

CREATIVE DARLINGTON

Investing in a Creative Community

An Arts Vision for Darlington
Darlington Arts Enquiry Group

Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to Creative Darlington. They include:

Darlington Arts Enquiry Group

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Paul Harman, Darlington for Culture / Member, Darlington Borough Council	Phil Dixon, Darlington Media Group
Tim Fisher, Principal, QE 6 th Form College	

Public and Stakeholder Engagement

The Enquiry Group's Voices and Views consultation programme collected information and opinions across the community to inform the development of this vision and of options for arts venues and governance.

- 1,349 local people completed questionnaires about their participation in the arts and their ideas and preferences for the future
- 109 people participated in focus group discussions about their arts participation and interests
- 23 local artists contributed through targeted discussion and questionnaires
- 10 organisations supported the consultation by staging discussions, publicising surveys or hosting web surveys; 3 arts organisations provided creative facilitation of discussion at consultation events
- Following the development of the vision and venues/governance options, 63 people attended focus group discussions in a second phase of engagement to provide their views on the vision and the venues and governance options.
- 5 local business leaders participated in discussion to advise the Enquiry Group on approaches to investing in the arts as sponsors and philanthropists

Darlington Borough Council Support Team

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Prepared by Darlington Arts Enquiry Group, July 2011

Darlington Arts Enquiry Group is an independent group of arts, business, third sector and Council representatives set up to explore and make recommendations on the future of the arts in Darlington.

‘Art is a place we go to make sense of our lives’

From the Pitman Painters by Lee Hall; performed at Darlington Civic Theatre, July 2011

Ten reasons why the arts matter in Darlington

- The arts bring people together in shared enjoyment and celebration
- They are capable of giving voice and identity to everyone in the community, including the vulnerable and the disadvantaged
- The arts provide directly jobs, income and wealth generation
- And they help to build a quality of life that attracts investment and jobs in the wider local economy
- A vibrant local arts scene encourages talented and enterprising local young people to stay on after education and contribute to the community
- The arts develop the thinking, imagination and understanding in young people’s education that spins off into other areas, like science and business...
- ...and they can stimulate the creativity, daring and enterprise that has helped to make Darlington a world leader in engineering and design technologies
- The arts contribute to social cohesion, mental health, happiness and well-being
- The arts make our everyday experiences special and help us to see and understand the world and ourselves in new ways
- The arts help us to reach our full potential as creative human beings

Creative Darlington

Darlington is a place that changed the world through creative endeavour. The ethos of enterprise, innovation and social philanthropy that created our historic legacy – what poet Bill Herbert captured as ‘Caring Sharing Daring’ in his arts strategy for West Park – is as vital to the future as the past, and the arts have a central role in carrying it forward. Art can galvanise every aspect of community life, and is of central importance in making the place that is Creative Darlington.

This vision is a framework for investing in the future of Darlington through the arts. We are challenged by the loss of public funding to be that creative community in unlocking new ways to support, experience and enjoy the arts. In doing so we will be investing in the future of our young people, in social inclusion and community cohesion, as well as in painting, theatre, dance, music, digital arts and all the other forms of expression and entertainment that contribute so much to Darlington’s quality of place and life.

A Vision for the Arts in Darlington

Looking forward to 2020 and beyond:

Darlington will be a place where art happens, where the arts matter and where the arts and creativity are central to Darlington's future identity and economic success

Four approaches to working with people through the arts, harnessed and working together will generate progress towards the vision:

- **INSPIRE** people to engage with and enjoy the arts, whether as participants in creative activity or as audience
- **GROW** and retain audiences, talent, enthusiasm, creativity and production in Darlington
- **CELEBRATE** together through high quality arts activities
- **ACHIEVE** excellence and specialist practice for which Darlington is recognised and respected, and which helps to attract further interest and investment in inspiring, growing and celebrating the arts.

