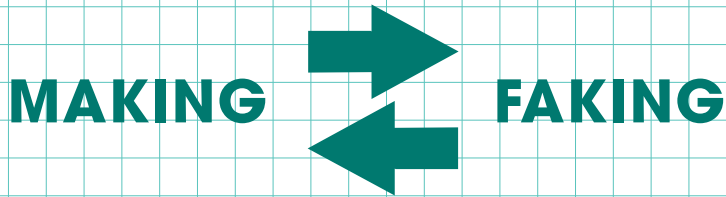


PLACE



GUIDE + QUIZ

Dr Bobbie Bailey & NAVIGATOR NORTH



“Placemaking is turning a public space from a place you can’t wait to get through, to one you never want to leave.”

Fred Kent, Project for Public Spaces

In recent years, placemaking has become a widely used term. It appears in funding bids, regeneration strategies, marketing campaigns and development proposals. But as its popularity has grown, so too has the risk of it being misused or diluted. What is sometimes labelled as placemaking can, in reality, be something quite different.

“Placemaking is a participatory process for shaping public space that harnesses the ideas and assets of the people who use it.”

Project for Public Spaces

This resource has grown out of both research and practice:

It builds on insights from Dr Bobbie Bailey’s PhD research, which worked closely with communities across Teesside to imagine alternative uses for public spaces.

It draws from hands-on creative placemaking work delivered through Navigator North’s WE SHALL BE programme.



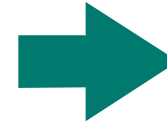


"Placemaking is about people coming together to shape the places they use every day. It comes from listening, testing ideas, and building things with the people who are already there. It puts their needs, stories, and experiences at the centre.

When it works, it turns overlooked spaces into places people actually care about and public art becomes a meaningful expression of local identity rather than just decoration."

Dr Bobbie Bailey

GUIDE



Core Principles of Placemaking

Community-Centred

True placemaking puts local residents at the heart of decision-making, ensuring spaces reflect their needs and culture.

Ongoing Engagement

It's not a one-time consultation - placemaking involves continuous dialogue and adaptation based on how people actually use spaces.

Authentic Expression

Public art should emerge from local stories, artists, and traditions rather than being imported or imposed from outside.

Multi-Functional Spaces

Great public spaces serve multiple purposes socialising, playing, relaxing, creating - not just visual appeal.

Sense of Belonging

The goal is to create places where people feel ownership, connection, and a desire to care for their environment.

Process Over Product

Placemaking is an ongoing process of improvement, not just installing a finished product and walking away.

Public Art & Placemaking

Public art is one of placemaking's most powerful tools - when done thoughtfully. Art can tell community stories, create landmarks, spark conversations, and transform how people feel about a space.

But art becomes placefaking when it's parachuted in without context, when it displaces rather than includes, or when it prioritises "cool" over meaningful.

"Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody."

Jane Jacobs

Creative Placemaking in Practice

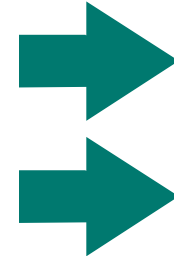
Creative placemaking uses arts and culture as catalysts for community development. It's most effective when:

- Local artists and cultural organisations lead the process
- Art activities generate genuine community participation and dialogue
- Creative interventions respond to real community needs and aspirations
- Projects create lasting positive change, not just temporary decoration
- The process values community stories and lived experiences

Spotting Placefaking

Placefaking occurs when developers, municipalities, or organizations use the language of placemaking without genuine community engagement or long-term commitment.

Here are warning signs



Top-down decisions without community input

Generic designs that could be anywhere

Focus on aesthetics over functionality

Temporary 'activations' that don't address real needs

Displacement of existing communities

Instagram-friendly but not people-friendly



How to be a Placemaker

You don't need a big budget or official permission to start making positive change in your community. Here are practical steps you can take:



Start Conversations

Talk to your neighbours about what they'd like to see. Set up a WhatsApp group or organise a cuppa in the park. Real placemaking starts with listening.



