

Community wall brightens up visitor hub for A1 improvement schemes

Two groups and a school contributed artwork for the Blaydon Hub, which is used as offices and a visitor centre for National Highways' upgrades of the A1 between Scotswood and North Brunton and Birtley to Coal House.

Arcadea's HUB Studio, Junction 42 and Blaydon West Primary School – were asked "What does connecting communities mean to you?"

National Highways Project Manager for the A1 Scotwood to North Brunton upgrade Keith Bradley, said:

The strategic road network is all about connecting people and communities. When National Highways carries out vital upgrades to that network, we become part of the community we are improving. It's important that we do that work sensitively with our neighbours in mind and that they feel involved and informed.

That's why we wanted local groups to contribute their thoughts on what should be on the community wall at the Blaydon Hub. Not only is it our site offices, full of designers, engineers, construction workers and other colleagues, its also a place people can visit to engage with us on a range of matters relating to our schemes.

Covid-restrictions permitting, we can host project updates for residents, give talks to community groups and invite schools or colleges in for STEM-based learning opportunities.

Paige Shiels, Community Relations Officer for delivery partner Costain Jacobs Partnership, was involved with the project's implementation. She said:

It has been a really rewarding project to work on. It's been great to learn more about some of the organisations in the area and we are delighted the groups we approached rose to the challenge with such passion and creativity. It's a joy to walk on to the site and see their work every day.

Arcadea is a disability led arts organisation that was registered as a charity in 1993. Ten years ago the organisation set out to redefine the understanding of learning disabled people as visual artists by establishing the HUB Studio. Where professional artists work alongside learning disabled people to identify potential excellence, nurture it and bring it forward.

Arcadea's Director, Katy Saunderson said

This project has been a fantastic opportunity for learning disabled people to showcase the talent in their community. The work created by our members celebrates learning disabled figures and their cultural value. Providing increased visibility, positive representation and inspiration to this too often marginalised group.

Junction 42 is a local charity working in prisons and communities, supporting people throughout the journey of custody and rehabilitation. Its mission is to see the lives of offenders and their communities visibly transformed through support, empowerment, and opportunity. As well as exhibitions inside prisons, Junction 42 brings creative artwork from prisoners into the local community.

Director Joanne O'Connor said:

We are delighted for the opportunity to showcase the talents of the men and women we work with. Our courses are designed to help offenders recognise their potential to achieve and encourage their artist ideas to flourish. Being able to exhibit allows a wider audience to see the potential of those in prison, challenging preconceptions and giving a voice to those in custody.

One of the artworks contributed by Junction 42

The children at Blaydon West Primary School were excited to take part in the project to design some group-based artwork for the community wall. A class from each year group got involved.

Headteacher Simon Brown said:

We were asked by Costain if the children could provide some artwork for their community wall. At a time of significant need within the community, and indeed the world, the children decided they would like to celebrate the things close to their hearts. Their friends and families, the local area and the NHS. They wanted to represent themselves all lined up, thanking the NHS for the hard work they did and still do, helping to protect us. They celebrated their community with representations of their houses and the local area. The most important part of all the whole project was they enjoyed themselves.

The A1 Scotswood to North Brunton upgrade will see the current two lane carriageway increased to three lanes in each direction. It is due to be complete in 2022-23.

The A1 Birtley to Coal House improvement will see approximately four miles of the A1 widened between junctions 65 and 67. The number of lanes on the northbound carriageway will be increased from two to three while the southbound carriageway will see the number of lanes increased from three to four.

The three junctions will be modified to accommodate the additional lanes and a new railway bridge built to carry the A1 over the east coast mainline, replacing the 40-year-old Allerdene Railway Bridge.

It is due to be complete in 2024-25.

Both schemes are focused on improving safety, journey time reliability and the economic performance of the region by improving accessibility to jobs and services whilst supporting additional development in the area.

More details on each scheme, including the ability to sign up for regular email updates, can be found at the below schemes:

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the National Highways customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the National Highways press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.