



SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY for DARLINGTON

Draft Themes and Priority Actions

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PROSPEROUS DARLINGTON

Our 2021 vision

Darlington is a community built on a rich tradition of technical and entrepreneurial innovation. This will be continued to make the borough:

- An outstanding small city location for business and enterprise
- A prosperous place offering a high quality of life to everyone
- A vibrant, exciting combination of the best of city life in a friendly market town setting

Context

Climate change is the critical issue of our age. Whatever we do locally to grow our economy and spread prosperity within the borough must be achieved in ways that minimise environmental harm.

In the first community strategy we said that we wanted to increase levels of employment, achieve higher wage levels, promote a growth in business start-ups and retain more local spending within the local economy.

Since 2002, partnership working through the Darlington Gateway Strategy has sought to bring about a step change in local prosperity and economic sustainability. Gateway has been remarkably successful in tackling what was the principal barrier to economic growth, the lack of sites and premises to meet the needs of potential employers.

Gateway has attracted £420 million of private sector investment into the borough to date, resulting directly in the creation of over 2000 new jobs. It is anticipated that this will have increased to around 4300 new jobs from over 1 million square feet of new employment accommodation by 2010. Gateway has also succeeded in creating a self-sustaining commercial property market in Darlington, with office rental levels now approaching £15 per square foot. Employment levels have increased, and the gap in unemployment rates between Darlington and the rest of Great Britain has been narrowed.

Business start-ups have increased, with a 5% rise in the number of VAT registered businesses. There is little evidence, however, of increased spending in the local economy through public procurement, and this will be a key focus for the future.

The improvement of the town centre has been tackled as an important strand of Gateway, with the transformation of the Pedestrian Heart now completed and the £100 million Oval (Commercial Street) shopping and leisure development ready to commence.

The Gateway approach is being carried forward, with continuing provision of the land and premises required for growth, including development of Central Park, Morton Palms and Faverdale, reinforced by a new focus on getting the right skills into the local workforce and supporting the growth of high value business sectors.

Our One Darlington focus highlights the remaining gap of 0.7 percentage points in unemployment rates between Darlington and the Great Britain average, whilst pay levels

remain low. Average earnings in Darlington are 7.1% lower than the Tees Valley average and 17.7% lower than the average for Great Britain (2006).

Darlington is ranked as the 90th most deprived area in the country, with 45% of the population living in 10 wards that are amongst the 25% most deprived wards in the country, and 7 wards amongst the 10% most deprived (2004 Indices of Deprivation).

Housing choice is an important condition for economic growth, and the rapid expansion of housing provision is a pressing national priority. There is a need locally to consider availability of both affordable housing and a range of choice at the top end of the housing market. Darlington has applied to the government as part of a Tees Valley initiative to be a Northern Housing Growth Point.

Effective transport is vital to a thriving economy. The need to make transport sustainable in environmental terms is targeted under the 'Sustainable Darlington' theme, but we must also recognise and address the high cost to the economy of congestion and poor accessibility.

The voluntary sector and the faith communities play an important role in the local economy through social businesses. It is important that this role is recognised and facilitated within our wider programmes for economic growth.

Enquiry Group Results

The Economy Enquiry Group's recommendations complement and reinforce the Darlington Gateway approach. They recognise that the focus on Darlington's quality of life and accessibility advantages, and on continuing to develop employment land and premises, should be maintained.

The approach should also be broadened to address skills availability - the principal barrier to growth over the next few years - as well as focusing support on high value growth areas of the economy and spreading the benefits of growth to all Darlington's residents.

Underpinning all of these strands, the Enquiry Group recognised the need to champion and promote Darlington's distinctiveness, and raise the borough's national and international profile, to support the growth of Darlington companies, as well as attracting the attention of potential inward investors.

Community Engagement Results

Provision of support and incentives for local businesses was more strongly supported by the Citizens' Panel and the general public than by partners. Provision of financial incentives is in the hands of Business Link at the regional level. Whilst we will continue to work in partnership with Business Link the local focus will be on providing support primarily through skills development.

The Panel and the public also emphasised the further development of the shopping centre, whilst partners and Council Members placed more emphasis on promoting Darlington's distinctive identity and attracting high-paid jobs. Partners and the Panel give strong support to the regeneration of the Town Centre Fringe.