Care for Small Spaces

Plant flowers in a neglected planter, organise a litter pick, or tend to a community green space. Small acts of care inspire others.



Support Local Creatives

When your area gets public art opportunities, advocate for local artists. Attend community consultations and share what matters to you.



Use Your Voice

Respond to planning consultations. Attend council meetings. Challenge placefaking when you see it. Your voice matters in shaping Teesside.



Connect with Others

Join or start a residents' association. Connect with local arts organisations like Navigator North. Collective action creates real change.



Keep Learning

Research successful placemaking projects. Learn from communities who've done it well. Share knowledge with your neighbours.

"If you plan cities for cars and traffic, you get cars and traffic. If you plan for people and places, you get people and places."

Fred Kent, Project for Public Spaces

Questions to Ask

When evaluating whether a project is genuine placemaking or placefaking, consider:

Where are the local artists?

For public art projects, are regional creatives being commissioned?

Who was involved in the decision-making?

Were local residents meaningfully consulted from the beginning?

Who benefits?

Does it serve community needs or developer/marketing interests?

What happens next?

Is there ongoing community stewardship, or is it a one-off?

Who's being displaced?

Does this project support existing communities or contribute to gentrification?

Is it rooted in place?

Does it reflect local identity, history, and culture?

QUIZ

We invite you to question what you see around you, to recognise strong examples of placemaking, and to spot when something might not be as community-focused as it claims, whilst offering a playful way to explore that difference.



Scenario 01 The Community Allotment Transformation

Description: Residents of a council estate in Stockton worked with the local authority over 18 months to transform a derelict patch of land into a community allotment.

Plots are allocated to families, there's a shared tool shed, and older residents teach young people traditional growing methods.

Do you think this is Place...

- ☐ making
- ☐ faking

Find the answer on page 19



Scenario 02 Middlesbrough Mural for Social Media

Description: A property developer commissions a brightly coloured mural spelling out 'MIDDLESBROUGH' in block letters outside their new luxury flats.

The mural was designed by a London-based artist without consulting local residents, specifically for Instagram photos to market the development.

Do you think this is Place...

- ☐ making
- ☐ faking

Find the answer on page 19

Scenario 03 Young People's Skate Park Co-Design

Description: After years of skaters being moved on from public spaces in Redcar, the council invited local young people to co-design a new skate park.

Youth participated in every design meeting, tested prototypes, and now help maintain the space through a youth steering group.

Do you think this is Place...

- ☐ making
- ☐ faking

Find the answer on page 20

Scenario 04 WE SHALL BE Installations

Description: Through Community engagement sessions led by local artists, murals and artworks were informed by resident's creative responses.

A commissioned sculpture made by a Tees Valley based artist incorporated publicly donated mobile phones.

The works were sited in and around the town's railway station.

Do you think this is Place...

