

Investing in people, place and creativity in Northfleet

The Northfleet Place Partnership brought together Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, Gravesham Borough Council, and Creative Estuary to deliver a joint programme of work to further develop culture and the creative industries, SME growth, and youth engagement as drivers of social and economic regeneration in Northfleet North.

The partnership invested £180,000 over three years across three strands of activity - creative workspace development, a grants programme and commissions. The aim was to help create a vibrant and inclusive creative landscape, offering high-quality opportunities for residents.

Working directly with local people through grants and activities, the partnership has supported Northfleet's existing creative community including individuals, businesses and community groups, and helped creatives at all stages to develop their ideas and ambitions. Alongside this, the partnership is progressing the capital regeneration of the Coach House for youth work, creative and community use.

The Northfleet Place Partnership holds a lot of local knowledge and connections in the local community. Building on this expertise, the partnership set about preparing a programme that would be based on local people's needs and would also draw out artists and creatives in the area; many of whom were not previously visible to local people and to the partnership.

The partnership's knowledge informed the work of Augarde & Partners who were commissioned as part of the Old Coach House capital project (see below) to understand the local creative economy and the business development potential.

Blueprint Arts were commissioned to work with local communities and creatives as part of the Gravesend Light Festival as a way to start connecting Northfleet creatives in the area.

The partnership also appointed Matilda Flood as Programme Coordinator. As a successful local artist and creative entrepreneur, Matilda built a high degree of trust with local creatives to support their development through targeted grants. After the investment, Matilda kept the connections and helped to steer creatives to drive their own local creative ecology through the setting up of the Northfleet Creative steering group (read more on their work below).

This report outlines what the Northfleet Place Partnership set out to achieve, how it worked and the impact it has had on the local area.

Supporting local creatives through targeted grants

The activity programme at a glance:

- £100,000 invested
- 22 creative businesses supported
- 35 events delivered
- 1,228 people reached



The Partnership allocated £100,000 to an activity programme designed to support the growth of Northfleet's creative sector and strengthen connections between creatives and local communities. The programme was delivered through three core strands: commissions, grants, and co-designed programming ie. working together to design the programme of activities.

The grants were offered across three tiers:

- **Development grants** (up to £1,000) to support creative practice and skills development.
- **Enterprise grants** (up to £5,000) to support early-stage creative businesses.
- **Impact grants** (up to £10,000) to help established organisations strengthen their connections within Northfleet.

From 37 applications, 18 grants were awarded, directly supporting 22 creative businesses. Four of these businesses also acted as mentors to Enterprise grant awardees, embedding peer to peer support and knowledge-sharing within the programme. In total, £55,847.59 was distributed through the grants.

"Knowing there was support available was really encouraging. At first, I was intimidated and hesitant to say I was from Northfleet but realising that funders want to invest in places like this changed my mindset. I now have a clearer portfolio, a stronger sense of

direction, and a real desire to represent Northfleet.”

- Steven Knowles, Development Grant Awardee

“This grant marked a turning point in my creative practice. It gave me the opportunity to move from producing one-off pieces to developing a more sustainable and scalable way of working, while retaining an authentic, hand-produced finish. The support allowed me to take this next step with greater focus and confidence.”

- Anna Crilly, Development Grant Awardee

“This inspiring group of local people represent something of the depth of talent across the diverse communities of Northfleet. These grants have supported local creative people and projects, and through this investment, we are building a thriving and inclusive creative economy in Northfleet”. **- Caggy Kerlogue, Creative Assets & Place Manager at Creative Estuary**

The programme reached a diverse range of creatives:

- Over 60% of grant recipients identified as women,
- 25% identified as neurodiverse, disabled, or living with a long-term health condition,
- 25% of awardees identified as being from global majority backgrounds, reflecting the programme’s commitment to inclusive investment.

Between May and October 2025, the grant programme directly enabled 35 creative events to take place across Northfleet. These activities ranged from history walks exploring Northfleet’s heritage to family workshops in the lead-up to Northfleet Carnival 2025. Collectively, these events reached approximately 1,228 people. This demonstrates the value of investing directly in local creatives in that the programme fostered deeper and more meaningful connections with Northfleet communities.