The priorities receiving most support from citizens are:

- Provide support and incentives for local businesses and traders
- Promote Darlington and advertise the town's successes and distinctiveness outside the borough to attract high value companies
- Stimulate growth by developing the fringe of the town centre
- Attract high-paid jobs into the borough
- Further develop the shopping centre and market place (shopping and leisure facilities)

Priority Outcomes

Taking all of the available views and information into account, our priorities are:

- 1. Quality of Life** – enhancing quality of life in Darlington as one of the borough's key assets for economic growth. We will do this by:
 - Focusing on creating a vibrant new mixed-use quarter between the town centre, the railway station and Central Park.
 - Encouraging more high quality restaurants, leisure and cultural facilities.
 - Seeking to attract symbolic companies to Darlington to reflect our aspirations for the area.
 - Enhancing transport choice and accessibility and reducing congestion
- 2. Employment Opportunities** – we will continue to improve the range of high quality premises available for incoming and expanding employers, whilst ensuring that developments are sustainable in their locations, accessibility and building design. The Local Development Framework will determine the location and design of future business and employment developments. This priority will contribute to our One Darlington focus on increasing employment opportunities and attracting higher paid jobs and, in combination with priorities 4 and 5, enhances employment and earnings prospects for people living in deprived parts of the borough. Key projects will include:
 - Developments that maintain and expand the employment premises and land portfolio
 - Enhancing the supply and quality of speculative office accommodation in accessible locations.
 - Further developing Faverdale as a location for logistics operations.
 - Providing start-up and grow-on space for young businesses.
- 3. Accessible Darlington** – addressing the second key asset in the Gateway approach, Darlington's accessibility by rail, air and road, and ease of access within the borough. We will do this by:

- Ensuring Darlington’s rail connectivity is enhanced in national policy and decisions.
 - Promoting the Tees Valley Metro to link the town centre and employment sites with the rest of the City Region.
 - Promoting conditions that support improved air links from Durham Tees Valley.
 - Ensuring that the A66 does not act as a constraint on development and economic growth.
 - Improving the capacity of transport networks to enable economic growth to take place in ways that are sustainable in the long term.
- 4. Going for Growth** – getting the right skills available in Darlington to support the growth of high value companies; and focusing on growing high value sectors – particularly business, financial and professional services; engineering design and construction; and knowledge intensive businesses. This priority, combined with priorities 2 and 5, will contribute to the One Darlington focus by improving skills training and employment prospects for residents, and in particular for young people coming out of full-time education. Key projects include:
- Engagement with key business sectors to understand current skills and business needs.
 - Working with education providers to link curriculum and life skills to business needs.
 - Attracting and retaining talent through targeted engagement with students and parents emphasizing Darlington’s attractions and economic prospects.
 - Inspiring science education through taking engineering into schools, and providing bursaries and graduate jobs in local engineering companies.
 - Growing our own talent through flexible training packages.
 - Supporting growth in high value sectors through employer engagement and linking companies to opportunity.
 - Maximising recruitment and training opportunities for Darlington residents, and in particular those disadvantaged in the local labour market
 - Linking high value companies to universities, Knowledge House and innovation centres.
 - Using public sector procurement to seek the establishment of symbolic companies in Darlington.
 - Working with Tees Valley partners to develop housing choice in step with economic growth, potentially as a Northern Housing Growth Point, with emphasis in Darlington on affordable housing and on the choice of executive houses within the local market
- 5. Inclusive Prosperity** – reflecting our One Darlington focus and reinforcing our proposals to increase employment opportunities, generate higher paid jobs and enhance people’s skills in relation to the job market, by tackling the disparities in

employment prospects and economic opportunity across Darlington, and supporting local procurement. Key approaches will be:

- Promoting work-based learning and modern apprenticeships.
- Linking unemployed residents in target wards with training and recruitment opportunities.
- Improving accessibility to workplaces
- Supporting local supply chain initiatives through public procurement.
- Recognising and supporting the role of social businesses run by the voluntary sector and faith communities

6. Distinctive Darlington – creating a clear and consistent identity for Darlington’s future, reflecting its distinctive history, as a platform for raising the borough’s national and international profile. We will:

- Create a unique and distinctive identity that all partners can sign-up to.
- Promote Darlington and our achievements through the identity, whilst managing the consistent use of the brand to maximise its effectiveness.
- Enrol symbolic local companies to promote the benefits of Darlington.
- Develop a ‘fringe’ programme of events as an integral part of the Town Centre Fringe regeneration project.
- Provide Darlington promotional material to be included in all companies’ recruitment.

Vision for Darlington

Our approach to building prosperity in Darlington through the above priorities and actions is central to the delivery of the vision. The successful Gateway Strategy and effective local, city region and regional partnerships drive this approach. It will contribute to bringing about the vision by

- Attracting and generating the business investment in Darlington that will bring increased employment and higher wage levels, by continuing to develop the infrastructure of accessible sites and modern premises combined with skills development and business support targeted on high value growth sectors
- Making Darlington a place where people want to live and work by expanding on the existing excellent leisure and cultural facilities to create a vibrant urban lifestyle
- Planning for economic growth in ways that retain the market town scale and feel of Darlington, a friendly, easily assimilated, attractive and accessible place

One Darlington – Narrowing the Gap

Under the theme of Prosperous Darlington our main One Darlington focus will be on improving the life chances of people living in deprived areas who are unemployed and on low incomes, young people, and others – including older people – who can benefit from our proposals for enhancing skills, employment opportunities and pay levels. Traditionally excluded groups, including members of the gypsy and traveller community, will also benefit from these opportunities. Faith community and voluntary sector and social businesses will also contribute to the development of community cohesion.

