesworks Ltd, with the stipulation being that 10% of the profits made on the site would come back to the public purse in perpetuity. This seems like a good deal all round: a site that was going to sit there for who knows how long is instead being developed, not only into something that will create jobs and wealth in the region but will also be a huge creator of clean energy. In addition,

it will be a constant source of public funding for the region, with large amounts of the money received from their share of the company being put into regeneration.

The problem for some appears to be built around Teesworks being a private, profit-making enterprise instead of a public body. You have a local council that is largely Labour run, up against the Tory Teeside mayor, Ben Houchen, someone who has staked a lot personally on Teesworks being a success.

Houchen won re-election as mayor this year, and Teesworks had a lot to do with that. Most people in the area know it’s a winner and will create scores of local jobs. To those who decry it being in private hands, I would say the following: one, it almost certainly took the innovation you can only get in the private sector to unleash the value of what Teesworks has in store. Two, if you want the green energy revolution to happen, people in the private sector are going to have to see the profit in it. That’s its only genuine chance of success. The people running Teesworks becoming wealthy from it should be something for environmentalists to cheer on.

When I went to Teesworks myself, I was blown away by what I witnessed. The site is one of the most impressive things I saw in all my travels around the country for this project. Martin





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Corney, one of the directors of Teesworks Ltd and a man who works daily on site, showed me around. Amongst the massive warehouses and work buildings being created (many the size of several football pitches), there was also a manmade quay along the riverbank. The mouth of the Tees was too rough for large boats to come in and out of the site, so they built a massive quay in 18 months.

“We had the likes of Balfour Beatty, other multinationals saying, ‘Okay, we’ll come back in 18 months and if you’ve built the quay, then we’ll talk,” Martin Corney told me when he took me on the site tour. “And when they returned a year and a half to find the brand-new quay sitting there, they understood that we meant business.”

Teesworks couldn’t have happened without government support. Yet it also would never be what it will become without the private sector getting involved. Public-private cooperation in creating jobs and industry can be incredibly powerful when they combine properly. I’ve never seen a more substantive, real-world example of that than what I saw with my own eyes at Teesworks. The development of a dead site to create not only tens of thousands of jobs in an area that desperately needs, but a massive amount of green energy should be celebrated by everyone. It is win-win all round.



# Simon Corbett and Orangebox Training

*“I want staff to go to bed on Sunday night quite looking forward to coming to work on a Monday morning.”*

Simon Corbett wanted to be a policeman when he was a boy. His father was a cop and very early on, he decided to follow in his old man’s footsteps. “I remember being at primary school knowing that if I couldn’t be a footballer,” Simon said. “I’d be in the police force.”

Unfortunately, the qualifications he left comprehensive school with were not enough to join the police. Undeterred, he went to sixth form college – the same institution now run by Jane Reed – to re-sit some exams. Even then, he needed further job experience. After working in retail and at a bank, Simon finally got a role within the Durham police. There he stayed for six years in uniform. “When I watch police programmes now, they put a smile on my face. I like to reminisce about those days.”

He knew being a uniformed cop wasn’t what he wanted to do forever. “I’ve always got a fire burning in my belly. No matter what, I’m impatient,” he told me. “I’m always looking for the next thing.” He joined the headquarters’ surveillance team. This was the start of his undercover career.

He wanted to move onto the National Crime Squad (as it was known then; it’s now the National Crime Agency) in Liverpool. Only 2% of applicants from local forces get hired – but Simon made it. He then spent many years as an undercover policeman, working all over the world, infiltrating crime gangs.



Simon Corbett





Eight years ago, he wanted out of that lifestyle. That's when he started Orangebox, a training company with an office on Hartlepool Marina.

"I've been working since I was 16 and I'm 50 now. I've learned a lot about bad work environments and good work environments. About the importance of teamwork and leadership. Loyalty and hard work. As I've got older, I just want to make a difference."

Orangebox Training Solutions runs a wide range of employment training courses for local people, in the process being another key institution providing a route into employment and out of poverty.

"I want staff to go to bed on Sunday night quite looking forward to coming to work on a Monday morning. Where they are going to have this feel good factor, feel part of a team, feel valued – but also feel great that we're helping out learner's lives. We work with unemployed people who are looking for a chance. Unemployed people are genuinely looking for work – so we work hard to get good employers offering good jobs to give them a chance."

Orangebox trains around 4,000 people a year, and Simon told me that around 75% of those who come onto a course with them go on to find gainful employment.

"We are making a massive difference to people's lives. What about that 25% that don't get a job right away through us? We don't give up on them either. We keep working with them. We'll find other opportunities, or we'll retrain them in something else. For those who want the help, we will help them."





