



Teesside
University

UK2070
COMMISSION

TEESSIDE TASKFORCE

2020-25



Foreword

The first edition of the Teesside Taskforce Journal launches with a clear purpose: to showcase the power of place-based leadership and collective ambition.

This publication is more than a record of progress – it is a statement of intent. It demonstrates how Teesside, through vision and collaboration, is taking a leading role in shaping the fairer, greener, and more prosperous future our country so urgently needs.

The Taskforce was born from the UK2070 Commission's mission to tackle entrenched regional inequalities. While we honour the legacy of the late Lord Bob Kerlake, who laid the foundations for this work, our focus is firmly on what comes next: ensuring that Teesside stands at the forefront of innovation, clean growth, and opportunity for all.

At the heart of this endeavour is Teesside University. As a civic anchor and a catalyst for change, the University is driving forward research, skills, and enterprise that power regional transformation. Working alongside industry, government, and community partners, Teesside University exemplifies what is possible when higher education leads with purpose and ambition.

Professor Michael Henson

UK2070 Commissioner and Chair
Teesside Taskforce Programme

This journal showcases Teesside as a Green Growth Corridor – a place where world-class research, industry, and civic leadership converge. It is a testament to the power of place-based leadership and the role universities can play in unlocking potential, inspiring change, and delivering renewal.

But this journal is not simply to be read; it is an invitation. An invitation to contribute ideas, share challenges, and join a collective endeavour that defines our work. Through this platform, we can explore how place-based leadership can unlock potential, inspire change, and set a course for renewal that benefits communities here in Teesside, across the UK, and far beyond.

Together, let us build on legacy, lead with vision, and deliver meaningful change for people and place.

Professor Stephen Cummings

Pro Vice-Chancellor
(Research & Knowledge Exchange)
Teesside University

Find out more about the Teesside Taskforce:



The Tees Valley

Located in North East England, the Tees Valley is a region of strategic importance, shaped by its industrial past and poised for a sustainable future. It comprises five local authority areas: Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, and Stockton-on-Tees, each contributing to the region's unique character and economic potential.

Today, the Tees Valley is transitioning from traditional heavy industry to a hub for clean energy, advanced manufacturing, and digital innovation. Its selection by the UK2070 Commission reflects both the region's challenges, such as economic decline and health disparities, and its potential to lead the UK's net-zero transformation.



Once dubbed the Infant Hercules for its industrial might, Teesside is now emerging as a global force for clean growth and innovation.

Teesside Taskforce Model

Building on the Tees Valley's industrial heritage, the Teesside Taskforce will focus on three core themes: Net Zero, Digital Innovation, and Place-based Leadership.

Its aim is to drive inclusive economic growth and prosperity across the region.

By harnessing Teesside University's academic expertise, the model will foster global partnerships while strengthening connections within the local community.



Net Zero

The Tees Valley is on track to become the world's first net zero industrial cluster by 2040. As one of Europe's largest industrial hubs, the region is uniquely positioned to lead in clean energy, carbon capture, hydrogen production, and green manufacturing.

The Teesside Taskforce is unlocking opportunities in key areas such as freeports, green steel, and hydrogen, with the goal of driving job creation, improving wellbeing, and accelerating the region's transition to a low-carbon economy.



Global Partnerships

Teesside University and the Teesside Taskforce are playing a pivotal role in advancing global collaboration on net zero innovation. Through a series of high-profile international engagements, the University has become a key destination for governments and climate leaders seeking to learn from its expertise in hydrogen and sustainable technologies.

2022

Starting in November 2022, at the invitation of the Teesside Taskforce, a senior delegation from the South African Government visited Teesside University as part of President Cyril Ramaphosa's UK state visit. The delegation explored how the University is helping transform the Tees Valley into a global hub for net zero technologies, particularly through its leadership in hydrogen innovation. The visit highlighted the parallels between the Tees Valley and South African Hydrogen plans, reinforcing collaboration and the impact of the Teesside Taskforce to bring two partners together.

2023

In September 2023, Dr Crispian Olver, Executive Director of South Africa's Presidential Climate Commission, visited Teesside University as part of a UK2070 Commission initiative to enhance international collaboration on climate action. The visit emphasised the importance of global academic partnerships within the Commonwealth to tackle shared climate challenges.



Hear from Dr Olver about his visit to Teesside University's Net Zero Industry Innovation Centre.

The Net Zero Industry Innovation Centre

Strategic partnerships with industry, government, and academia drive the Net Zero Industry Innovation Centre's (NZIIC) success, developing global sustainability solutions, attracting investment, and reinforcing the region's net zero leadership. Beyond technology, the Centre integrates policy and social inclusion, ensuring a just transition and setting a national benchmark for place-based climate action.

Through strategic partnerships with Turner & Townsend, the UK2070 Commission, and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, the NZIIC influences policy and contributes to international net zero efforts, demonstrating how local action can deliver global impact.



2025

In March 2025, Teesside and Illinois Universities opened discussions to create a Transatlantic Net Zero Centre of Excellence, focused on clean energy and digital innovation. Led by the UK2070 Teesside Taskforce, the initiative will unite academia, industry, and policymakers to drive progress in hydrogen, digital trade, and next-generation energy, strengthening UK-US collaboration in green technology.

