

# Bishop Auckland Strategic Advisory Panel

15 April 2026



# Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Stronger Towns Board Overview
3. Regeneration Programmes Update
4. Property Reuse Fund
5. Artists Hub
6. Questions and Networking
7. Date of next mtg

# Welcome and Introductions

Shaun Hope  
Chair Bishop Auckland Stronger  
Towns Board



## 2. Stronger Towns Board Update

Shaun Hope



# Board Update

**Board met 2<sup>nd</sup> April**

**Updates received on projects**

**Following DCC decision on South Church potential reallocation of funds considered**

**Communications**

# Stronger Towns Project Updates

# Bishop Gateway

(Formerly known as ESAC)

## Project Description

Provision of new road, car parking and pedestrian footbridge to service new visitor destinations

## Progress Update

Significant technical work has led to submission of planning application in March 2026.

Pre Planning Public consultation - November 25

- 135 attended consultation Event
- 323 responses
- 91% Supportive/Very supportive
- 97% viewed plans to regenerate town as positive

Opportunity for public input through statutory planning consultation

Cost estimates have been higher than expected and value engineering/scoping which has led to delays.

## Stronger Town Contribution

£15,700,000



# Market Place Hotel

## Project Description

- 59-bedroom, full-service Hotel be built on the demolished site of the north side Market Place in Bishop Auckland

## Progress Update

- Planning approved September 2025- Design adapted to reflect advice from DCC Heritage officer
- Demolition complete
- Practical completion May 2027 with Hotel opening June 2027

## Stronger Town Contribution

- £3,100,000



# Town Centre Diversification

# Public Realm



## Project Description

Improvements to public realm space in Fore Bondgate, North Newgate Street and the Market Place.

## Progress Update

Switch to a temporary experimental arrangement to provide funding for PRF2 agreed by Stronger Towns Board

Reduced scheme to redirect funding to PRF 2 – Proposal approved by Stronger Towns Board.

Market Place lighting largely complete with York Stone paving delivery delayed until early 26.

Fore Bondgate: investigations ongoing with feeder supply with a view to replace rising bollard with ANPR

Instruction to pause until Strategic Place Plan consultation is concluded and then coordinate with regeneration colleagues on scope.

## Stronger Town Contribution

£1,116,000

# Heritage Walking & Cycling/Tindale

## Project Description

Linking residential, employment, education, retail and tourism locations across the town centre via accessible sustainable travel routes.

## Progress Update

Following initial detailed design, the original proposed route would be very challenging to deliver

An alternative route linking to wider tourism, retail, education nodes and S&DR route is being developed.

## Stronger Town Contribution

- **Heritage Walking and Cycling** £2,250,000
- **Tindale** £4,750,000



# Springboard to Employment

## Project Description

Refurbishment and renovation of McIntyre's Building into new training café and digital studios for Bishop Auckland College

## Progress Update

Project is **complete**, opening Dec 2024

Restaurant and Kitchen providing training to those seeking careers in the hospitality and tourism sector. There is also retail space for goods produced by small businesses.

Upstairs is a digital and training suite offering courses to help local people develop skills, as well as a job matching service.

Created 6 jobs

## Stronger Town Contribution

£1,300,000





# South Church Enterprise Park

## **Project Description**

Development of new incubator space for local businesses

## **Progress Update**

Project currently under review

DCC Capital funding withdrawn following capital review

Alternative funding and delivery options currently being explored e.g. JVA, Development Partner or offer development to the market

Should project not proceed Stronger Towns Board to consider options for reallocation of funds

## **Stronger Town Contribution**

£1,670,000

# 3. Regeneration Programmes Update

Andrew Walker



# Town Investment Overview

Fund	Projects	Funding	Source	Timescale
Stronger Town Fund	7	£33,200,000	Government +	2021 - 2028
Future High Street Fund	13	£19,856,853	Government +	2021 - 2028
Heritage Action Zone	44	£1,200,000	Historic England	2018 - 2023
Levelling Up	3	£30,860,000	Government & DCC	
Leisure Transformation	1	£20,000,000	DCC	
Restoring Your Railways	1	£72,000	Government and TAP	
11 Arches	1	£240,000,000	11 Arches and TAP	
The Auckland Project	6			

# Future High Street Fund



# Bus Station

## Project Description

- Demolition and development of a new fit for purpose Bus Station and car parking supply, enabling visitor led regeneration.

## Progress Update

- Some initial delays due the discovery of partially demolished houses directly beneath the footprint of the new bus station and live electricity cables running adjacent to footprint of new building (not identified on public utility drawings).
- Building complete
- Surfacing works delayed due to weather conditions. Works now complete
- Open May 2026

## Future High Street Fund Contribution

- £11,920,873













# 9-11 Newgate Street Food and Beverage Units (STACK)

## **Project Description**

Provision of new Food and Beverage uses by Development Partner - STACK

## **Progress Update**

Project Delayed

Structural Stability of building next door

Health and Safety priority

STACK fully committed to scheme - on site when issue is resolved. Anticipate 6-9 month construction period with completion to be determined

## **Future High Street Fund Contribution**

£3,304,824



# Public Realm

## **Project Description**

- North to Fore Bondgate - Hard landscaping and mural works. Planting and seating installed including power supply to new lighting columns.
- Kingsway Car Park - Construction work on new car park. Car park operational since December 25.
- Spanish Gallery - Public Realm improvements

## **Progress Update**

- North to Fore Bondgate - Project complete
- Kingsway Car Park - Project complete
- Spanish Gallery - Project complete

## **Future High Street Fund Contribution**

- North to Fore Bondgate - £651,869
- Kingsway Car Park - £2,242,545
- Spanish Gallery - £35,123

# Road Junction Capacity Improvement

- **Project Description**

- Works to improve the road infrastructure at three key junctions which are currently inadequate to accommodate the current and projected number of road users.

- **Progress Update**

- FHSF fully committed on design work.

- Work to reduce queuing and congestion along the A688 in Bishop Auckland. Princes Street is complete, which involved widening the road from the roundabout northwards towards Tenters Street to allow extra queueing capacity in the left-hand lane.