These approaches are underpinned by the principles that the arts belong to and should be available to everyone, that they should bring people together and that they should champion inclusion and social cohesion. These are core principles of the Arts Council's 10-year strategy, *Achieving Great Art for Everyone*, and of *One Darlington : Perfectly Placed*, the overall plan for Darlington. The arts have a part to play in upholding these principles and contributing to these wider plans.

Making sure that the arts are part of the common wealth of the community, however, does not mean accepting the commonplace. Artistic excellence, by which we mean striving to be the best of which we are collectively capable, as well as being inviting and inclusive will inspire people and help to grow the community of arts practitioners and audience.

Excellence is also vital in attracting recognition, respect and investment from outside the borough, helping to drive the future development of the arts as well as wider regeneration.

Inclusion and excellence will be rooted in two distinct but interdependent aspects of arts development and programming:

- Encouraging a BROAD AND DIVERSE ARTS OFFER, responding inclusively to the wide-ranging interests and needs across the borough.
- Reinforcing the SPECIALIST PRACTICE in Children and Young People's Arts, with emphasis on the performing arts; this specialism will be a beacon, as it is now, attracting national recognition to the arts in Darlington.

These two dimensions are not new. They are about building on existing strengths. The current arts offer is itself a considerable asset, with especially notable provision in visual and public arts and in festivals. A particular feature is the wide range of third sector arts organisations that contribute richness and diversity to the arts scene in Darlington. This is further reinforced by the arts and cultural offerings in school, college, community and faith settings.

The specialist practice in children and young people's performing arts is well established and nationally recognised. Theatre Hullabaloo, based at Darlington Arts Centre, is funded by the Arts Council as a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) and is the sole funded specialist provider of theatre for children and young people in the region. The National Association of Youth Theatres (NAYT) is located alongside Theatre Hullabaloo at the Arts Centre. The Arts Centre's ArtsSpark young people's theatre programme is the NAYT Associate Venue for the North East. The Forum Music Centre, Darlington Arts Academy, Steam Shed (an outreach project of Chicken Shed, the London-based inclusive theatre project) and the performing arts department at Queen Elizabeth 6th Form College are prominent amongst a wide range of local organisations reinforcing the current arts provision for children and young people.

These two aspects – the broad, diverse arts offer and the children and young people's specialism – are totally interdependent and neither is more important than the other. The broad dimension is the seedbed of inclusion and of the rich diversity of arts provision that contributes so much to Darlington's quality of life. Specialist practice in children and young people's arts gives a cutting edge to the ambition of investing in the future through the arts. It can be the engine of the inspire-grow-celebrate-achieve development cycle. And it is a strong proposition for attracting investment that can spin-off into other areas of the arts from companies wanting to invest as stakeholders in Darlington's future through their corporate social responsibility programmes.

However, simply providing these two interlocking strands of arts programming will not achieve a fully rounded expression of the Creative Darlington vision. That requires

Darlington to be a creative place in which artists, arts producers and creative businesses can flourish. There are many artists and creative professionals living in Darlington but the current tendency is for them to find their creative communities of support and collaboration elsewhere.

Two linked development trajectories are required. Firstly we need a regeneration-led approach to the development of a stronger creative sector within the local economy, providing appropriate artists work spaces and creating fertile conditions for the start-up and development of creative businesses, attracting established artists and creative producers to live and work here, and encouraging talented young locals to stay and develop their careers. The second trajectory is to embed arts and culture at the heart of the borough's regeneration and development, positioning the creative sector so that it can both guide and benefit from investment programmes. The assessment of the economic, social and environmental sustainability of proposals for built development (a statutory requirement of the planning process) should consider how development can contribute to achieving the Creative Darlington vision. This positioning of arts and culture as a key consideration in the borough's future development will also expose the sector to wider investment opportunities, such as the corporate social responsibility programmes of businesses.

From Vision to Reality

This vision is not a prescriptive plan. Its purpose is to create fertile conditions for the arts to flourish from the ground up through diverse initiatives, organisations and projects. The action plan at the end of this document is focused on creating these conditions. The plan is currently high level and generic until decisions have been made on arts venues/buildings and governance options. The plan will be developed in detail in the light of the chosen options.