In June 2025, Teesside University launched a landmark PhD partnership with the University of Pretoria, focused on advancing sustainable energy research. This initiative aims to accelerate innovation in clean energy and strengthen global collaboration.



Digital innovation

The UK2070 Teesside Taskforce positions digital innovation at the heart of regional renewal. Grounded in local needs, the Taskforce promotes place-based digital growth to support skills development, economic opportunity, and regional equity. Its collaborative approach brings together academia, industry, policymakers, and communities to co-create digital solutions that are both technologically advanced and socially meaningful, aligning local action with national and global goals.

CASE STUDY

Tees Valley Investment Zone

The Tees Valley Investment Zone exemplifies the UK2070 Commission's vision of digital innovation as a catalyst for inclusive, place-based transformation.

The government-backed initiative will accelerate growth in the digital and creative sectors across Middlesbrough and Hartlepool. With £160m in public funding and a goal of attracting £175m in private investment, it aims to create over 2,000 high-quality jobs and drive innovation-led regeneration.

The zone also reflects the Taskforce's belief in retaining and nurturing local talent. By creating a thriving ecosystem for digital and creative enterprises, it offers young people in the Tees Valley a compelling reason to stay, build careers, and contribute to their communities, reversing decades of outmigration and economic decline.



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CASE STUDY

Teesside's 5G Digital Trade Testbed: A UK first in digital trade innovation

The Teesside Digital Trade Testbed is a key example of the Teesside Taskforce's mission to drive place-based innovation and inclusive economic regeneration. Based at Teesside International Airport, the collaborative initiative between Teesside University and the Tees Valley Combined Authority tests and develops cutting-edge technologies to streamline international trade and reduce costs. As the only facility of its kind in the UK, the testbed serves as a blueprint for other regions.

The testbed builds on an ongoing partnership between Teesside University and the International Centre for Digital Trade and Innovation (IC4DTI). Through the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) UK, this partnership has already won investment to fund two projects to accelerate the digitalisation of UK and world trade.



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Place-based Leadership

The Teesside Taskforce showcases place-based leadership by leveraging the Tees Valley's strengths in green industry and digital innovation. Rooted in a dynamic ecosystem of industrial assets, business support, and global trade links, the region is a model for inclusive, sustainable growth, driven by local insight, collaboration, and strategic vision.

Teesside University's Institute for Collective Place Leadership plays a pivotal role in this mission, conducting research that empowers local leaders, policymakers, businesses, and communities to co-create solutions to complex regional challenges.

The Institute's work is grounded in the principles of collaboration, empowerment, and lived experience, aligning closely with the UK2070 Commission's vision for tackling regional inequality. Through its engagement with the Commission and the Teesside Taskforce, the Institute ensures that local voices shape national policy and that innovation is rooted in the realities of place.



CASE STUDY

National Institute for Health & Care Research: Health Determinants Research Centre, South Tees

Established in 2023, in partnership with local councils, and backed by £50m funding from the National Institute for Health & Care, the Health Determinants Research Centre (HDRC) will develop innovative, evidence-based approaches to improve long-term health outcomes across the region.

This initiative exemplifies the University's commitment to place-based leadership, as championed by the Teesside Taskforce, by embedding research into local decision-making and service delivery. Through co-production with communities and local authorities, the HDRC will foster a culture of research and knowledge-sharing that directly addresses the social and economic factors affecting health in South Tees.

Led by a Teesside University academic and supported by the University's People & Place research pillar, the collaboration builds on the University's civic mission, strengthening its role as a regional anchor driving inclusive growth and public health innovation.



This initiative exemplifies the University's commitment to place-based leadership.



CASE STUDY

**Public Policy Academy and
Darlington Economic Campus**

Teesside University's Public Policy Academy is a flagship initiative designed to connect students with the realities of policymaking. In collaboration with the Darlington Economic Campus, the Academy offers immersive experiences for students, including workshops led by civil servants from HM Treasury, the Department for Business and Trade and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Held annually during UK Parliament Week, the programme convenes students, academics and policy professionals to explore how public policy shapes regional and national outcomes. The initiative is supported by the UK2070 Commission and aligns with the University's People & Place strategic research pillar, promoting inclusive regional development.

Through masterclasses, site visits, and collaborative exercises, the Academy encourages civic engagement and policy literacy, preparing students to contribute meaningfully to public affairs and governance.



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CASE STUDY

**Bridging research and policy in £5m
policy engagement programme**

Teesside University is part of a £5.9m national initiative to strengthen the role of academic research in public policy.

Funded by Research England, ESRC, and UKRI, the project supports the growth of the Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN), a UK-wide collaboration hosted by UCL. UPEN connects over 110 universities with policymakers to promote evidence-based decision-making.

Over the next four years, it will focus on improving university-policy engagement, supporting place-based policymaking, and embedding citizen involvement.



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A blueprint for the future

Looking ahead, the Teesside Taskforce aims to position the region as a national and global hub for green growth, digital innovation, and inclusive development.