- South Church roundabout and Coundongate roundabout junctions works are still to be programmed for construction. Works will start Autumn 2026.

- **Future High Street Fund Contribution**

- £539,008

# 4. Property Reuse Fund

Kathryn Watson



# Property Reuse Fund 1

- **Project Description**

- Grant scheme for local businesses to bring vacant floorspace back into economic use.

- **Progress Update**

- Project supported 13 businesses with grants bringing vacant buildings and floorspace back into use

- **Future High Street Fund Contribution**

- £1,000,000

# Property Reuse Fund 2

## **Project Description**

Grant scheme for local businesses to bring vacant floorspace back into economic use.

## **Progress Update**

Following success of FHSF PRF 1. Agreement from Stronger Town Board to realign £1.2m from TCD Public Realm works into PRF 2

PRF 2 launched early Jan25

9 Grants Offer Letters issued

4 schemes complete , 5 schemes on site

9 FTEs created and 394sqm of vacant floorspace brought back into economic use

4 schemes progressing through the application process with a further 2 expressions of interest

These schemes are expected to progress to award upon confirmation of planning consent and following the tendering of works packages.

## **Stronger Town Contribution**

1,200,000

# 5. Artists Hub

Richard Hinch



# Artists Hub

## **Project Description**

Refurbishment of building to provide new space for creative businesses

## **Progress Update**

Artist Hub is now open offering exhibition space, equipped kilns, programme of events.

Grants for community artists available

Bishop Auckland College to provide Level 3 courses in Art, Photography and Ceramics

Level 3 Seamstress and Costume Design Programme

Local Artist and Groups already engaged including:

Jack Drum Arts

Ferryhill Brass Band

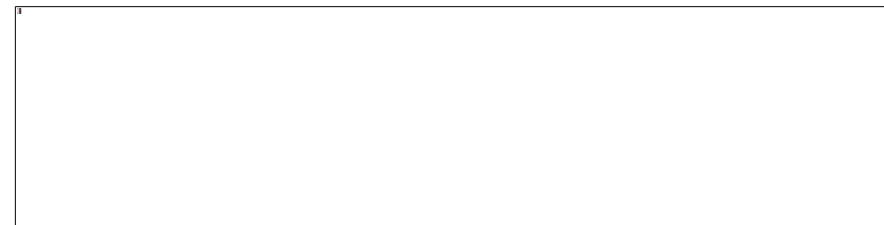
Sketching Club

Young Artists Club

## **Stronger Town Contribution**

£900,000

# AIR\* REPORT



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**MARCH 2026**

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# THE STARTING OF A SOMETHING

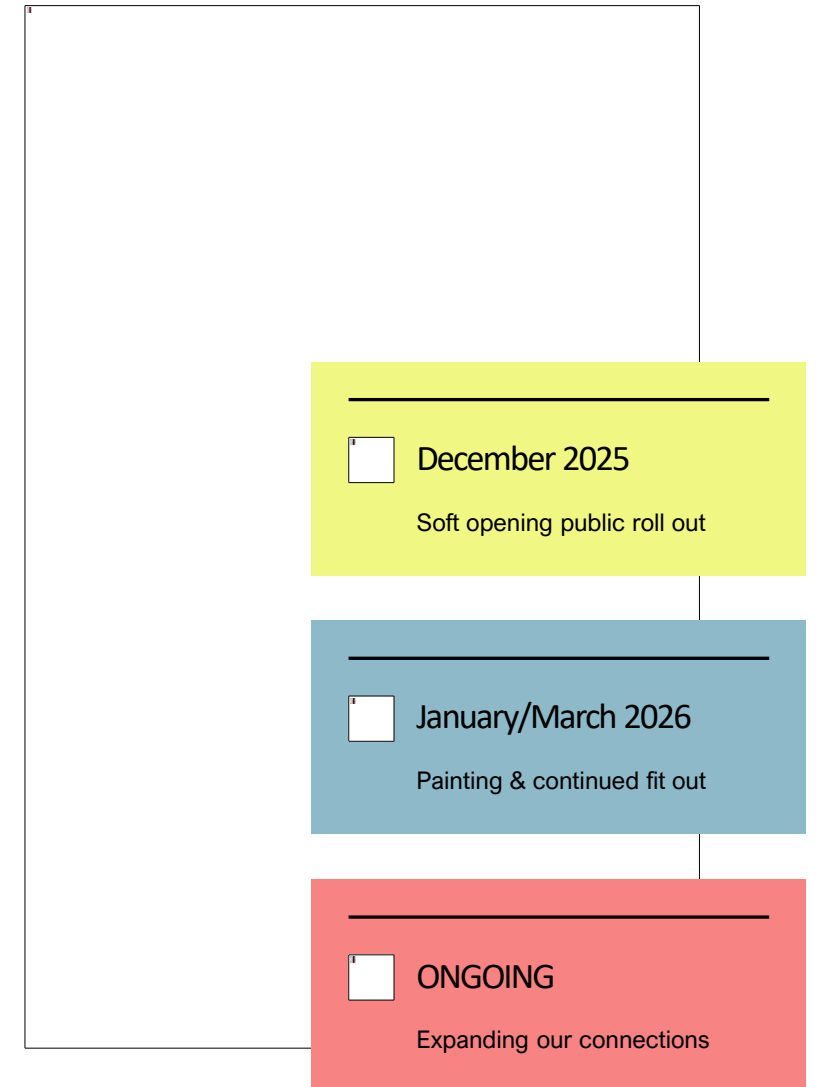
## & the Sub-committee

### THE ARTISTS' HUB

The Artists' Hub is an incredible, unique and exciting opportunity to bring together and test collaborative decision making and cultural programming which is responsive to both the artist development needs and the creative skills offer to the wider community of the people of Bishop Auckland.