Diversity is well established, with organisations such as Darlington Arts Academy, the Forum, Darlington Media Group, Darlington Operatic Society, Darlington Orchestra, the Community Carnival, Stagecoach, Dance Wright Studio and the Rhythm and Blues and Folk Clubs just a few amongst the many that make up a vibrant local arts scene.

The Civic Theatre, Head of Steam Museum, Darlington Libraries, schools, colleges and community and faith groups will contribute to a greater or lesser extent to turning the vision into reality.

The vision, and the governance structures that are created to deliver the vision, must support and enable arts practitioners to do what they do, contributing through their independent purposes, programmes and activities to the overall development of a sustainable arts offer.

However, diverse and independent activity is unlikely to add up to progress towards the vision spontaneously. The four approaches – Inspiring, Growing, Celebrating, Achieving, each leading to the next in a self-reinforcing cycle of arts development - are intended as signposts to orientate individual pieces towards a collective endeavour whilst avoiding the imposed straitjacket of a top-down plan.

Turning the Inspire-Grow-Celebrate-Achieve concept into a practical framework for sustained development will require support, co-ordination and prioritisation across arts organisations. This must be light-touch, encouraging and enabling, and proposals for providing this strategic support are set out below.

Key Requirements and Principles

Some of the Enquiry Group's focus has been on the relatively short-term but pivotal challenge of developing viable options for the provision and running of the buildings/venues and governance or organisational arrangements needed to support the future arts offer, culminating in recommendations to Darlington Partnership on the preferred options.

The development of the vision, combined with the findings of the Voices and Views programme, has thrown up three key requirements that the buildings and governance options should fulfil if they are to fully support the delivery of the vision. These requirements do not predetermine the recommendations, but they are foundation stones that should be built into the options. They are:

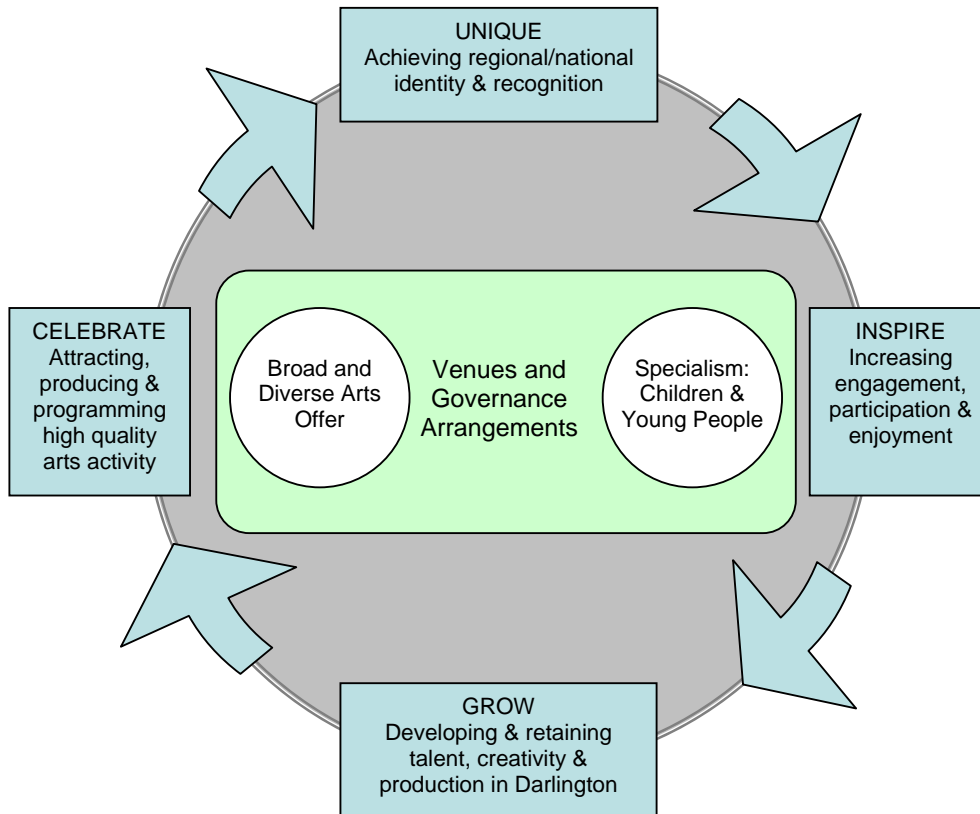
- **Arts hub** – whether a single building or closely co-located facilities, it is important buildings solutions bring different art forms and arts providers together in close proximity. This requirement is a key driver of the inspire-grow-celebrate-achieve cycle of arts development.
- **Children and young people's theatre** - the specialist practice in children and young people's arts, placing strong emphasis on the performing arts, requires a modern performance and rehearsal facility to support high quality production and reinforce Darlington's national profile.