More generally, a successful and prosperous economy will underpin improvements for priority groups and places under the other themes of the strategy. Our work on improving transport choice and accessibility will contribute to expanding access to employment for people on low incomes.

ASPIRING DARLINGTON

Our 2021 vision

Aspiration fuels our vision for Darlington. Our ambitions as a community are nourished by the aspirations of all our children, young people and adults. Darlington will be:

- A university town offering outstanding opportunities for learning at all educational levels
- A place that nurtures people's aspirations and enables them to achieve their ambitions for learning and personal development
- A place where people can maximise their potential in their working lives and in their contribution to their community

Context

The 2007 review of the Children and Young People's Plan for Darlington provides an up-to-date and realistic picture of progress that our partnerships are achieving in improving educational prospects for our young people.

Academic performance varies across the Key Stages. At Key Stage 2, performance is well above the national average, with particularly strong results in mathematics. The percentage of pupils achieving 5 A*-C grades (Key Stage 4) is slightly better than the national average, whilst Key Stage 5 performance is excellent, with the borough being ranked as 11th best nationally.

The Eastbourne Church of England Academy has now been established to replace Eastbourne School, which was the poorest performing school in the borough. Pupils achieving 5A*-C grades fell to 19% in 2006, the lowest nationally, but recovered through targeted action to 45% in 2007, in advance of the formation of the Academy.

Absenteeism and exclusions are a particular concern in Darlington. Until recently performance was declining, but there is now evidence that a number of strategies, including the development of vocational options at Key Stage 4, are producing positive effects, with both absence and exclusion rates showing a downward trend – there has been a reduction of 600 attendance days lost to fixed-term exclusions between September and November 2007 compared to the same period in 2006.

There is a clear understanding in Darlington, reinforced by head teachers' evidence to the Local Strategic Partnership, that some of the barriers to further progress in improving academic achievement, requires concerted joint efforts on a number of fronts and not only in schools. This understanding is reflected under other themes in this community strategy, notably in terms of skills training and health, in order to promote a holistic approach to improving the life chances of all our children and young people and the attainment gap. Targeted interventions will be strengthened in community settings using the network of children's centres, school clusters/ extended schools and family learning centres.

Enquiry Group results

The enquiry group looking at this theme identified the importance of the following:

- Ensuring a smooth transition for every child from primary to secondary education, and across all settings and phases.
- Effective communication between schools, parents and their communities in support of achieving improved attendance and attainment.
- Addressing the disparities in performance between schools by supporting and developing effective leadership and governance.
- Building the links between schools and employers to ensure that young people have the best possible preparation for their careers.

Community engagement results

Equality of access to education is the highest priority across most consultation groups, but especially so for rural residents and disabled people.

Partners voting at the Darlington Assembly and the Citizens' Panel also emphasise access, but give significant weight, together with Council Members and staff, to greater parent and carer involvement. The Panel want to see more school places and choice, whilst partners focus on tackling performance disparities which would ensure that all schools are schools of choice.

Overall results of consultation with residents, employers and visitors tell us that people want to see:

- All children having equal access to an excellent education, including those in rural communities, those with special needs and all other minority groups.
- Greater involvement of parents and carers in the education of their children, with better links developed between schools and employers.
- Education to include community and lifestyle issues (e.g. citizenship, health, environmental, respect for others).
- Engage, inspire and mentor young people (provide role models & work experience).
- More/improved training, including apprenticeships so we can 'grow our own' talent.

Priority Outcomes

Taking all of the available views and information into account, our priorities are:

1. Addressing the disparity in the performance of schools

To achieve this we will:

- Develop a Darlington wide commitment to overcoming the barriers to educational achievement, particularly with respect to the impact of poverty, deprivation and worklessness.

- Support school leadership teams in their continuous improvement, assess the performance of governing bodies and ensure that all schools commit to the highest standards of teaching and learning.

2. Easing the transition from primary to secondary education

To achieve this we will:

- Establish a transition model for all schools, informed by existing good practice in Darlington.
- Ensure that children in Year 6 spend at least a week in secondary school during the second half of the summer term.
- Addressing and improving children's experiences in travelling to and from school

3. Improving parenting and communications with parents

To achieve this we will:

- Deliver a Darlington-wide Parenting Strategy and disseminate good practice regarding communication with parents.
- Ensure that schools communicate with parents in such a way that parents understand and appreciate what is expected of them, and ensure all schools have effective practices in place to engage with their communities.

