

Darlington Town Centre

A Quality Town

Business Plan
October 2004 – March 2007



Foreword

Many things have happened since the Town Centre Business Plan was first published in 1998, but our aim remains the same: the creation of a high quality town centre that benefits all stakeholders and that enjoys a distinctive position within the regional economy.

In securing a viable commercial future for Darlington, it is imperative that enthusiasm, co-operation and a desire for excellence are shared characteristics of all involved. It is for this reason that an executive style Town Centre Board has been established – comprising of 11 members, who will help to keep up the momentum in Darlington by providing a strategic direction and act as ambassadors and overseers in all Town Centre developments.

It is the aim of the Town Centre Board to promote the balanced development of our town centre's role in commercial, cultural, shopping, tourism and leisure activities; to advance the town centre's prosperity; to ensure a clean, safe and welcoming environment. Everything we do will be of the highest standard. The initiative is not designed to duplicate the role of the local authority, but to act as a catalyst to encourage and help progress. Effective town centre management is a continuous process and not a quick fix.

This Plan has not been produced in isolation, but complements and supports other strategic documents relevant to the Town Centre, including the Community Strategy and the Town Centre Development Strategy. They both contain policies and objectives which reflect our own, and which underline the benefits of a **co-ordinated** approach to the Town centre, for the benefit of all who experience it.

We intend to help Darlington Town Centre reach its full potential in an increasingly competitive world, and to cultivate a wider sense of involvement and ownership of our town centre among the people who live, work and play here. More than ever, we now need active support from business and there are some ideas in this document for you to consider. It is not an exhaustive list and any ideas and suggestions will be welcome. Those that are feasible and attract financial sponsorship or support will be progressed.

This Business Plan builds on the lessons of the past, with a strong and clear vision for the future. A future which is confident, prosperous and confirms Darlington's position as a key shopping and leisure destination in Tees Valley. The key to success is partnership, and the Town Centre Board welcomes the positive contribution of local people, businesses and organisations. A thriving town centre, which encourages people to shop locally, is good for local communities, good for business, and good for the environment.

We hope that you will support this plan for town centre management in Darlington, and more importantly, get involved.

Darlington Town Centre Board

The Team

Town Centre Board Members:



Chair
Councillor John Williams
Leader Darlington Borough Council



Vice Chair
Rory Fleming
Manager Queen Street Shopping Centre



Richard Alty
Assistant Director - Development
and Regeneration
Darlington Borough Council



Andy Atkins
Cooks & Kitchens
Chair – Grange Road Traders Assoc



Chief Superintendent Michael Banks
Area Commander
Durham Constabulary



Councillor Sheila Brown
Darlington Borough Council



John Coxon
Leggs



Councillor David Lyonette
Cabinet Member for Regeneration
and Planning,
Darlington Borough Council
Albion Small



Steve Pashley
Manager of Binns



David Preston
Darlington Partnership - Community



Manager Cornmill Shopping Centre
Chair – Chamber of Trade

Town Centre Management Team:



Louise Payne
Town Centre Manager



Richard Baker
Town Centre Assistant

Town Centre Forum:

The Town Centre Forum, meets two or three times a year to consider and comment on the work of the Board and review progress on the Business Plan and annual Action Plan. It has wide involvement of town centre business and other organisations concerned with the town centre.

Build A Brighter Future: Vision 2010 (Bold)

Objective: “To promote sustainable development; the economic vitality and business opportunities within Darlington Town Centre, as well as to enhance existing business in the town.” (Bold)

The Town Centre Development Strategy adopted by the Council and One NorthEast in February 2001, sets out a strategy to guide step improvements for the physical and economic development of the town centre over the next 10 years. The focus is the centre’s physical resource – its land and premises, and natural and man made assets.

The aim is to invigorate and expand the retail function, which is at the core of the town centre’s economy and vitality, to enable Darlington to better compete with the rest of the region. The key is to provide units of a size and quality (no comma) which will interest national, multiple retailers and to broaden the scope of retailer representation, thereby encouraging more people to use the town centre and to stay longer when they are here.