# What do businesses in Hartlepool want?

I've never been anywhere in England that needs infrastructure investment as badly as Hartlepool – and given most of the country is crying out for infrastructure investment, that's a bold statement. Particularly transport infrastructure of every conceivable stripe. I didn't see a bus the entire time I was in Hartlepool, which amid all the local complaints about their scarcity, seemed notable. I heard endless stories from people at all levels of society about how getting in and out of the town via public transport is a nightmare. Given the existence of huge employers like Teesworks in Redcar, this is a massive problem that holds back so many Hartlepudlians.

Most businesses in the town feel like Hartlepool gets less attention and care than other places within Teesside. They feel “left behind” in the most core sense imaginable. Talented people want to stay in – or even return to, like Harrison Smith did – Hartlepool, but feel like conditions are pushing against them.

Mostly, businesses in Hartlepool are looking for someone and/or something to save the place. Everyone feels that while there are plenty of great entrepreneurs and people working in the public sector in town who are dedicated, it is going to take a lot more than what they currently have to turn the place around.

# Lessons on best hiring practice and bringing people out of poverty

It is impossible to overstate how important places like the FE college and Orangebox Training Solutions are to a place like Hartlepool. Parallel to something like Ascend in Sheffield, Orangebox is taking people out of unemployment and poverty and giving them the new start they need; while post-secondary institutions like the FE and Sixth Form colleges are not only training up people of all ages, and helping them find apprenticeships and other employment opportunities, but running an impromptu public transport service and helping feed the students as well. It is scary to imagine how much worse the plight of a place like Hartlepool would be without their presence.

Much more attention needs to be placed on coastal communities and how they are different to every other part of the UK. Somewhere like Cromer has way more in common with Hartlepool than it has with towns in Norfolk ten miles inland from it. I think we need a “Minister for Coastal Communities”, although which department this would sit within presents immediate difficulty (perhaps we need a “Secretary of State for Coastal Communities”). However this is done, the UK government needs to start looking at coastal communities as a portion of the United Kingdom in their own right, separate from the surrounding territories they reside within.

# Final thoughts



It was the final thing that happened to me in Hartlepool that I feel summarises my experiences in the town. At the railway café, inside the station, I ordered a ham sandwich and a cup of tea. After I had done so, I noticed that the café only took cash, no cards. I panicked a little and looked in my pockets for all the change I had. The sandwich and tea came to £4.80, and I only had £4 on me, having spent the rest of the cash I had on a lousy kebab the previous evening.

“I’m so sorry about this,” I said, ‘But it turns out I don’t have enough for both the sandwich and the tea. Don’t worry about the tea then.’

“No, no,” she said. “Just give me the four pound and you can have the tea.”

As she said this, a look of immeasurable charity appeared across her face. She’d seen it all before, many times. Someone a little short of the price of a cup of tea. It’s what keeps places like Hartlepool together, these little acts of kindness. Even to someone like me who didn’t really need it, having foolishly wasted my remaining cash on an inedible kebab.



Despite persisting for decades, the UK’s coastal communities problem can be solved. We simply need to look at it in the right way. Hartlepool, Redcar, Cromer and many more places like them are bursting with talent. It’s just that not enough people care to look for it. As someone once said, you’re either there, or you’re not.



# Acknowledgements

These are the Hartlepool/Redcar/Cromer based organisations contacted for this report, without whom it would not have been possible

|                                         |                              |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Alan Teather Quilting                   | Merchants' Place             |
| Bespoke Bears                           | Northern Utility Solutions   |
| Blonde Ambition                         | Old Rock Shop Bistro         |
| Cliftonville Hotel                      | Optimisation Solutions       |
| Emerald Associates                      | Orangebox Training Solutions |
| Evolution XR                            | Poppyland                    |
| Harrison Smith                          | Redcar Athletic FC           |
| Hartlepool Borough Council              | Redcar and Cleveland Council |
| Hartlepool College of Further Education | Stupid Good                  |
| Hartlepool Sixth Form College           | Teesworks                    |
| Host & Stay                             | West Street Deli             |
| JMI Editorial                           |                              |



The Jobs Foundation is a registered charity (1202928) which champions the role of business as a force for good, particularly the crucial role companies play giving people a step up in life by providing jobs and training opportunities.

We want to have a practical impact on the ground, by helping business leaders do even more for their local communities, by providing them with the tools, knowledge, and best practice on employing and training people from less privileged backgrounds.

In parallel, we want to have a policy impact by creating a business environment which allows companies to thrive. We hope our advocacy programme will bring about a real change in the way policy makers view business and the crucial social and economic value businesses contribute to society.

To achieve this, we are building a coalition of business leaders and entrepreneurs from across the country to join our Business Council, to act as the driving force and delivery engine for our ambitions.



*“Hartlepool is a unique and special town that displays potential as it moves into its next stage of growth and development, including community cohesion, local productivity and sustainable growth. With innovative and relevant academic and technical career routes for diverse communities, there is a strong hope that we will see the fruits of our labour, in the training and retaining of our young people, as the foundations for essential future careers within Hartlepool and the wider region”*

**Jane Reed**

Campus Principal, Hartlepool Sixth Form College