4. Engaging with employers

To achieve this we will:

- Develop systematic and comprehensive links between schools, employers and employer forums, significantly improving universal careers education and guidance.
- Review and radically overhaul work related learning arrangements in secondary schools including more systematic contributions from the public sector.

Vision for Darlington

Our approach to raising aspirations through the above priorities and actions is central to the delivery of the vision. The Children's Trust and Learning and Culture Partnership will drive this approach. They will contribute to bringing about the vision by

- Delivering an effective Academy new build at Eastbourne and associated improvements.
- Working with the Learning Skills Council, Darlington College and Teesside University to deliver the Darlington 'university town' concept.
- Linking education with business development and the skills needs of high value growth sectors. Offering challenging mentoring schemes and promoting the benefits of further and higher education as a means of personal development and to better fulfil the requirements of local employers.

One Darlington – Narrowing the Gap

Narrowing the gap in aspiration and attainment between different parts of Darlington, different groups of people within the borough and between Darlington and the rest of the country is integral to our approach. Our vision for Darlington is of a borough where all residents are aspirational for themselves and their families, and achieving attainment results that materially improve their quality of life. Initiatives to drive up standards will be focused on the most vulnerable including those living in priority wards, disabled young people, looked after children, black and minority ethnic groups, young carers, young offenders and children and young people educated other than at school. Young people's access to further and higher education will be considered as part of our work on sustainable travel choices.

HEALTHY DARLINGTON

Our 2021 vision

Health and well-being is fundamental to our vision of a high quality of life for everyone. Darlington will be a place where every person can maximise their potential for health and well-being without disadvantage from social, economic or environmental factors

Context

There are significant differences in health between Darlington residents and the rest of England, and within Darlington, across a range of measures. The reasons for this are complex, and can be summarised as: inequalities in opportunity – poverty, family, education, employment and environment (the wider determinants of health); inequalities in lifestyle choices – smoking, physical activity, food, drugs, alcohol and sexual activity; and inequalities in access to services for those who are already ill or in high risk groups (health inequity).

Action across all the themes of this strategy, and particularly in tackling economic inequalities and raising aspiration, will be important in helping to tackle this pattern of disadvantage, and a new Director of Public Health is now working to co-ordinate and progress initiatives among all partner agencies. The voluntary sector also has an important role in supporting health and well-being, particularly in relation to older people

A key concern is the 13 year difference in life expectancy between the best and worst wards. In parts of Darlington life expectancy is above the national average of 76.9 years for men and 81.1 years for women, but the most deprived wards fall below these averages.

Local priorities include effective interventions in relation to circulatory disease and cancer, delivered so as to narrow the inequalities gap, plus tobacco control including stop smoking services, reducing alcohol misuse, tackling obesity, improving mental health and promoting good sexual health.

There has been success in reducing smoking, particularly amongst pregnant women, but deaths caused by smoking and from heart disease and stroke remain above the England average.

There are improving trends in the number of teenage pregnancies, and in the percentage of women breastfeeding. However, teenage pregnancy rates remain higher than the England average. There are also encouraging trends in health related physical activity, such as walking, cycling and participation in sports, particularly amongst young people. Department for Transport research suggests that the NHS locally could save £5.85 million if local people took moderate exercise each day.

About 24% of children live in households dependent on means-tested benefits. The rate of people claiming sickness benefits because of mental health problems is higher than average.

Estimates suggest that about 25% of adults binge drink. The rate of people admitted to hospital for alcohol specific conditions is also higher than average. A lower than average

percentage of Darlington's adults are estimated to be eating healthily; about 19% of adults are estimated to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables each day.

Enquiry Group results

The enquiry group looking at this theme identified the importance of the following:

- Reducing the 13-year gap in life expectancy between the borough's healthiest and unhealthiest wards.
- Maintaining, enhancing and promoting the opportunities for everyone to participate in physical activities.
- Working with employers to champion healthy workplaces and giving a focus on schools as the setting for health improvement and physical activity programmes.

Community engagement results

Tackling health inequalities is the highest overall priority, and is especially emphasised by rural and disabled residents. Access to health care is a significant concern for partners and the general public. The Citizens' Panel wants to see health inequalities tackled, but considers the lack of NHS dentists a higher priority.

The highest priority for partners is the raising of awareness and promotion of individual responsibility for well-being, and they also support preventative measures such as sports, walking and cycling, combined with tackling obesity in young people. Responsibility and prevention priorities are also favoured particularly by the Citizens' Panel and rural residents.