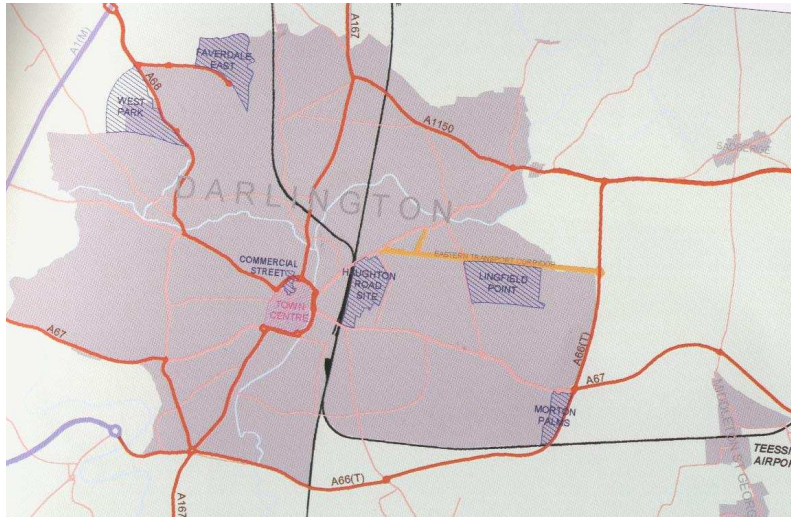
Key Aspirations

- Further improve the Indoor and Outdoor Markets
- Produce a retail mix portfolio for the Town Centre, to help broaden retailer representation

Future Aspirations

- Encourage more leisure attractions/developments, particularly using the ‘Feethams’ site
- Encourage a greater number of high quality restaurants
- Encourage the development of more hotel facilities in the town centre

Darlington is set to become the gateway to the region, building upon its locational advantages in terms of its excellent accessibility, combined with a quality of life second to none. This Gateway Initiative will see the development of new business parks; investment in new roads; new housing schemes; shopping centres and attractive environmental programmes for the town centre, in the next three to five years.



not straight

** Town Centre schemes to be highlighted with artists impressions eg

Pedestrian Heart – evolving from the Town Centre Development Strategy and Access Study (2001), the vision of the Pedestrian Heart project is that the Town Centre will be redesigned to mark out the heart of Darlington, by the creation of a series of high quality areas to:

- Reinforce the distinctiveness of Darlington
- Act as an icon for the renaissance as a shopping, living and working destination in the Region and indeed Britain
- Act as a hub for the economic health of the Town Centre and
- Improve access and quality for all

Commercial Street – a multi million pound shopping complex and multi storey car park, which will offer 25 retail units, of a size that national retailers require.

Crown Street car park development

Bondgate **Environmental** Improvement **Scheme**

Gateway Scheme

More Than You Might Imagine

Objective: “To promote Darlington Town Centre to the widest possible audience, for its unique qualities as a location for leisure, investment, shopping and culture, in its own right and as a major sub regional centre.” (bold)

Darlington Town Centre has nearly 400 shops set in a pleasant environment with good access by all modes and is compact which facilitates good pedestrian movement. The old and new stand side by side with many of the High Street names you would expect and an enviable number of quality independents.

The town centre also builds on its heritage as a market town with fresh local produce on sale in the Victorian covered market and a vibrant outdoor market on Saturdays and Mondays, Farmers’ Markets every third Friday of each month and occasional speciality markets.

But it has more than just shops ...the town centre boasts beautiful floral displays, friendly people, a great programme of entertainment for the whole family, pavement cafes, buzzing nightlife, wonderful Victorian architecture and a heritage to be proud of – Quaker traditions, market town and the Stockton & Darlington Railway, the world’s first public passenger carrying railway.

(Replace with text below?)

(Darlington Town Centre as a sub-regional shopping centre, has a catchment area population of around 500,000 people and has over 500 shops and businesses set in a pleasant shopping environment. The town centre is relatively compact which enables easy pedestrian movement. The old and the new stand side by side, with many of the High Street names you might expect; two excellent indoor shopping centres and an enviable number of quality independents. Town centre shopping also benefits from highly successful schemes such as Shopmobility, Crimenet and a comprehensive CCTV system.

The town centre also builds on its heritage as a market town with fresh local produce on sale in the Victorian covered market, a vibrant outdoor market on Saturdays and Mondays, and occasional speciality markets also taking place. In addition to the variety of shops on offer, the Town Centre also boasts many other features including:

- Attractive floral displays
- Street events and attractions
- Relaxing pavement cafes
- Restaurants serving food from around the world

- A buzzing nightlife, with numerous bars and clubs
- Indoor multi-sport facility – the Dolphin Centre
- Arts Centre and Civic Theatre
- Library and Art Gallery
- 13th Century St. Cuthbert’s Church
- Wonderful Victorian architecture and a heritage to be proud of

Key Aspirations

- Encourage wider participation in Sunday Trading
- Develop an improved Evening Economy and build on the existing safety measures, to ensure customers enjoy a safe and welcoming night out
- Expand the use of ‘Darlington’ branding (ensuring clarity of the Darlington offer) through marketing and promotion
- Effectively communicate transport access issues, for the benefit of town centre users
- Engage with businesses, to manage the ‘change’ during periods of transition

A Darlington Town Centre Healthcheck was recently undertaken by recognised external consultants, and many of the findings have been used when setting objectives and performance targets for this Business Plan. The Healthcheck acts a retail audit or ‘snapshot’ for the town centre and its main conclusion, based on a number of indicators, is that Darlington Town Centre is performing reasonably well, in comparative terms, as a sub-regional centre.