- ☐ making
- ☐ faking

Find the answer on page 20



Scenario 05 Temporary Pocket Park in Stockton

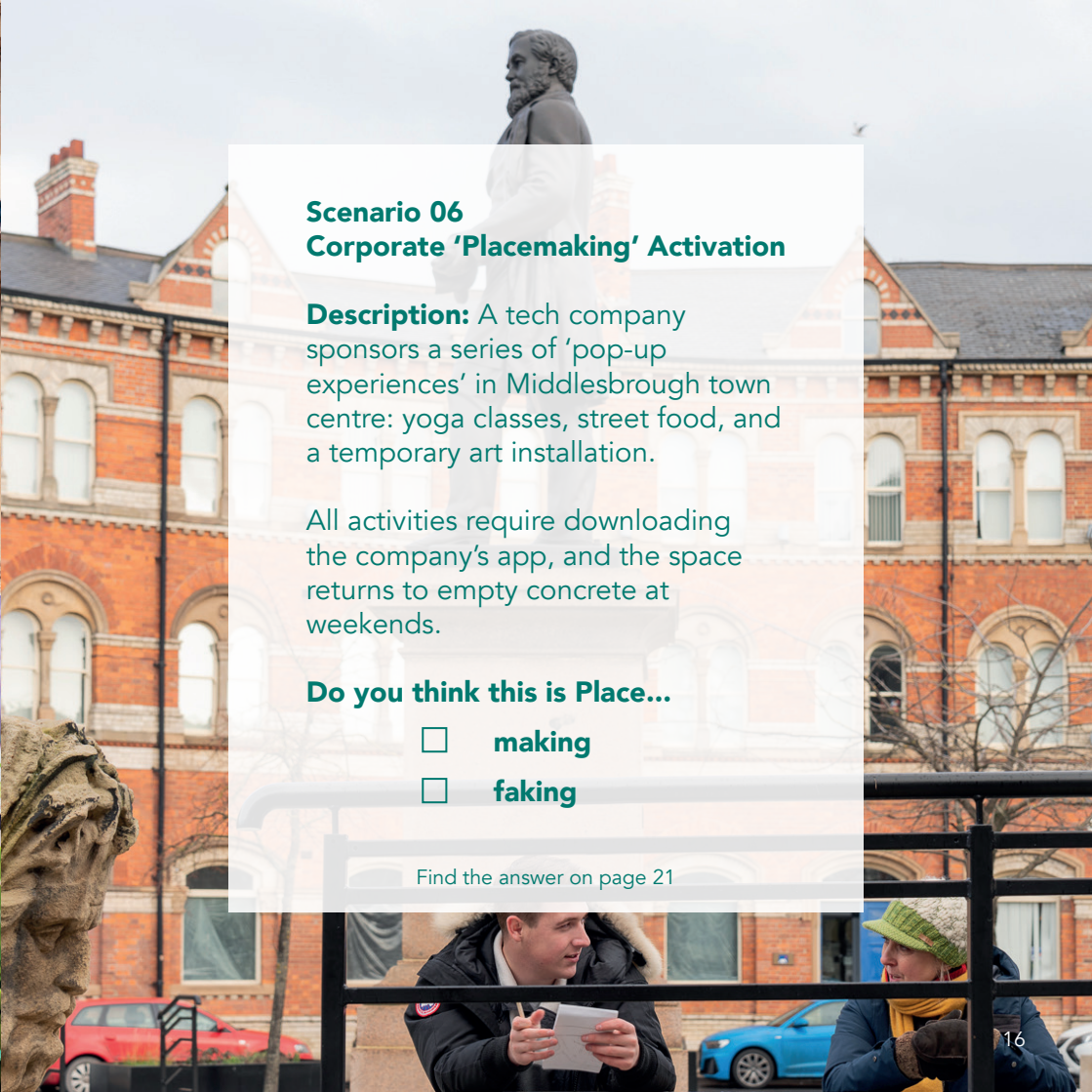
Description: The council converts an abandoned car park into a temporary park with seating, planters, and a small performance space—all designed after surveying local residents about what they wanted.

Local artists from Tees Valley painted murals reflecting the area's industrial heritage.

Do you think this is Place...

- ☐ making
- ☐ faking

Find the answer on page 21



Scenario 06 Corporate 'Placemaking' Activation

Description: A tech company sponsors a series of 'pop-up experiences' in Middlesbrough town centre: yoga classes, street food, and a temporary art installation.

All activities require downloading the company's app, and the space returns to empty concrete at weekends.

Do you think this is Place...

- ☐ making
- ☐ faking

Find the answer on page 21

Scenario 07

Painted Crossings for Tourism

Description: Without community input, a Tees Valley council paints colourful 'artistic' pedestrian crossings in a working-class neighbourhood. They use photos for a 'vibrant communities' tourism campaign whilst basic infrastructure requests remain unfunded.

Do you think this is Place...

- ☐ making
- ☐ faking

Find the answer on page 22

Scenario 08

Shipping Container 'Creative Hub'

Description: A developer places brightly painted shipping containers in a Hartlepool car park, calling it a 'creative hub' and 'pop-up cultural space'.