Overall results of consultation with residents, employers and visitors tell us that people want to see:

- An increase in everyone's awareness of how to improve their health and well-being, and encourage people to take responsibility for their own health.
- Health inequalities tackled. Providing better advice and education to encourage residents in targeted areas to lead a healthier lifestyle (e.g. reduce smoking in target communities).
- Improvements and easier access to hospital care, GPs and health centres for all, including more NHS Dentists.
- Better access to sports activities and support for grass roots sports.
- Encourage more walking and cycling by providing more facilities.

Priority outcomes

Taking all of the available views and information into account, our priorities are:

1. Tackle health inequalities (our overall goal is to close the gap)

To achieve this we will:

- Launch a targeted social marketing initiative in our unhealthiest ward, aimed at smokers under 25.
- Achieve 50% more smoking 'quitters' in worst wards than the best wards.
- Launch a targeted social marketing initiative in the worst ward for binge drinking, with particular emphasis on 16-30 year old women.
- Aim to reduce the number of emergency admissions for alcohol poisoning to nil for 10-19 year olds girls from the most deprived wards.
- Reverse the trend for alcohol related hospital admissions for 40-45 year old men from the most deprived wards.

2. Create easy access to sport and leisure

To achieve this we will:

- Carry out an audit of grass roots sport facilities. Create a user-friendly directory of clubs, coaches and facilities, maximise their use, extend school spaces for sport and promote greater use of walking and cycling.
- Increase walking and cycling to and for leisure, through the location and design of leisure facilities and through changing cultural attitudes
- Investigate extension of community led physical education programmes e.g. Zone Active and community gyms.
- Require developers to feature active leisure in health impact assessments.
- Make it a formal requirement for the Community Sports Network to be consulted on relevant applications and be able to make recommendations to Cabinet.

3. Create healthy workplaces – investors in health

To achieve this we will:

- Launch and sustain an ambitious workplace health scheme, targeting the biggest employers first.
- Publicise a roll of honour and launch 'Investor in Health' company of the year.
- Promote workplace (and school) travel planning and link with the health improvement agenda.

4. Tackle obesity in young people

To achieve this we will:

- Create a more co-ordinated approach to health in schools and promote the 'Bike It' scheme, particularly at primary level.
- Assess the value of making programmes such as 'speed, agility, quickness' compulsory.

- Promote a Gold, Silver, Bronze 'Schools Investor in Health' scheme with annual school of the year.
- Use 2012 to build Community Games into Darlington School Olympics.
- Address cultural attitudes to walking and cycling amongst young people and increase active travel

Vision for Darlington

Our approach to improving health through the above priorities and actions is central to the delivery of the vision. The Health and Well-Being Improvement Partnership will drive this approach. It will contribute to bringing about the vision by

- Ensuring quality primary care is available for all and equitable access to services for those who become ill.
- Working collaboratively amongst partners to contribute to improvements in lifestyle choices and stimulating positive leisure and cultural pursuits.
- Championing accessibility and healthier sustainable travel options as part of the wider visionary investment and major capital projects.

One Darlington – Narrowing the Gap

Narrowing the gaps in life expectancy, physical activity and general health and well being between Darlington and the rest of the country is integral to our approach. Under the theme of Healthy Darlington our main One Darlington focus will be on improving the life chances of those people living in deprived wards, working with partners to ensure those wards with the greatest prevalence of ill-health receive targeted interventions and support. More generally we will also stimulate initiatives to support the mobility, physical activity and general well-being of our older people and pursue measures to address the emerging obesity problem amongst younger generations, promote sexual health and tackle teenage pregnancy. Sustainable travel programmes will promote and incentivise walking and cycling amongst young people and adults to improve health and well being.

GREENER DARLINGTON

Our 2021 vision

Darlington's environment and accessibility are cornerstones of our vision for a sustainable community. The borough will be:

- An attractive built and natural environment that supports a high quality of life and the richest possible biodiversity
- A place where all people can get to where they want to go easily and quickly via an efficient and accessible transport infrastructure
- An area playing its part in achieving national and global targets for sustainability and climate change

Context

Darlington has strong environmental assets, and is well-placed to take effective action to both manage the quality and condition of the local environment, and to provide local responses to global issues, in particular climate change.

These assets include: over 900 hectares of open space within the urban area and the larger villages, amounting to almost 10 hectares per 1000 people, well above the national average. There are seven local nature reserves, and larger areas managed for nature conservation. Street trees are a feature of the western part of the town. Distinctive built environments include 16 conservation areas and over 500 listed buildings, whilst attractive countryside, ranges from the valley of the Tees to the magnesian limestone escarpment around Heighington.

Darlington has a good record of developing brownfield sites and defending the limits of built-up areas, although in 2006/07 the percentage of new dwellings built on previously developed land fell from 76.45% to 65.67%. We must ensure that we contribute to the pressing national need for more housing, whilst minimising harm to the environment and identifying opportunities to enhance the local environment for biodiversity and access to improved landscapes.