Current performance indicators:

- **103,200 sq m of retail floorspace**
- **Catchment population of 500,000 people**
- **Experian Retail Centre ranking of 80th out of 253 locations assessed**
- Vitality Score
- **Vacancy rates - 10.1%**
- **9 car parks with ‘Secured Status’**
- Footfall figures – based on an average weekly flow
With map and locations for footflow count

Socio-economic profile %

Professional and Managerial –	28.0
Intermediate and own account workers -	17.4
Lower supervisory and technical -	9.4
Semi-routine occupations -	15.1
Routine occupations -	11.7
Never worked and long-term unemployed	4.8
Not classified and students	13.5

- Zone A Rent - £915 per square metre
- A quarter of town centre businesses open regularly on Sundays (continued upward trend)

** glossy photographs

A Safe, Clean and Welcoming Environment

Objective: “To support and facilitate high quality improvements to all aspects of the physical environment of the town centre and to ensure that an attractive, signposted, clean, safe and well lit town centre is maintained.”

To attract more visitors we must continue to provide a safe, clean and welcoming town centre, a destination that is easy to get to and a pleasure to be in. Clean streets, good quality street furniture, well lit streets and buildings, well-tended flowers and trees all have a huge impact on the image we portray. We are also looking to the gateways of the town centre to ensure they all reflect a strong corporate identity and present a high visual standard.

The most effective way to revitalise a town centre is to ensure that it is a desirable and attractive location in its own right. Thus our main aim is to create a town centre filled with people who all feel happy here – and want to return again and again, to enjoy all that Darlington has to offer.

Key Aspirations

Create a pedestrianised area within the heart of the town centre, which will incorporate a:

- Review of Signage
- Review of Street Furniture
- Review of paving conditions and street maintenance
- Review of lighting

Develop an Environmental campaign, which will further improve how we tackle issues that face any town, for example:

- Litter and chewing gum
- Graffiti
- Flyposting
- Keeping empty retail units tidy

Introduce and encourage more events and speciality fairs and attractions throughout the Town Centre, with an increased and better usage of the Market Square

** photos of events, pavement cafes, 'ghost' impression of pedestrianisation

Darlington Town Centre's Performance

The Town Centre Board will establish and monitor a programme of performance measurement criteria, which will factually illustrate progress in the development of our town centre and provide a reliable information base for informed management decisions.

Almost everyone has an opinion about the town in which they work or live. But to be effective, town centre management must redress any imbalance of perception and hearsay with solid, objective data. The Board will measure the progress and performance of the town centre, both against itself and other standards, and promote the findings to all relevant sectors. These include existing and potential inward investors and sponsors, the commercial sector, decision makers and the media.

The facts and figures will come from existing statistical databases held by local authorities and other organisations, as well as new databases developed by the Darlington Town Centre Board. New surveys and research will be commissioned to extend and link existing information, and to support particular projects. A complete framework of statistics will be monitored closely to enable the Business Plan to reach its goals and provide an effective and efficient management steer for the town centre as a whole.

** photos

Inside back cover Folder element to be incorporated to hold the One Year Operational Plan.

‘The quality of life for this and future generations depends not just on how we live and work together, but also on the state of our towns and cities. An urban renaissance is vital.’
John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister, Foreword to the Urban White Paper

Gateway To The North

Darlington became an important market town and centre of commerce in mediaeval times. In the industrial revolution Darlington expanded rapidly, specialising in engineering and also as a railway centre – and it is still a strategic station and junction on the East Coast mainline. Darlington town centre is less than 2½ hours from central London.

Much of the modern highway network follows the routes of historic roads including Darlington's radial routes and the town is well located on the strategic highway network. The A1 (M) runs through the Borough linking Scotland and Newcastle with the rest of the UK and there are three junctions serving the town. The A66 links Darlington and Teesside with the M6, the North West and Western Scotland. The A68 starts in Darlington and forms a popular tourist route to the North Pennines, Northumberland, Scottish Borders and Edinburgh.

Durham Tees Valley International Airport is located in the Borough and has recently embarked on a development programme, creating links nationally and globally.

** map of UK showing
Darlington location



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