“As a small grassroots organisation with limited resources, it can be difficult to dedicate time to securing larger funding opportunities. This support will allow us to expand our reach and deepen our impact. It marks an important step in our work to connect and empower Northfleet North’s residents, organisations, and businesses.”

- Blueprint Arts, Impact Grant Awardee

Alongside grant funding, Enterprise awardees took part in four business development workshops led by experts from Kent Business School. The sessions focused on addressing skills gaps that had been holding businesses back. High demand led to the workshops being opened to all 18 awardees, with an online support group created to provide ongoing advice, discussion, and peer support.

“Northfleet is an incredible place with a creatively rich community. These workshops were designed to support creatives working across different disciplines to understand the fundamentals of business growth, from identifying customers and strengthening marketing and sales, to financial planning and accessing future funding opportunities.”

- Rebecca Smith, Mentoring Manager, Kent Business School



“The Northfleet Place Partnership grant and business growth support addressed key challenges that had been limiting our growth. The mentoring helped us strengthen community engagement, networking, and market research, and begin building meaningful relationships within Northfleet. This support will enable long-term growth.”

- Ulla Tervo, NUEN Architects, Enterprise Grant Awardee



The feedback from the programme was positive and a local creative network began to emerge. Local creatives wanted to meet each other and to come together. The Partnership agreed to allocate the remaining investment funds to support the emerging creative network in Northfleet. **The Northfleet Creative Steering Group** was born, bringing individual creatives and creative businesses together to develop activities in Northfleet. The Steering Group started meeting in Autumn 2025 and are forming plans through to spring/summer 2026. To further their ambitions, the Creative Steering Group has taken the initiative to pursue a minimum of three grant opportunities and plans to leverage additional income streams to strengthen and maximise the investment.

“Northfleet is brimming with creative energy, and the Northfleet Place Partnership has played a vital role in nurturing and supporting this growing community. By championing local creatives and strengthening creative network groups, the Partnership helped ideas to take root, connections to flourish and confidence to grow. This collective support is helping Northfleet’s creative community to thrive, develop its voice and shape the area’s future with ambition and pride.” - **Matilda Flood, Programme Coordinator at Creative Estuary**

Vision for the Coach House Site

Whilst supporting and investing in people, the Partnership focused on creating space for local people through the redevelopment of the Old Coach House and the land adjacent, alongside the Northfleet International Railway Station in Northfleet.

The vision for the Coach House is to create an integrated hub that combines youth services with creative workspace. It will offer opportunities for skills development, enterprise, wellbeing and personal growth. The site aims to provide young people with access to support, networks, and resources, while enabling creative businesses to test ideas, grow those ideas, and thrive within Northfleet. Young people will have the opportunity to learn from and work with some of the creative businesses that will take up business space planned for the land adjacent to the Coach House. The Coach House will be the hub for public activities, workshops, youth work, and a small cafe.

The Northfleet Place Partnership is working closely with Northfleet Central CIO, who are delivering youth activities in the area, to bring the disused Coach House building and adjacent brownfield land back into use. Northfleet Central CIO are a local voluntary organisation who work to provide opportunities and support to improve the lives of young people in the area.

As a valued partner in the Northfleet project, Northfleet Central CIO have championed the needs of the young people as the project has evolved and they conceived the idea of a youth centre at the heart of the Old Coach House redevelopment. Their advice and challenge throughout the project to date has been invaluable in listening to local people and to shaping the project.

A steering group comprising representatives from the Northfleet Place Partnership, including Northfleet Central CIO, is overseeing the feasibility stage, design development, and public consultation for the site's redevelopment. There are two core ambitions for the Coach House site:

- **Youth provision:** To address a lack of accessible spaces, services, and opportunities for young people in the Northfleet area, particularly to support skills development, training, and creative expression.
- **Creative workspace:** To support the area's growing creative sector; more than 400 creative individuals and creative businesses are operating across Gravesham borough. Many of these people have to work from home or commute due to a lack of suitable local workspace. The Coach House aims to respond to this demand by creating a hub for creative activity and collaboration where local people can use the space for their work and to find work.