In 2006/07 Darlington residents generated 51,250 tonnes of household waste, of which 22.49% (11,529 tonnes) was recycled or composted. A new waste disposal contract will be operational from 2009. This, combined with a review of our recycling arrangements, will ensure that, as a minimum, we achieve ongoing government targets for diversion from landfill, with a recycling target of 40% in 2009/10.

The Local Motion and Cycle Town programmes have achieved significant shifts from car to sustainable travel modes between 2004 and 2006, with a 9% reduction in car driver trips, a 15% increase in walking and 65% increase in cycling (starting from a low base). Darlington is now a lead area in the UK on implementing voluntary travel behaviour changes. These changes are already saving 6000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions annually.

The Tees Valley Footprint Report published by the Stockholm Environment Institute found that Darlington has the highest carbon footprint in the Tees Valley (11.12 tonnes per capita compared to an average of 10.85 tonnes; the UK average is 11.87 tonnes). The Tees Valley Climate Change Strategy sets city-region reduction targets for carbon dioxide emissions of 8.75% from 2006 to 2012, and a further 27% from 2012 to 2030.

Our One Darlington focus highlights the disparity in environmental quality across the urban area – the most deprived areas tend to be the least attractive. Car ownership is relatively low (61.6% of households have cars, compared to an average of 67.6% for England and Wales) and is still an aspiration for many that outweighs consideration of climate change.

Parish Plans completed to date highlight transport as a particular issue for rural communities, with poor accessibility to shopping, work, health and leisure facilities for non-car owners/drivers.

North east residents spend 6% above the national average on heating their homes. This is partly due to climatic factors, but for people on low incomes and particularly older people living in older houses, the inability to properly insulate their homes also contributes.

The duty to conserve biodiversity must be integral to our environmental programmes. The well documented recent national loss of biodiversity has also been reflected in the Darlington area. This is in danger of undergoing yet another phase of loss brought about by climate change. Legislation and national policy now promotes the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity through the full range of human activities, from farming to the design of new housing estates.

Enquiry Group Results

The Environment and Transport Enquiry Group addressed two questions: 'What would it take to make Darlington the greenest place in the UK?', and, 'Transport, Accessibility and Environment – what would it take to get all three right?' The group's report emphasised the importance of the following:

- Raising the profile of environmental issues within Darlington and building eco-footprinting the sustainability appraisal in to the community strategy.
- Recognising Darlington's contribution to global climate change, and planning for a low carbon town to reduce the local causes and effects of climate change.
- Protecting and enhancing the green spaces in and around Darlington for biodiversity, leisure and health and well-being.
- Increasing the sustainability of Darlington's transport network.
- Engaging across the community to raise awareness and promote behavioural change.

Community Engagement Results

Citizens' concerns are focused on more localised environmental issues, compared to the primarily global perspective of the Enquiry Group, and our priorities need to synthesise and reflect both these approaches. Maintaining clean and attractive neighbourhoods is most important, with most concern for:

- Ensuring clean and well-maintained streets, parks and open spaces.
- Protecting and enhancing parks, open spaces and natural habitat.
- Improving the appearance of the built environment.

In terms of transport, respondents were most concerned about:

- Providing more effective and affordable bus services (including rural areas).
- Making it easier for people to travel around Darlington using different modes of transport.
- Reducing traffic congestion.

Commenting on priorities for the town centre, high priority is given to:

- Providing better public facilities (seats, toilets, etc).
- Investigating the potential for 'Park and Ride'.

Although not scoring highly in the overall survey, disabled people gave highest priority to ensuring good accessibility for disabled people in the town centre. The highest single priority for the town centre was for the provision of better car-parking. This needs to be addressed holistically with the other transport priorities to achieve the optimum balance between car use and sustainable travel.

Priority Outcomes

Taking all of the available views and information into account, our priorities are:

1. A Low Carbon Borough Tackling Climate Change – actions taken under this priority can contribute to our One Darlington focus by contributing to reduced living costs and health improvements for people on low incomes and for the vulnerable, including older people. We will address this priority by:

- Reducing Darlington's energy consumption, through tackling fuel poverty, improving housing standards and street lighting and supporting private sector initiatives.
- Facilitating the use of renewable energy sources through procurement and planning policies.
- Increasing resource efficiency through reuse and recycling, and reduced waste and landfill.
- Lifestyle and building adaptations to alleviate the impact of climate change.

2. A Sustainable Transport Network – sustainable transport initiatives support the One Darlington approach by opening up safe and accessible transport choices to all, with particular benefits for children and rural communities. This priority will be pursued by:

- Reducing vehicle use and decreasing vehicle emissions by marketing alternative sustainable modes, promoting food from local growers and providers, working with vehicle fleet partners to reduce their emissions and monitoring local air quality.

