BUSINESS, PARTNERSHIPS & PLACE COMMITTEE F

9 July 2026

Present (Committee): Jane Robinson (Chair); Jen Middleton; Rene Koglbauer; Boguslaw Obara; Luisa Wakeling (online); Yvonne Chase; Paul Tyack; Murray Pollock; Suzie Nestor-Robson. ; Harriet Mayambala (Minutes)

In attendance: Bob Allan and Ben Rutherford-Orrock (presenters).

Apologies: James Annesley; Christine Younger; Rachel Pain; Estelle Blanks.

M I N U T E S

1. MINUTES

Minutes from the meeting of the Business Partnerships and Place Committee held on March 4th were approved as an accurate record.

2. CHAIR'S UPDATE

Received an update from the Chair of the committee:

2.1 The Chair reported on a joint session with the URIC Committee, chaired by Matthew Grenby. The session considered areas of shared interest, including local innovation partnership funding, the University's relationship with the combined authority and the development of the research strategy.

2.2 Members discussed how to better coordinate staff development opportunities across the University. These were considered difficult to navigate, with potential gaps to address.

2.3 The discussion also considered the regional innovation ecosystem and funding for place-based activity, in light of UKRI's increased focus on place and the devolution of some local innovation funding to the Mayoral Strategic Authority. The importance of ensuring the University was positioned to contribute to these developments was noted.

2.4 Members were advised that the five-year accountability statement for Higher Education Innovation Funding had been submitted at the end of April. A response had not yet been received, and arrangements for managing and reporting on the funding were continuing to evolve. The University was considered well positioned under its current approach.

2.5 An update was provided on the proposed Mission North East initiative, expected to launch in September. Its areas of focus were described as university and school partnerships to support progression; improving quality, particularly in English and mathematics; school leadership; and enrichment. Additional funding was expected.

2.6 Members discussed university engagement with schools, including the potential and risks of mathematics schools. Previous concerns included the possibility of undermining existing sixth forms and the risks associated with the University becoming a provider. Alternative approaches, including the Tutor Trust model, were also discussed. Members emphasised the importance of engaging early so that the University could help shape the mission's direction.

3. DISCOVER FESTIVAL UPDATE

Bob Allan and Ben Rutherford-Orrock presented the festival evaluation and took questions.

Noted:

3.1 The festival was described as the University's flagship public engagement event and a civic gateway for local families, communities and partners to engage with the University's campus, research, innovation and education. Its aims included inspiring local audiences, strengthening public understanding of the University's impact, and providing a high-quality engagement opportunity for staff and students.

3.2 The festival offered 65 activities, including workshops, drop-in activities and performances; 18 activities required advance booking. More than 300 staff and students contributed. Attendance was estimated at approximately 2,500, compared with approximately 1,500 in the previous year.

3.3 Evaluation results indicated a positive visitor experience. Ninety-three per cent of respondents said the festival made them curious or motivated to learn more; 97 per cent agreed that the University's research and education benefited the region; and 94 per cent agreed that the University was open and engaging.

3.4 Staff and student participation was also reported to have benefits. All surveyed participants felt confident engaging with the public after taking part; 84 per cent said the festival helped their work reach a wider audience, and 52 per cent said public feedback had positively influenced their thinking. Participation by postgraduate researchers fell from 13 per cent to 8 per cent.

3.5 The festival reached audiences from across the North East. Of those who registered, 96.8 per cent gave a North East postcode; more than a third were from Newcastle, with further representation from North Tyneside, Gateshead and Northumberland. Around 27 per cent of people surveyed had not previously interacted with the University, while 16 per cent had attended the previous year's festival.

3.6 The evaluation suggested that attendees continued to engage with festival topics after the event: 88 per cent of respondents discussed the festival afterwards, 53 per cent sought further information, and 50 per cent planned to volunteer, take part in research or attend another University event.

3.7 The presenters cautioned that postcode and demographic analysis was based on people who registered or booked activities, rather than the full audience. The available data suggested that people from more deprived North East communities were underrepresented among those registering. Barriers discussed included travel costs, digital access and the time required to book in advance.

3.8 The quiet hour for neurodiverse visitors was welcomed. Members also discussed the need to improve wayfinding, manage queues and review the booking process, while recognising that queues at popular activities could indicate strong demand. Other challenges included catering capacity and giving contributors sufficient time to prepare.

3.9 Recommendations included retaining the festival's hands-on, family-centred approach; improving visitor information and the booking experience; strengthening accessibility and inclusion; reaching community organisations more effectively; considering travel support; and increasing support for staff and postgraduate researchers taking part.

3.10 Possible future developments discussed included community co-creation, further partnership involvement, making innovation and skills more visible, and creating more opportunities for public dialogue. Suggestions included online streaming, sponsorship, a

festival app or map, take-home materials, and programming for different age groups. These were proposals for consideration.

3.11 Members discussed whether the festival should continue to focus primarily on families with younger children, and how to sustain young people's interest as they grow older. The presenters noted that student recruitment was not the festival's primary purpose, while recognising the potential value of connecting the festival with other University activity for older teenagers.

Action:

Bob Allan and Ben Rutherford-Orrock were invited to identify the main barriers to the festival's growth, including potential resource, funding, connection and partnership needs, for further consideration by the committee.

4. NEXT GENERATION NEWCASTLE: COMMUNICATING TO OUR PARTNERS WITH CLARITY, CONSISTENCY AND CONFIDENCE

Paul Tyack and Jen Middleton presented.

Noted:

4.1 The work aimed to establish a clearer and more consistent University narrative, in response to declining public perceptions of universities and evidence of confusion about the University's strategy and related programmes.

4.2 The work drew on research into public perceptions of universities, research and employability, as well as internal feedback. The University was considered to have strong regional visibility, with opportunities to improve national visibility and reach audiences less familiar with the institution.

4.3 Members were advised that the University's purpose and strategy had not changed; the work was intended to articulate them more clearly. Next Generation Newcastle was described as the transformation programme supporting delivery of the University's vision and strategy.

4.4 The University's proposed central message was framed around transforming how higher education can unlock talent, drive discovery and strengthen communities. The signature strengths identified were ageing and health, creative places, data and AI, and energy transitions.

4.5 Paul Tyack described how the messaging model could be applied to three high-value audiences: industrial partners, government and policymakers, and philanthropists. The "Think, Feel, Do" approach was intended to help colleagues move from communicating the University's story to agreeing a practical next step.

4.6 For potential industrial partners, colleagues were encouraged to refer opportunities to Newcastle Innovations; for government and policymakers, to Jen Middleton and her team; and for philanthropic prospects, to Paul Tyack and the Advancement team. Members were advised to understand each contact's interests and make an appropriate referral rather than present every University offer.

4.7 Members discussed the strongest stories to communicate, the support leaders needed to communicate clearly and consistently, and how the model could be shared across the institution. The transcript records the start of a paired discussion but does not capture its conclusions.

Action:

Paul Tyack to send the full messaging-model presentation deck to the committee.

5. LEVERAGING THE POWER OF THE ALUMNI TO SUPPORT THE UNIVERSITY'S INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

Paul Tyack was listed to provide a briefing.

Noted:

5.1 The item was deferred because of time constraints and the absence of relevant members.

6. AoB

6.1 No other business was recorded

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

Members were asked to note the following BPP meeting dates for 2026/2027:

- Thursday 24 September 2026 — 10.00–11.30
- Thursday 3 December 2026 — 10.00–11.30
- Monday 8 February 2027 — 14.00–15.30
- Thursday 22 April 2027 — 10.00–11.30
- Thursday 8 July 2027 — 09.00–12.00