- **Strategic function** – ensuring that arts programmes add-up to progress towards the vision requires guidance, co-ordination and support across the local arts scene. Arts governance arrangements should include this strategic function to deliver all or most of the activities outlined in the next section and translate the Inspire-Grow-Celebrate-Achieve arts cycle into effective action.

The Enquiry Group has established the following core principles that the arts governance organisation(s) to be created to act on this vision should uphold:

- Ensure that the arts are fair and inclusive, and that the duties on service providers set out in equalities legislation are fulfilled;
- Be generalist in its approach, encouraging and supporting all arts sectors rather than focusing on specific art forms or audiences;
- Ensure a commitment to the free expression of the experiences and voices of individuals and communities; the approach should
- Be responsive to Darlington and able to encourage work that is sensitive to local people and place; and
- Foster collaborative working and creative partnerships, including with corporate and philanthropic sponsors and donors.

The diagram below shows how the various components of the vision sit together:



The Strategic Function

The strategic function will drive the cycle of development illustrated above. The Enquiry Group has identified the need for a range of activities, summarised below, that will be needed to do this and to support a sustainable arts offer. The strategic function, which could be provided in a variety of ways, will have the challenging responsibility for ensuring these activities and their outputs and outcomes are delivered, whilst working in enabling and collaborative ways with arts practitioner organisations, respecting their diversity and independence, rather than imposing demands on them.

The strategic function will work with arts organisations and other partners around the following activities:

- **Vision & strategy development for the arts** - responsible in partnership with others in the sector for the 'ownership' and refreshing of the vision and for the delivery of its core values and objectives.

- **The Moving Spotlight** – collaborating and co-ordinating the regular spotlight on particular art forms or communities.
- **Fundraising** - leading on the development and delivery of a fundraising strategy for the arts in Darlington, embracing sponsorship, philanthropy and grant support.
- **External partnerships and collaboration** – improving the arts offer and creative outcomes for Darlington by encouraging collaboration with the Arts Council funded National Portfolio Organisations in the region, such as MIMA, Stockton International Riverside Festival, Gala Durham and Dance City; with the Bridge Delivery Organisation for Children and Young People in the region (Sage Gateshead); with Teesside University (a leader in digital media and arts) and Darlington College; and with potential sponsors and philanthropic supporters, including through the agency of County Durham Community Foundation.
- **Regeneration and creative industries** – supporting regeneration, education and training and business support agencies to maximise the potential of the arts to provide direct employment, attract inward investment, and encourage creative business start-ups; generally encourage the development of a creative community that supports artists’ production, attracts creative professionals to base themselves here and retains home grown young talent in Darlington.
- **Community arts engagement** – identifying ways in which arts provision can respond to and represent the voices, interests and needs of local communities.
- **Public engagement** – working with partners across the community to utilise the communicative potential of the arts to support effective community engagement and participation.
- **Information exchange** - provide a point of contact, advice and support, and receive and cascade information on arts related matters, including utilising the web to facilitate these activities.
- **Partnership working** - collaboration has always been a core value underpinning Arts development and delivery in Darlington, and is a priority for Arts Council England in its funding programmes; collaboration is essential to progress in the current climate of constraint and limited resources.