- Recognising that effective transport and accessibility are critical to prosperity, and ensuring that sustainable transport programmes support economic growth
- Promoting increased use of sustainable transport - walking, cycling and public transport – to deliver both environmental and health benefits, through travel planning information and marketing.
- Exploring how we can manage the demand for road space in favour of sustainable travel modes, linked to decisions on the location and design of new developments
- Improving sustainable transport networks, with comprehensive, joined up and high quality provision for walking and cycling, and efficient, reduced congestion routes for all traffic.
- Managing the transport network to tackle congestion, improve accessibility for all, support a high quality of life and minimise the network’s environmental footprint.
- Ensuring good accessibility to jobs and services through appropriate location and layout of new development, secured through the Local Development Framework

3. Greener, Cleaner Darlington – the One Darlington focus emphasises the need to ensure that an attractive, liveable environment is available to all residents, and especially people living in deprived areas. The key strands of work under this priority are:

- Protecting and enhancing Darlington’s parks, greenspaces, allotments and natural habitats, to support biodiversity, informal leisure and health and well-being.
- Reclaiming open space for community use.
- Making urban Darlington a greener place, through tree planting and protection and other measures.
- Linking up green spaces to improve walking and cycling corridors as well as biodiversity.

4. Well-Designed Darlington - the quality of the urban environment is a vitally important asset supporting many aspects of our community strategy. We will pursue this priority by:

- Ensuring that planning policies and powers are used to protect and enhance the overall quality of buildings and streetscapes in Darlington.
- Ensuring an appropriate supply of affordable and other housing to meet the changing needs and aspirations of local people, whilst achieving targets for reduced emissions and energy use through housing location and design
- Encouraging location and design of development that supports walking, cycling and bus use.
- Encouraging the regeneration of run-down areas and making the most of Darlington’s potential, for example in the Town Centre Fringe and along the River Skerne.

- Generally improving the appearance of the built-up area, and promoting higher standards of presentation on the main routes into Darlington.
- Encouraging private property owners to go for higher standards or presentation for shop fronts and other business premises, particularly in the town centre.

5. Engagement and Partnerships for Change

Effective action to achieve sustainable environmental benefits requires commitment and contributions from all sectors of the community – it cannot be achieved by the strategic partners without community support. Under this priority our key actions will be:

- Incorporating eco-footprinting and sustainability appraisal into the community strategy, and encouraging all partners to adopt ambitious and realistic environmental targets in their planning.
- Delivering programmes of awareness raising and education to change behaviours and attitudes.
- Promoting the quality of life benefits of more sustainable lifestyles.
- Supporting community and business-led initiatives.

Vision for Darlington

The environment is integral to our vision for Darlington. That vision is conditional upon ensuring that the local environment contributes to the quality of life that attracts people to live, work and invest here. Good accessibility to jobs and services, and to other cities and regions, with low congestion, travel time and cost, is a vital part of that attraction. And we must also ensure that we play our part in tackling global environmental concerns like climate change.

Our proposals for the environment will support the vision for Darlington through three inter-related approaches:

- Ensuring that the local environment is clean and well-maintained, and that its attractiveness is protected and improved
- Building on the successful approaches to promoting a range of travel choices, with emphasis on walking, cycling and public transport
- Reducing Darlington's contribution to global warming, and making good environmental practice an integral part of the borough's attraction.

One Darlington – Narrowing the Gap

A more sustainable environment can also be a fairer environment. Through our One Darlington focus we must ensure that our environmental initiatives contribute to narrowing the deprivation gap. Sustainable transport choices are choices for all residents, particularly children and older people, and not just car owners. We must continue to target accessibility improvements for deprived areas, particularly outlying estates, and address

the accessibility needs of disabled people. Transport choices must also benefit the rural areas and villages.

An attractive, well-maintained and accessible environment must be a benefit for all residents, wherever they live. It can also provide opportunities for activities to safeguard people's health and well-being whilst measures to tackle climate change, such as improving the thermal performance of houses and reducing reliance on fossil fuels, must also deliver cost of living and health improvements for people on low incomes, in particular older people.

SAFER DARLINGTON

Our 2021 vision

Darlington will be:

- A more tolerant and even safer place, reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, and tackling drugs and alcohol misuse;
- A Darlington that enables us to value and respect each other and our environment, and where public behaviour becomes acceptable to all;
- A place where life can be enjoyed free from the fear of crime.

Context

Darlington today is a safe place. In terms of actual levels of crime, residents, employers and visitors perceptions, the quality of our open spaces and road safety we are collectively achieving and delivering a safe borough. Public satisfaction around community safety has improved, were tackling the fear of crime and making in-roads into addressing anti-social behaviour.