The sub-committee is currently formed of a variety of partners all working towards a common goal and vision. The door is also open for any additional partners which may become interested over time. The sub-committee is currently: The Artists in Residence, Hearth, Bishop Auckland Town Council, Bishop Auckland Town Hall, The Auckland Project and Bishop Auckland College. It hosts regular meetings and communicates important information between these meetings via email and the AIR team have a work-stream WhatsApp group which has proven very useful for time sensitive matters or issues with the physical space - it allows nimble, generous team working.

An overview of upcoming exhibitions and decisions around vibe and physical layout have been explored and working practices continue to be tweaked and revised as new dynamic learning takes place.



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## YEAR ONE - WHAT CAN WE DO?

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### Vision

During the sub-committee meetings it became clear that a **shared vision** existed within the group. A theory of change and an elevator pitch are currently in development so that our messaging and **communications remain cohesive**. This will be taken to and agreed by The Auckland Project leadership team.

Words that the AIR team felt will guide their work, development and decision making going forward are; **more, build, love, together, fun, grow** and **cheer-leading**.

### Mission

- to **increase** footfall within the space
- to **reach** new audiences
- to **continue developing** opportunities for creative skills within the creative sector
- to continue to **develop a cohesive** messaging communication plan
- to continue to **listen** to the needs and interests of the communities of Bishop Auckland to shape the workshops, exhibitions and events.
- to develop a **robust, responsive** engagement strategy

## OUR HIGHLIGHTS

- Ignite festival - the people, the programme and the potential for growing the event into 2027 and beyond
- Showcasing the space and exhibitions on the local news and newspapers
- Taking part in the shaping of Bishop Auckland's Town of Culture 2028 bid.
- Rallying together when flooding and adversity cast a cloud over the daily running of the space
- Welcoming artists & creatives from Durham County Council Into The Light team to the space to collaborate and connect
- Developing and delivering new workshops, events, exhibitions and activity for 2026
- Welcoming Playful Anywhere to the space for their research
- Developing a diverse sub-committee with a democratic structure based on emerging trust and space for shared conversations promoting deep listening and relationship building
- Hearing about the plans the college has for skills development when they join the space

### Ignite

750 visitors

### New workshops

3+

### Artists & Organisations connected

50+

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## WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

# Artist Reflections

As we look back over the last four months there is so much to celebrate but to say it has been plain sailing would be to do the process a disservice. Artists by nature are quite solitary creatures of habit, comfortable in their own methods and ways of working. Learning to navigate a team dynamic and collaborative workspace understandably takes time. It is testament to the shared vision of a commitment to the regeneration of Bishop Auckland that has kept spirits up when challenges have appeared on the path. Jilly has been the lighthouse to AIR storms, reassuring and connecting the various personalities and needs.



100%

felt more connected to other AIR

100%

felt collaboration was growing

## SUCCESS STORIES



### AIR Exhibition

This showcase was an opportunity to introduce the current Artists in Residence and convey a little about their creative practice and previous work to the passing community audience within general day to day footfall of Bishop Auckland. It was a great way to bring the established audience of each artist to the space and increase word of mouth about what was emerging at No.43. It was also a great tool for encouraging conversations between the AIR team and developing trust and relationships.

### Ignite

Ignite was a collaboration between Daisy Arts, Hearth, The Auckland Project and Artisolutions. Not only was it a spectacular warming, playful invitation to a creative transition into spring, it was a learning-rich experience of the potential and pitfalls of partnership working. It highlighted areas to develop going forward and aspects to celebrate and champion together. This learning will strengthen the creative collaborative offer from the Artists' Hub going forward into the year's events and activities.

**100%**  
learnt new methodologies through 'testing and courage'

**100%**  
felt it was an event that could be grown in year 2 & beyond

**100%**  
felt it provided opportunities for reflection on their own creative practice

**100%**  
agreed lessons were learned around hosting exhibitions in the Hub

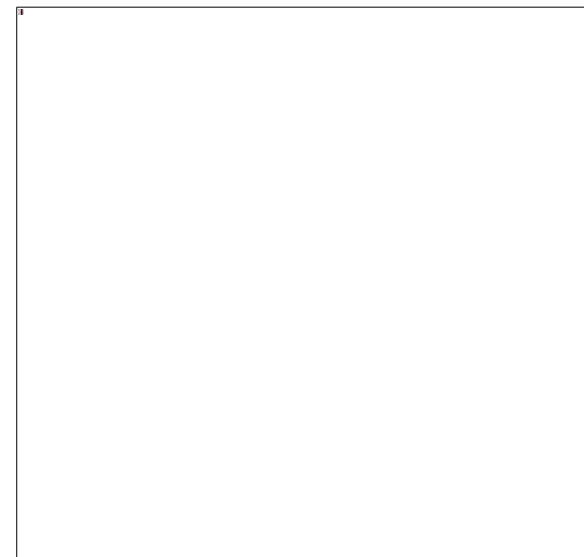
# ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



## Dawn Belshaw

### Artist & Director - Daisy Arts

Dawn found adjusting to the new space challenging at first - ensuring all equipment was accessible for her groups. The AIR team have supported her with practical solutions. Her groups have settled well into their new 'home' and Dawn is enjoying having time to explore and work on her own practice with other artists nearby for support.



## Jackie Stonehouse

### Artist & Workshop Tutor

Jackie shaped the physical space. Introducing splashes of colour and plants helping wrangle the awkward space into something which works for a variety of uses. Jackie has established two new workshops and has many plans in the pipeline for 'Bloom' festival and 100 Portraits show.

**Wins**

- meeting and chatting with a wide demographic of the public,
- working together with others a contrast to the 'isolated' feel of No.42 now other pods are vacant

**Challenges**

- the signage in the early days wasn't too clear of how to find the building,
- need a doorbell or similar for lone working in the space,
- working within the 'awkward' layout of the space.