- **Capacity building in the Third Sector** - it is important that the needs and ambitions of the Third Sector arts organisations are articulated and listened to; the strategic function can provide and broker capacity building support.
- **Marketing** - identified through the consultation process as something that Third Sector organisations feel they would like support to develop, with emphasis on opportunities for joint marketing.
- **Audience Development** – the existing expertise in this area can be developed, and extended to others through mentoring, to support a lively, innovative arts offer. This includes research into ‘audience’ characteristics and behaviour, and developing new approaches that encourage people to only enjoy accessible and entertaining arts activities, but also experiment with the new. A new Friends scheme could build engagement and loyalty and support the fundraising strategy.
- **Advocacy** - ensuring that the value of the arts is recognised, both for their own sake and for their wider social and economic benefits, and that people are encouraged to act as formal or informal ambassadors for the arts.
- **Engaging people in the arts** - a key component of the strategic function that will benefit from a strategic approach embracing key public and third sector partners, and particularly important in developing the focus on Children’s and Young People’s arts.
- **Facilitation of an Arts Forum** - there are many examples nationally of forums or networks that are focused on collaboration in the arts or wider cultural activities; a forum can connect the arts into the Darlington Partnership led delivery framework for One Darlington : Perfectly Placed.
- **Visual arts programming and development** – developing better opportunities for local artists to exhibit work and supporting the development of an artists’ network and affordable artist workspaces.
- **Public Art strategic planning and delivery** - public art contributes to the built and natural environment in Darlington and there are opportunities to continue to work with a range of partners to develop this further.
- **Programming of events** - including professional and community productions across a range of arts and community venues.

- **Technical support** - developing an offer to independent arts organisations and other groups around technical expertise, equipment and resources, and venue booking and support.

This is a very wide ranging and substantial agenda. Priorities and ways of developing and delivering the strategic function are dependent on decisions yet to be taken as this vision is being prepared on future governance arrangements for the arts in Darlington.

For the time-being the Council's Arts Team will continue to deliver and progress some of this agenda on a transitional basis, particularly around ongoing programming and marketing. The Council has also made a commitment of £100,000 per annum to support the strategic development of the arts. This is likely to be used to provide staff to perform the strategic function and to create a fund to commission others to drive forward the development of various arts sectors.

Questions of employment and accountability of staff delivering the strategic function are dependent on future arts governance arrangements. A number of existing organisations, such as Darlington for Culture, Theatre Hullabaloo, Darlington Arts Academy, Humantics and other third sector and private sector arts providers are likely to be involved in those arrangements, and options could include the formation of a partnership steering group or a Darlington Arts Development Trust.

The details of the location and operation of the strategic function will be determined once the governance structures are established, with the Council continuing to work with the other the arts organisations and partners to provide a transitional service.

CREATIVE DARLINGTON: ACTION PLAN

The action plan as set out here is shaped around the strategic function and focused on two distinct areas: outline proposals for the longer-term development of arrangements to create the fertile conditions outlined on page 4 of the vision; and more detailed actions around continuing to provide and develop arts programmes and projects during the transition to new arrangements.

Transition is reflected in the 'Responsible/Participants' column, which anticipates the DBC Arts Team initially leading or participating in many of the actions, with transition in due course to the Strategic Function proposed in the vision.

Many of the longer-term actions are necessarily high level and generic at present. The detailed shape and timing of actions will be influenced by the selected options for buildings and governance arrangements. Once these are known, the plan can be developed in detail. For the time being, it indicates the scope and nature of the steps that are likely to be required to create the conditions needed for the vision to be delivered.