Rent is too expensive for local artists, so it's filled with chain coffee shops and craft beer bars.

After six months for planning permission, it's removed and luxury flats are built.

Do you think this is Place...

- ☐ making
- ☐ faking

Find the answer on page 22

ANSWERS

1. The Community Allotment Transformation

THIS IS PLACEMAKING

Explanation: This exemplifies placemaking at its best: a long collaborative process addressing real needs (food access, community connection), intergenerational knowledge sharing, and ongoing stewardship by residents themselves. The space genuinely belongs to the community.

Principle: True placemaking creates ownership and ongoing participation, not just a finished product.

2. Middlesbrough Mural for Social Media

THIS IS PLACEFAKING

Explanation: This is placefaking because it prioritises marketing over community benefit. The mural serves the developer's branding rather than local residents. There was no community engagement, no local artists involved, and it's designed primarily for social media rather than creating meaningful space.

Principle: Ask: Who benefits? If it's primarily for marketing or outside interests, it's likely placefaking.

3. Young People's Skate Park Co-Design

THIS IS PLACEMAKING

Explanation: This is excellent placemaking because it involved the actual users throughout the entire process. Rather than designing for an imagined user, the council engaged with the real community who would use the space. Youth ownership continues through maintenance involvement.

Principle: Design WITH people, not FOR them. The best experts on what a community needs are community members.

4. WE SHALL BE Installations

THIS IS PLACEMAKING

Explanation: This is exemplary creative placemaking: genuine community-led commissioning with extensive engagement, local artists at the core, public participation in the artworks themselves (donated phones), and work that responds to the motto 'Erimus' (We Shall Be) to explore community aspirations. The programme builds on years of creative placemaking work rather than being a one-off intervention.

Principle: True creative placemaking centres community voices, employs local artists, and creates work that belongs to and reflects the place and its people.

5. Temporary Pocket Park in Stockton

THIS IS *PLACEMAKING*

Explanation: This is genuine placemaking because it started with community input, addressed a real need (lack of green space), and incorporated local identity through regional artists and heritage. The temporary nature also allows for iteration based on how people actually use the space.

Principle: Start with community needs, not just a vision. Let local voices shape the design.

6. Corporate 'Placemaking' Activation

THIS IS *PLACEFAKING*

Explanation: Whilst this creates activity, it's fundamentally promotional rather than community-serving. The app requirement creates barriers, weekend emptiness shows it's about weekday workers (customers) not residents, and there's no lasting improvement or community ownership.

Principle: Activations that serve corporate agendas with the veneer of public benefit are placefaking.

7. Painted Crossings for Tourism

THIS IS *PLACEFAKING*

Explanation: This is placefaking because it prioritises optics over substance. Paint is cheap PR whilst real infrastructure needs go unmet. The community wasn't consulted, and the primary purpose is external promotion rather than resident benefit.

Principle: Cosmetic changes without addressing real needs - especially when used for PR - is placefaking.

8. Shipping Container 'Creative Hub'

THIS IS *PLACEFAKING*

Explanation: This is placefaking through 'meanwhile use'—temporary creative aesthetics to smooth the path for development that displaces community. Local creatives can't afford it, it's not genuinely cultural, and it's tactical: making development more palatable whilst gentrifying the area.

Principle: Beware 'creative' spaces that are actually softening tactics for gentrification and displacement.

Navigator North's WE SHALL BE is a groundbreaking community-led commissioning programme, 2024-26, designed to transform overlooked public spaces around Middlesbrough Railway Station as a key gateway into the town.

WE SHALL BE is the English translation of 'Erimus' - the town's motto.

The programme explores what this means to people of Middlesbrough and reflects themes of identity, pride and collective ambition.

This Placemaking guide and quiz by Dr Bobbie Bailey and Navigator North is supported through an IMPACT Award from Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).



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MIDDLESBROUGH
ART WEEK



Featuring photography by Rachel Deakin and Ayodeji Faturoti