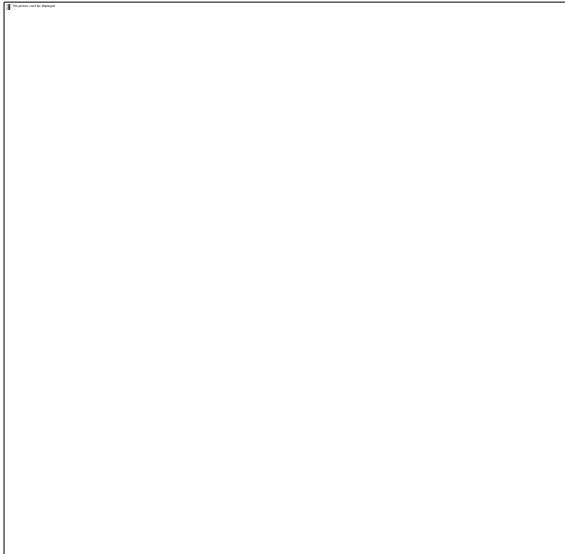
**Wins**

- having a central base,
- working as a collective and a place for communities and creatives to connect

**Challenges**

- navigating the emerging uncertainty of how the space can be used,
- delays in the college settling into the space

## ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



### Jane Crawford

#### Artist & Managing Director - Daisy Arts

Jane and Dawn partnered with Hearth to bring a wonderful festival 'Ignite' to the town. It was well attended and feedback was positive. She is enjoying being part of a partnership, being amongst others as we try things, being able to share, dissect and discuss is a great thing as we continue to grow and learn how to be.

### Richard Hartnell

#### Artist

Richard is creating and supporting his fellow AIR, he's making new connections within the creative community and has many exciting ideas in the pipeline within his own practice. He has found the support of fellow creatives massively useful and special, being able to bounce ideas off everyone involved in the common aims and both practical and mental support.



#### Wins

- a lovely warm space to create in together,
- an exhibition and getting to know the space

#### Challenges

- how to use the space to its full potential
- promoting the space and activities
- the exhibition and layout

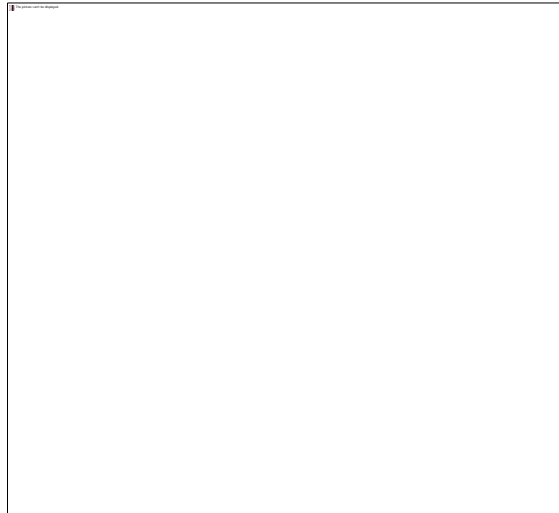
#### Wins

- getting the technology to work
- obtaining a space to proto-type ideas in Pod at No.42, resilience
- a stronger belief in own capabilities and skills.

#### Challenges

- sharing his passion that art = powerful
- insufficient knowledge of parametres, lack of clarity around budgets

# ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



## Alison Curry

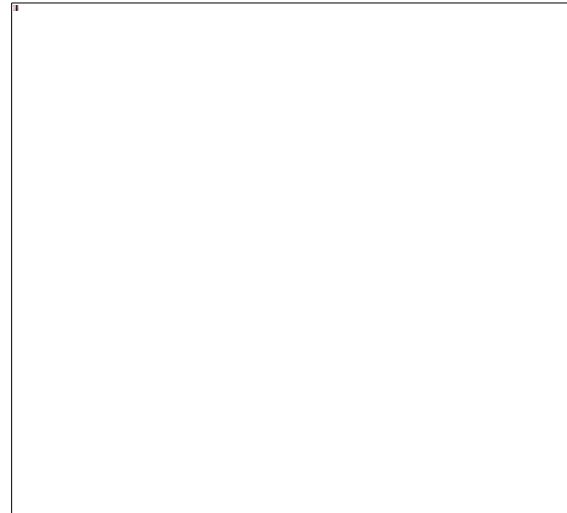
Artist, Creativity Agitator & Community Connector - dispel art

After a decade of freelancing in often quite solitary working environments, Alison has found being able to work from a space where there are other creatives who are a useful sounding board and support system has had a positive impact on her creative practice.

## Jilly Johnston

Artist & Hub Manager

Jilly has hit the ground running with managing the complex demands of a different, collaborative way of working. She has drawn upon her unique insights as an artist herself to lead, support and consolidate the needs of the team. The current working model has space for growth which with time will allow her opportunities to develop her own creative practice as part of her developing role.



### Wins

- establishing social media accounts for the Hub,
- having work exhibited at Ignite
- continuing to bring new people on board with the Hub journey

### Challenges

- the moving in and getting established as a purposeful space has taken longer than anticipated by forces beyond our control

### Wins

- succeeding in establishing the exhibition walls,
- seeing members of the community enjoying the groups,
- seeing the sub-committee develop and plan together

### Challenges

- Speed of the development and pace of initial months due to external excitement and enthusiasm of wider team

## SOCIAL IMPACT

The Artists' Hub has made impactful community connections with local individuals, organisations and groups.

- The Hub space welcomed a Guiding event as part of their Thinking Day which was hosted by Hearth.
- AIR Alison was the catalyst for opening conversations with Durham County Council and Hearth about the possibilities of bringing Brass back to Bishop in the shape of a festival or activity.
- Conversations are ongoing with the Trust team at Bishop General Hospital about how they could work with the Hub teams to extend their creative offer.
- Conversations with members of the community visiting both the exhibitions and making enquires about what regular activities are ongoing and in development are strengthening trust and building relationships.
- Conversations are ongoing within the wider cultural development of County Durham and skills programmes.