Ref.	Actions	Responsible/Participants	Timescale
STRAND 1: STRATEGIC FUNCTION			
1a.	Seek to ensure that the key requirements for the delivery of the vision are delivered through the implementation of the preferred buildings and governance options, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An arts hub • A modern facility for children and young people's theatre • A strategic function to guide and support progress towards the vision 	Darlington Partnership; Enquiry Group (or legacy body); Arts Governance Trust/Partnership; Darlington Borough Council (DBC)	
1b.	Determine the organisational setting, staffing and funding for the strategic function, agree scope and working arrangements, set up team and accommodation	Darlington Partnership; Enquiry Group (or legacy body); Arts Governance Trust/Partnership; Darlington Borough Council (DBC)	
1c.	Establish Arts Forum or Cultural Network, linking artists and arts providers into Darlington Partnership, and providing setting for discussing issues, facilitating collaborative working, setting priorities and plans to progress the arts vision, and 'moving the spotlight'	Darlington Partnership; DBC Arts / Strategic Function; Arts Governance Trust/Partnership; Artists / arts sector organisations	

Ref.	Actions	Responsible/Participants	Timescale
STRAND 2: DEVELOPING THE VISION			
2a.	As part of Strand 3, establish an approach to engagement with public, artists, arts practitioners and other stakeholders to support the review and development of the vision	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; <i>Artists / arts sector organisations; DBC – Communities Team support</i>	
2b.	Carry out annual review of progress and refresh vision	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; <i>Arts Forum</i>	
2c.	Prepare annual priorities for arts programming organised around the Inspire, Grow, Celebrate and Achieve components of the vision, and for the spotlight.	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; <i>Artists / arts sector organisations; Arts Forum</i>	
STRAND 3: ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS			
3a.	Organise events and training opportunities to build capacity in Young People's Theatre in Darlington and the region, including a one day regional training event for leaders.	DBC Arts Team / Strategic function; <i>Steam Shed, NAYT, Arts Council England (ACE)</i>	
3b.	Continue to support development of and build capacity in young people's theatre initiatives such as Steam Shed	DBC Arts Team / Strategic function; <i>Steam Shed, NAYT, ACE</i>	
3c.	Continue to support the arts offer for children and young people through initiatives such as discounted theatre tickets, summer activities, Arts Network and CPD for schools	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; <i>ACE</i>	
3d.	Deliver the 7-11s Arts Award Pilot Establish the Arts Award accredited work experience in arts venues programme	Theatre Hullabaloo; <i>DBC Arts / Strategic Function; ACE</i> DBC Arts / Strategic Function <i>Schools; ACE</i>	Oct 2011
3e.	Establish the Arts Network for Schools	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; <i>Schools</i>	Aug 2011
3f.	Continue to support the wider arts offer including carnival, street arts and provision for vulnerable groups through initiatives such as Open Arts Studio	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; <i>Darlington Community Carnival; West Indian Association; DMG; PCT</i>	

Ref.	Actions	Responsible/Participants	Timescale
3g.	Participate in a regional project to open up quality arts experiences to Looked After children and young people.	Tech Max; <i>Tyne and Wear Museums, DBC Arts / Strategic Function</i>	
3h.	Develop strategic relationships with ACE, NP and Bridge Organisations, Teesside University, Darlington and QE Colleges around good practice, resources and developing approaches to collaborative working	Strategic function; <i>Strategic partners; Support from DBC / LSP as needed</i>	
3i.	Linked to the development of the Arts Forum, establish arrangements and terms of reference for collaborating, supporting and capacity building with local arts sector organisations and groups	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; Arts sector organisations; Arts Forum	
3j.	Establish a point of contact for receiving and cascading information on arts practice, issues, advice and support, including development of a website	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; <i>IT Support (DMG, DBC?)</i>	
3k.	Establish an agreed approach to engagement with local people to develop arts audiences, building on existing skills and providing mentoring across the arts sector to benefit individual providers; the approach should both seek to expand audiences and to encourage people to experience new work	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; <i>Artists / arts sector organisations; Audience development expertise; DBC Communities Team support</i>	
STRAND 4: FUNDING			
4a.	Develop a finance and funding strategy, incorporating strategy on philanthropy and sponsorship of the arts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with the business community to develop opportunities for companies to invest in the arts in pursuit of their corporate social responsibility aims. 	DBC External Funding Team; <i>DBC Arts / Strategic Function; Arts sector organisations; Businesses and private sector representative bodies</i>	
4b.	Lead on discussions with Arts Council England on the renewal of strategic funding for arts in Darlington	DBC Arts / Strategic Function with DBC/LSP support; ACE	