Feasibility and Site Redevelopment

The Northfleet Place Partnership commissioned Augarde and Partners, and Turner Works, to undertake the initial feasibility and business planning work to understand the potential for redevelopment of the site. Key findings from the feasibility report include the importance of a mixed-use approach to planning the spaces; to explore how we can combine youth and

community activities, with workspace for businesses. The aim is to maximise social impact and ensure financial sustainability. This thinking is also about working out ways to redevelop the site so that young people will be able to create pathways to employment and training through the activities and with the businesses that will form a hub on site.

The proposed redevelopment plan is to attract businesses to the workspaces on the site whilst starting up the youth services in the Coach House. Over time, the intention is to develop a community of businesses and service providers who will build their businesses and attract local people to engage, particularly young people, in meaningful activities, training and work opportunities.

In November 2024, Ebbsfleet Development Corporation approved the Strategic Outline Case for the Coach House site, and this enabled the project to progress to the next stage of design development. The Partnership Steering Group is continuing to explore operational and business models for the site; a practical layout for the site; and is in the process of trying to procure a company to act as an operator to manage the whole site including services and businesses. The operator, once appointed, will work with the Partnership to shape the final design and layout of the site to make sure the plans are sound and can be managed efficiently. We expect to appoint an operator in Spring/ Summer 2026.

Community and Sector Engagement

The Northfleet Place Partnership has undertaken local public consultation and further consultation with local creatives and creative businesses. All the information and feedback from these consultations have and continue to inform the redevelopment of the site. Here are some examples:

- **Public consultation events** were undertaken by Ebbsfleet Development Corporation to hear what local residents think of the site as it is at the moment, and to understand the local issues and concerns. Parking and car movements have been flagged. Also, residents said that there is not enough for young people in the area.
- **Young people** were engaged through a series of workshops delivered in partnership with '2 to 3 Degrees'. These sessions focused on personal development and explored how the Coach House could provide meaningful youth provision. The workshops led to increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and improved wellbeing among participants, while offering valuable insight into the lived experiences of young people in Northfleet. This learning directly informed both the site design and programme of activities.
- **The creative and cultural sector** was engaged through a roundtable convened by Creative Estuary. Local creatives and organisations responded positively to the proposals, expressing strong support for the site and a desire to be actively involved through workspace use, partnerships, and programme delivery. The discussions reinforced the need for a shared creative and community space in Northfleet and

highlighted the lack of accessible venues as a barrier to both community participation and business growth.

- **Business engagement:** Gravesham Borough Council supported engagement with businesses and helped raised awareness amongst the creative business community using established networks and wider communications.



Summary

As the redevelopment of the site continues, the Northfleet Place Partnership will continue to communicate our progress. Creative Estuary on behalf of the Partnership are continuing to support and nurture local creatives as part of the creative ecology of the Thames Estuary. This partnership approach to the capital redevelopment on the site and, local community and creative development with local people, is about being a responsible developer. Local people are becoming aware of the redevelopment of the site, and they are being supported to develop their creativity and creative businesses now. This means that they can be ready to take advantage of the opportunities that will be delivered when the Coach House, and adjacent land, is brought into use as a youth, business, and creative hub.

"We're proud of how far this Partnership has come and what has already been achieved. As the redevelopment project progresses, local people have stepped forward to take the lead in growing youth provision and the creative economy. Building real local confidence through collaboration is as important as improving public spaces. By listening to community voices and

continuing to work in partnership, we're focused on providing facilities and services shaped by and for local people."

Northfleet Place Partnership: Ebbsfleet Development Corporation – Ian Piper, CEO; Gravesham Borough Council – Jamie Izzard, Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Communities & Inclusive Growth; Steve Stamp – Northfleet Central CIO; Creative Estuary – Lorraine Cox, Director.