### Activities

12+

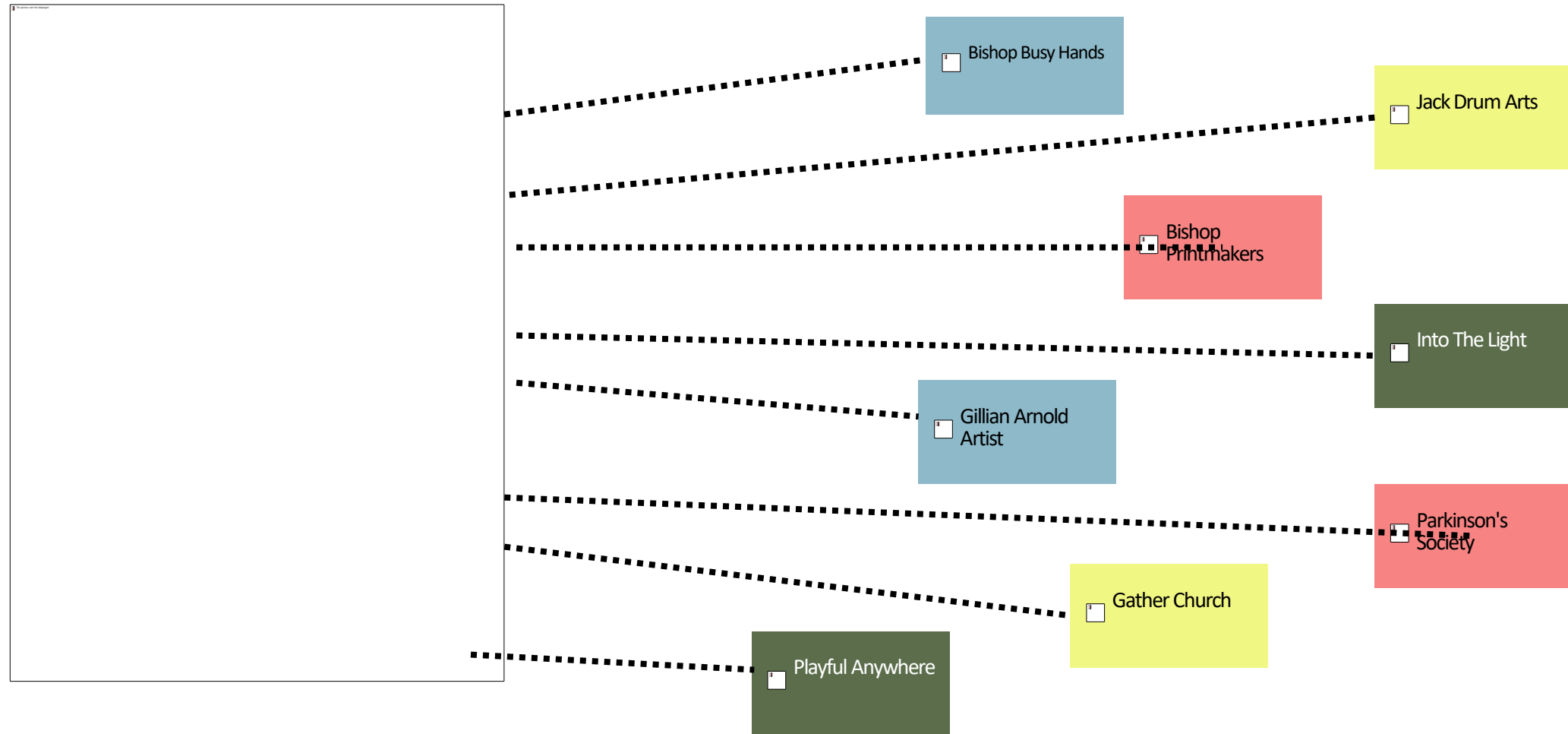
### Exhibitions

3

### Connections

400+

# CREATIVE ACTIVITY SUPPORTED & CONNECTED



## FOOTFALL & FIGURES

February 17th 2026 to March 17th 2026

### Artist Led Activity

The daily, weekly and monthly footfall is monitored by Jilly Johnston and is recorded to review patterns, growth and potential trends in visitor numbers to the space. The conversations with interested members of the local community and artists are helping shape new workshops and activities which resonate with their lives and will help grow audiences and word of mouth as we continue through the year and beyond into year two.

<input type="checkbox"/> New groups offered	2
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<input type="checkbox"/> Hub footfall	1350*
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<input type="checkbox"/> Developing workshops & activity	5
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\*higher than previous month due to Ignite festival

### Instagram

An Instagram account was created in November 2025. The first post was published in December. Other commitments and finalisation of programming content meant that consistent posting only began in February/March 2026. Both Jilly Johnston and Alison Curry have access to the account and monitor the page. A social media schedule is in production and work is forming on a growth strategy for going forward.

Graphic templates by Sarah Carlton from Design By Kinship is supporting us in developing a cohesive look.

<input type="checkbox"/> Followers	114
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<input type="checkbox"/> Posts	13
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<input type="checkbox"/> Reach in the last 30 days	4.1K
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### Facebook

A Facebook page was created in November 2025. The first post was published in December. Other commitments and finalisation of programming content meant that consistent posting only began in February/March 2026. Both Jilly Johnston and Alison Curry have access to the account and monitor the page. Facebook will play a role in audience development via Facebook groups. A social media schedule is in production and work is forming on a growth strategy for going forward.

<input type="checkbox"/> Followers	217
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<input type="checkbox"/> Posts	19
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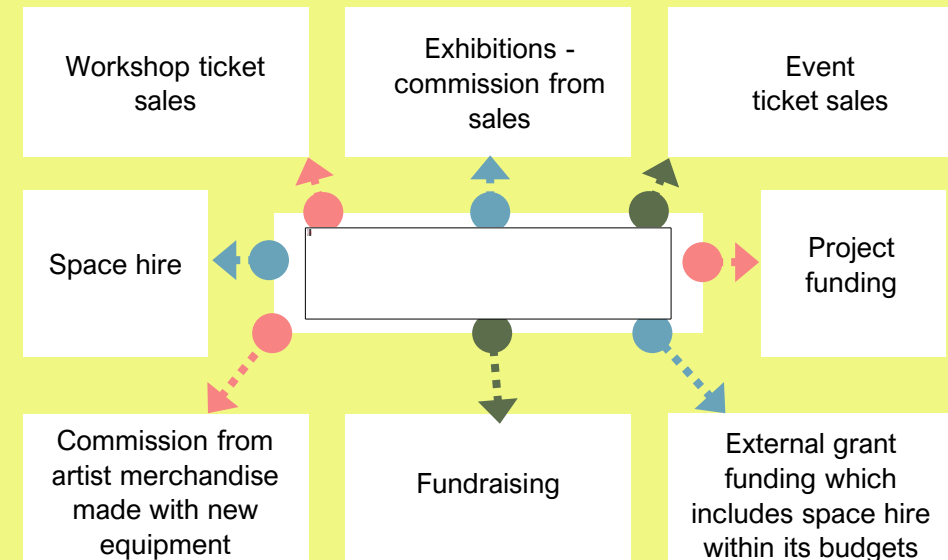
<input type="checkbox"/> Reach in the last 30 days	2.6K
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## TOWARDS SELF-SUFFICIENCY