Ref.	Actions	Responsible/Participants	Timescale
4c.	Develop an approach to attracting sponsors and donors to the arts as part of a wider strategy on 'Giving' provide the interface and brokerage for developing sponsor/donor relationships; establish working relationship with County Durham Community Foundation and other regional/national arts endowment bodies	DBC for wider strategy; DBC Arts / Strategic Function to interface on arts projects, with support from senior DBC/LSP or arts practitioners as appropriate	
STRAND 5: PROGRAMME AND MARKETING			
5a.	Support the development and growth of regional theatre projects such as 'Walking Backwards' and the 'If the Walls Could Dance' dance theatre piece to be produced by regional artists in Darlington.	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; New Writing North; Customs House; Caroline Pearce; ACE	
5b.	Deliver a schools dance festival and the Darlington Dance Festival	Darrien Wright; Darlington Dance Schools; Darlington Schools Partnership Manager; DBC Arts; ACE	
5c.	Support voluntary arts organisations to develop capacity to plan and deliver arts programmes.	<i>Darlington for Culture; Music Society; Photographic Society; R'n'B, Folk, New Orleans Jazz Clubs; Darlington Orchestra; Vane Women, etc;</i> DBC Arts / Strategic Function; ACE	
5d.	Develop a joint approach to marketing arts programmes across arts sector organisations and utilising all appropriate marketing channels	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; <i>Arts sector organisations; IT Support (DMG/DBC?)</i>	
5e.	Linked to Action 2c, work with arts providers to develop a programming protocol that responds to agreed priorities	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; <i>Artists / arts sector organisations</i>	
5f.	Lead and co-ordinate annual arts programming	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; <i>Artists / arts sector organisations</i>	
5g..	Develop opportunities for local visual artists to show their work in central venues; co-ordinate an annual visual arts programme	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; <i>DBC; Artists</i>	
5h.	Establish a technical support service, incorporating local venue	DBC Arts / Strategic Function	

	information, technical expertise, and loan of equipment and resources		
Ref.	Actions	Responsible/Participants	Timescale
STRAND 6: REGENERATION			
6a.	Public Art – implement schemes at Parkside development and at Denes entrances	DBC; <i>Arts UK; Taylor Wimpey; residents; Groundwork; HLF; Friends of the Denes; Caseys; Mayflower</i>	
6b.	Work with Turning Point North East to develop visual arts practice, development and partnerships in the north east, linking to the national Turning Point Network	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; Arts Council; Baltic; MIMA; Contemporary Arts Society; Arts Sector	
6c.	Develop a strategic approach to encouraging and growing creative businesses within wider regeneration strategy	DBC Regeneration Service	
6d.	Investigate opportunities for providing incubator accommodation for creative businesses and artists' workspaces, linked if appropriate to proposals for future arts venues	DBC Regeneration Service; <i>DBC Arts / Strategic Function; Artists</i>	
6e.	Identify and respond to the creative or business skills training needs of people working in or seeking to establish creative businesses	DBC Business Support; <i>University/College; Training Providers</i>	
6f.	Review and carry forward strategy on public art within wider regeneration and environmental programmes	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; <i>DBC Regeneration Service</i>	
6g.	Promote the value of the arts within wider regeneration programmes in their contribution to quality of life, attracting investment, retaining talented and enterprising people and as engagement channel	DBC Arts / Strategic Function; <i>Arts Forum; Darlington Partnership</i>	