Building on Teesside's industrial heritage and strategic assets, the Taskforce will:

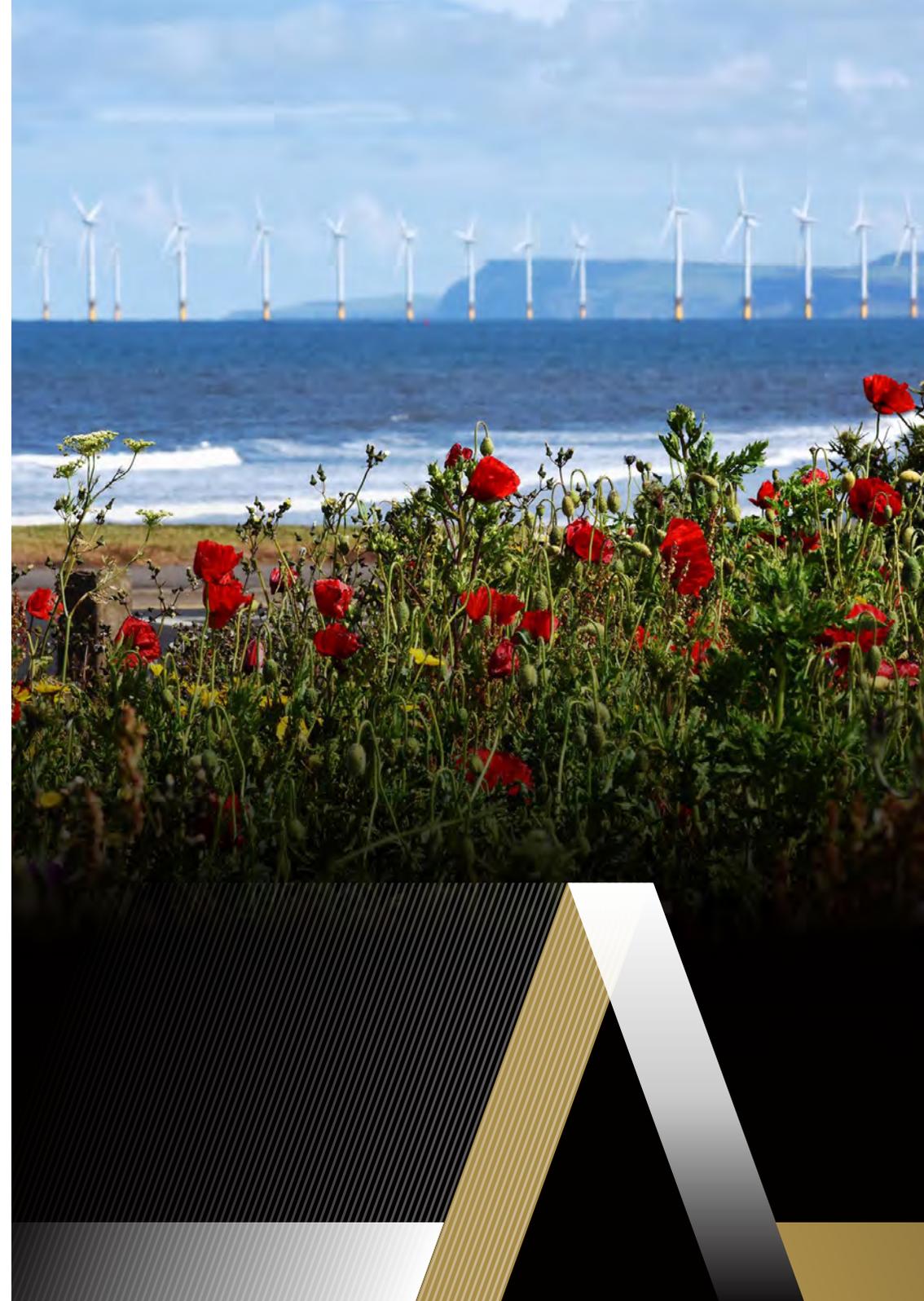
- > lead a just transition to net zero, establishing Teesside as a centre for clean energy and sustainable industry
- > create a connected innovation corridor, linking people, places, and opportunities across the Tees Valley
- > improve health, skills, and wellbeing, addressing the legacy of industrial decline through evidence-based action
- > strengthen civic collaboration, with institutions like Teesside University driving research, innovation, and community engagement.

The Taskforce's ambitions are firmly rooted in the UK2070 Commission's long-term vision, directly contributing to key national priorities:

- > a spatially just transition to net zero
- > stronger local economies and foundational sectors
- > future-skilling the UK through education and innovation
- > empowering regions through inclusive devolution
- > a coordinated national spatial plan that supports balanced growth.

By aligning local action with national strategy, the Teesside Taskforce exemplifies how place-based leadership can drive systemic change, tackling inequality and creating sustainable, inclusive prosperity.

As the UK faces complex economic, environmental, and social challenges, the Teesside Taskforce offers a powerful model for regional renewal, harnessing partnership, innovation, and civic pride to build a stronger, fairer Tees Valley, and contribute to a more balanced and equitable United Kingdom.





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