The focus of the past four months has been to ensure the space is fitted out for safe use and that it is responsive to the needs of both the community and artists alike.

Throughout this process the sub-committee and AIR team have been looking at revenue streams and ways to optimise a balance between exhibitions, workshops, retail, events and fundraising.

Financial sustainability will be a strong focus for the next four months. Conversations will take place between the Hub team and the relevant Auckland Project teams to ensure robust systems and monitoring is in place as we test what is viable and sustainable to ensure high quality creative, responsive provision continues to be available for the communities of Bishop Auckland.

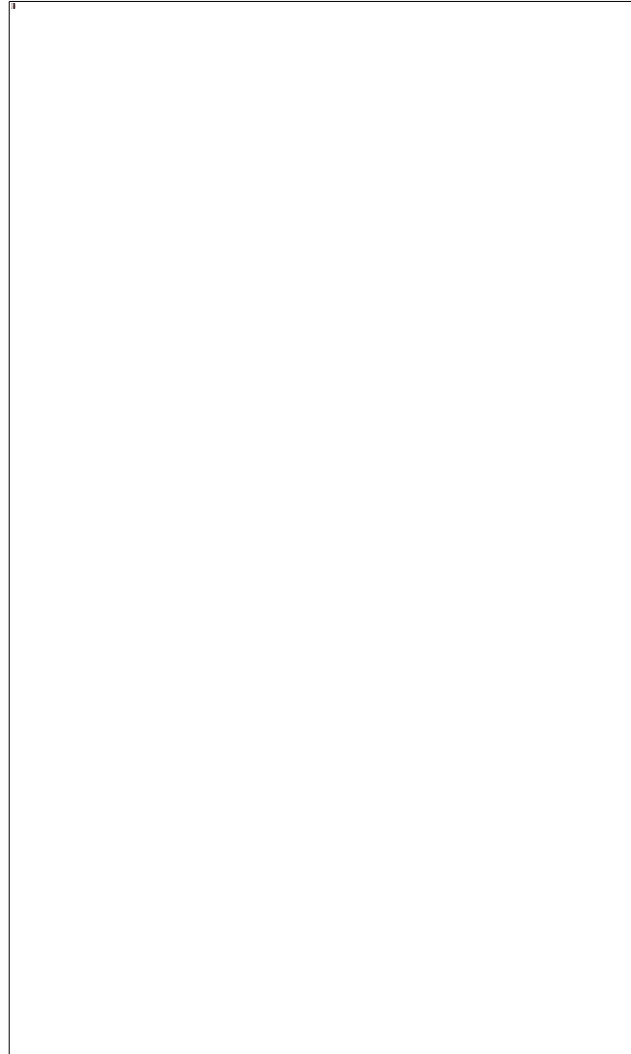


## FUTURE OUTLOOK MANY HANDS

The next four months will focus on **connection** and **skills development** with **growth** as the guiding north star - both personal and professional.

### IN DEVELOPMENT

- Creative Writing sessions - Alison Curry
- Poetry Evenings - Alison Curry
- Exploration of Spanish Gallery Collection - Sarah Calavara - supported by Alison Curry
- Bloom Festival - Jackie Stonehouse
- Amalgamate - Creative social - Alison Curry
- Reading & Creativity - NLT & local school - Alison Curry
- Brand /Marketing workshop - Richard Hartnell
- Digital corner - Richard Hartnell
- Championing Identity Exhibition - Dawn & Daisy Arts
- Food Fridays - 'Something at the Hub during this time - Hub AIR team



## Future Plan

- Continue workshop development
- Continue artist skills development
- Continue audience development
- Continue procedures development
- Continue relationship development
- Continue communications development

## Next steps

- create a more robust staffing schedule that allows for AIR to be supported when 'in flow' creating without the added admin of visitor engagement at certain times
- explore safeguarding protocols for lone working in the space and explore de-escalation training for AIR, staff & volunteers
- explore various training offers for AIR in skills relevant to supporting Jilly within the space

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## USEFUL INFORMATION

### Email ~ Jilly Johnston

JillyJohnston@theaucklandproject.org

### Email ~ Alison Curry

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dispel.develop@gmail.com

### Social Media

@theartistshub.bishop



### Data sources

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Ongoing monitoring & feedback from the four month review session held March 2026

March 18th 2026 to April 14th 2026

# FOOTFALL & FIGURES

## Artist Led Activity

Hearty Walks facilitated by Daisy Arts returns  
 3 days less footfall noted than the last recorded period - on track for similar/more to last 30 days  
 Creative Writing sessions in development  
 Creative drop ins for artists in development stage  
 Word Fest in viability scoping stages

☐ New groups offered	1
☐ Hub footfall	1208*
☐ Developing workshops & activity	3

\*includes opening event of 100 Portraits of Bishop Auckland

STEADY

## Instagram

Automated message to be added to accommodate 24/7 enquiries

Regular posting and responsive engagement to continued growth and developing audience

☐ Followers	156
☐ Posts	32
☐ Reach since 18th March	6.1K

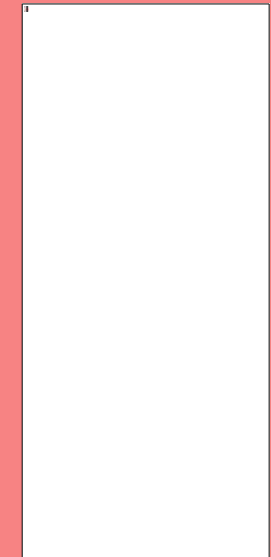
42

## Facebook

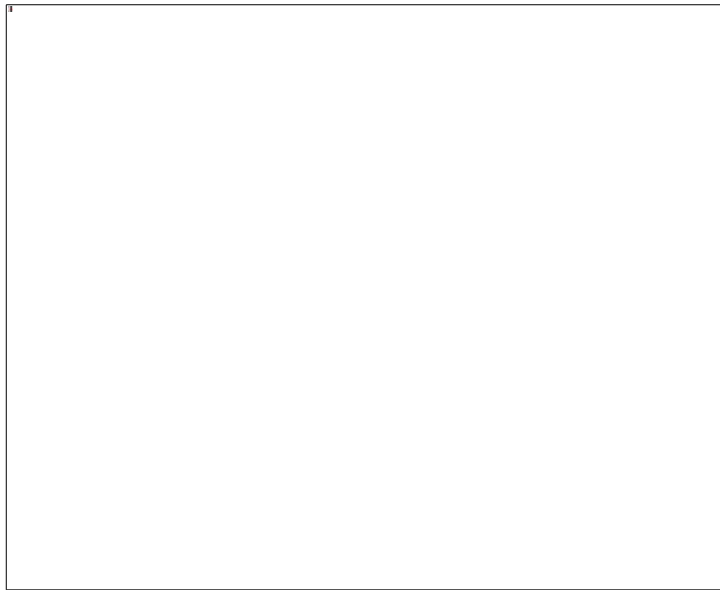
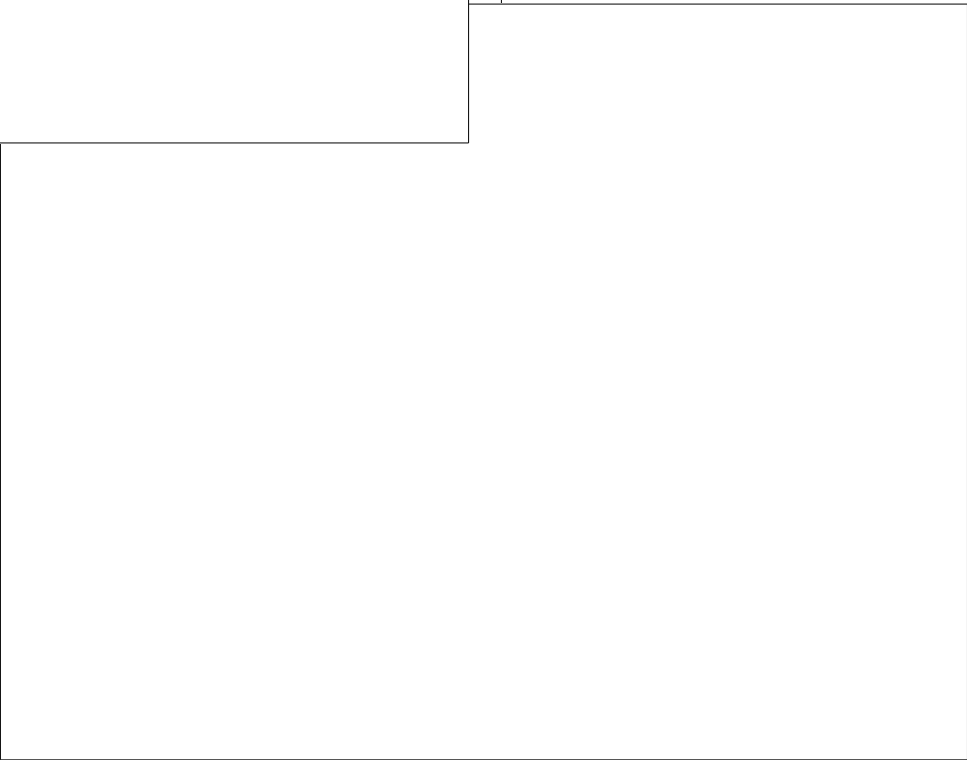
Continued exploration of best use of sharing via this platform

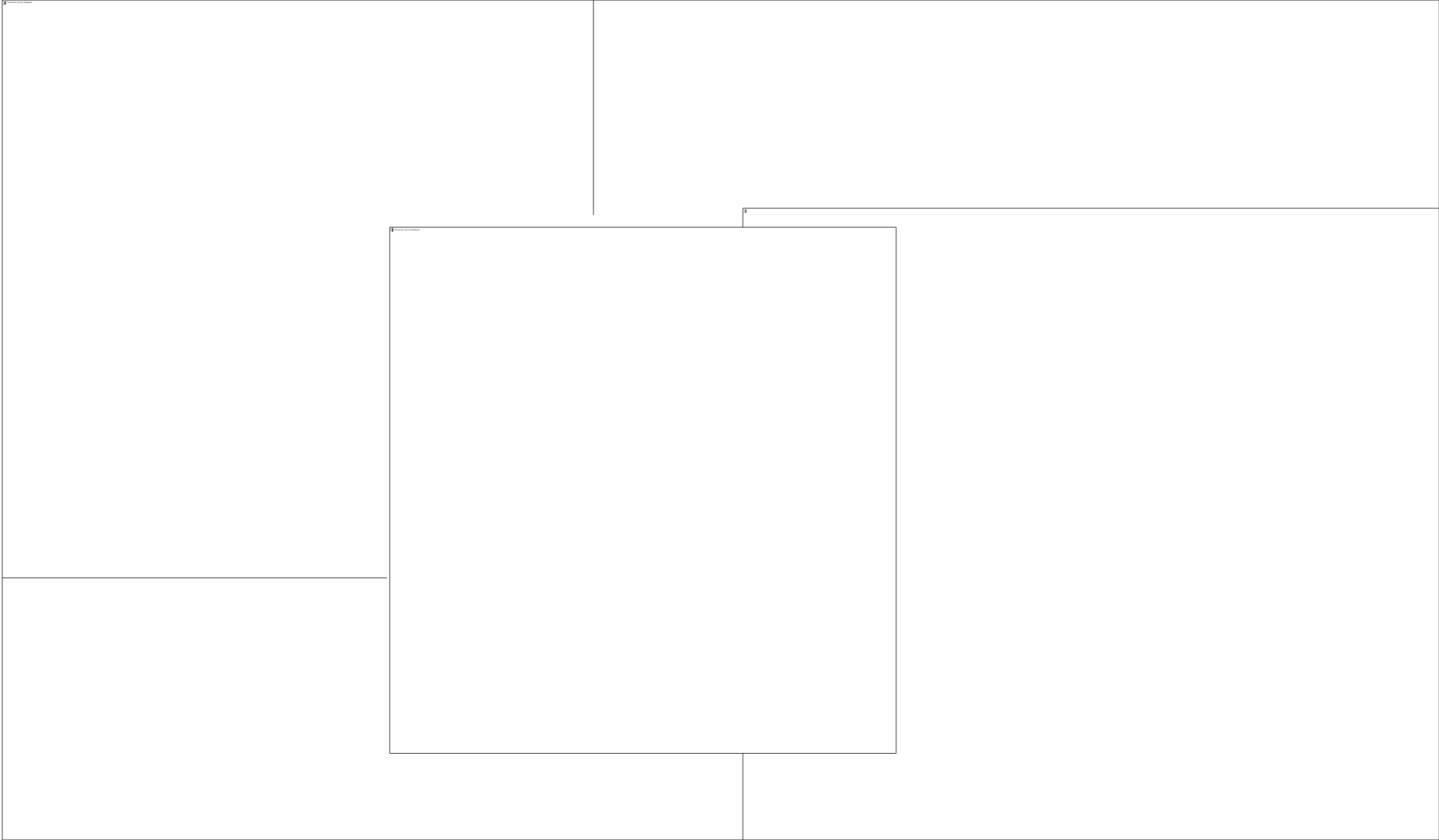
☐ Followers	271
☐ Posts	33
☐ Reach since 18th March	9.7K

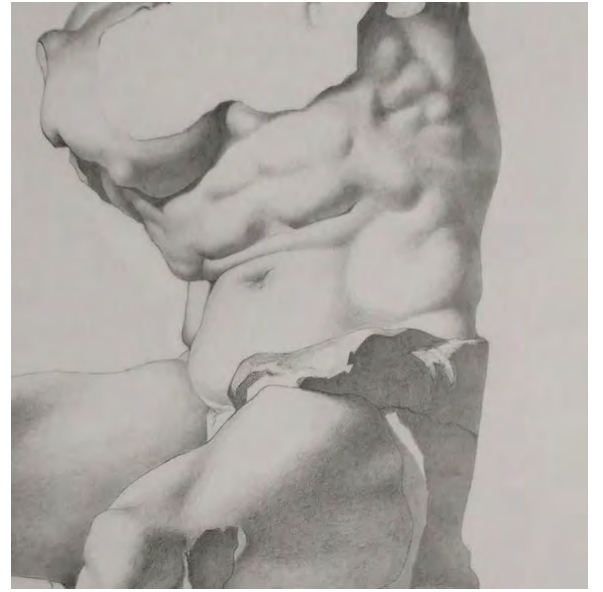
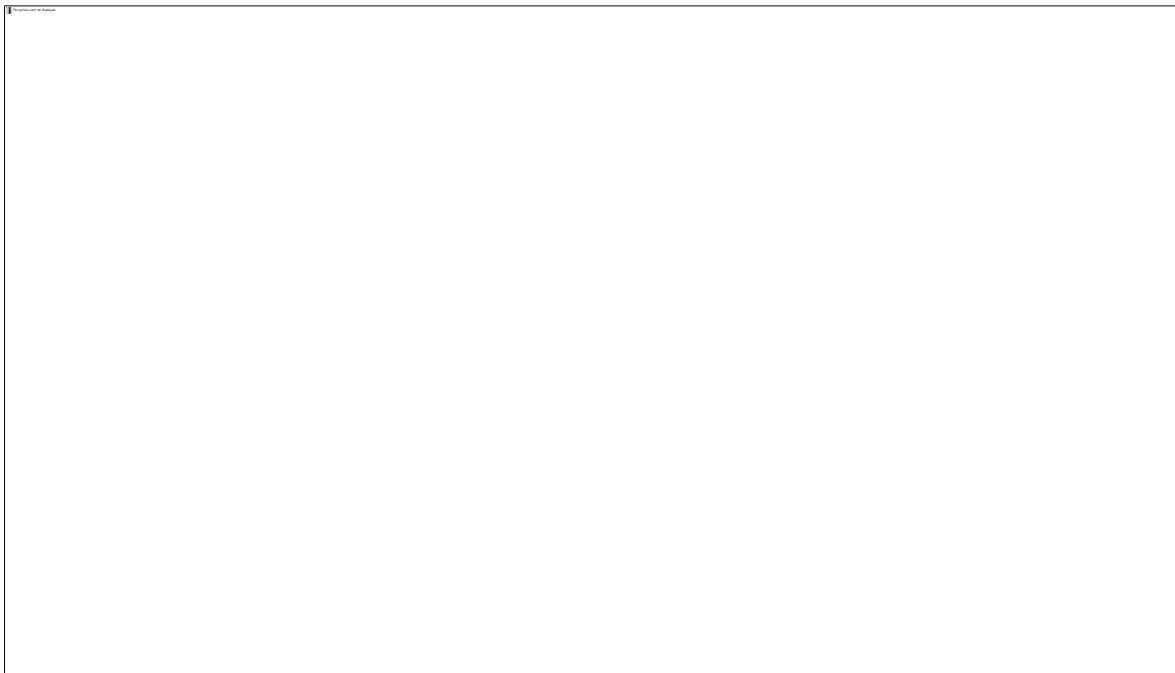
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GROWTH







# 6. Questions and Networking