Levels of total crime in Darlington as at the end of 2006/07 are broadly in line with 2003/04 figures, although there has been an increase in the top ten priority crimes. However, there has been a 19% reduction in total crime for the period April-September 2007, compared to total crime for the same period in the previous year. This is well-ahead of the 6% target set by the Home Office for Darlington, and performance continues to improve.

Criminal damage, damage to vehicles, theft from motor vehicles and violence against a person accounts for the highest volume of total crime; a pattern which remains the same today as in 2003/04.

Incidents of anti-social behaviour recorded by the Police have increased from 2003 levels, with rowdy/nuisance behaviour remaining the highest type of complaint. The percentage of residents feeling safe after dark and during the day has remained relatively high and stable in recent years. Domestic abuse, drug and alcohol crime remain concerns, in terms of domestic abuse primarily with the number of repeat victims.

Additional PCSOs have been recruited and the development of the Uniformed Warden Service has continued. CCTV has been further expanded with coverage into Darlington Parks and Cemeteries. The Council has worked with Arriva to install CCTV on buses, with good results.

Enquiry Group results

The Enquiry Group was concerned with four main factors; behaviour that has negative influences, the number of incidents of crime, young people involved with crime and the association with truancy and absence rates from school.

The Group identified five priorities for action:

- Community ownership;
- Understanding and tolerance of others;
- Parenting skills;
- Importance of aspiration and mentoring, and;
- Designing out crime.

Programmes of proposed work included Safer Schools Partnership being recognised as a means to engage with young people and as a means to reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, whilst promoting good citizenship. Eastbourne Academy provides the venue for Darlington's first Safer Schools Partnership, bringing together key partners to support young people, their parents and the wider community.

Focused work experience was also identified as key, needing to make work experience more useful for employers and students alike. Greater involvement of offenders in community based restorative justice programmes and identifying the need to ensure that the design of new buildings encouraged positive community activity was also proposed.

Community engagement results

Working for a safer community and a more tolerant society is an important aspect of partnership working in Darlington, but it is not an area of work that automatically recommends itself as a theme for a long-term community strategy, given its focus on addressing problems rather than setting visionary goals for the community to aspire towards.

The output from community engagement, however, strongly emphasised tackling crime and anti-social behaviour. It is therefore included as a strategy theme, albeit one that provides a platform underpinning the other outcome focused visionary themes.

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour was the most supported theme across all consultation groups. Setting aside the views of the Citizens' Panel, the theme was slightly ahead of Economy and Education as the three leading themes. However, the theme dominated Citizens' Panel views so that, overall, it is the outstanding priority. Partners voting at the Darlington Assembly, as well as Council staff, gave more weight to the Economy theme.

The outstanding priorities within the theme focus on diversionary activities for young people, and increased use of restorative justice within the community. Partner organisations emphasise these, whilst the Citizens' Panel supports diversionary work combined with more policing and other security measures. Rural residents and disabled people give priority to policing. More discipline in schools is supported by the Citizens' Panel, whilst partners also support initiatives to reduce drug and alcohol misuse.

Priority outcomes

Taking all of the above data into account, our priorities for this theme are:

1. Reduce anti-social behaviour

- Develop intelligence led approaches with full utilisation of GIS.
- Ensure appropriate resources are targeted to areas in need of support.
- Work with parents to develop parenting skills and with communities to create a more tolerant Darlington
- Create safe places. Develop planning policies to enhance feelings of safety, designing out crime, using lighting, landscaping etc.

2. Reduce the impact of prolific and other priority offenders on the Community

- Ensure those individuals who cause the greatest risk to communities are dealt with swiftly and efficiently through the criminal justice system.
- Provide support to individuals on the cusp of engaging in crime/Anti-social behaviour to try to deter them from offending.
- Ensure appropriate support mechanisms are in place to support those coming out of the Criminal Justice System to prevent re-offending.
- Ensure those prolific and priority offenders with drug and alcohol needs receive appropriate levels of support/intervention in community based restorative justice programmes.
- Support the development of the borough's first offender management unit.

3. Reduce domestic abuse and reduce the number of repeat victims

- Develop multi-agency risk assessment conference within Darlington.
- Develop an effective performance management regime to understand the true extent of Domestic Abuse in Darlington.

4. Reduce violent crime and disorder

- Ensure resources are used effectively to tackle violent crime and the night-time economy.
- Work with licensing to ensure premises are compliant with legislation.
- Raise awareness amongst young people of the harm caused by alcohol.

5. Minimise the harm caused by illegal drug and alcohol misuse

- Work with partners to effect the delivery of effective treatment sources for drugs;
- Raise awareness of the harm caused by binge drinking and promote responsible

Vision for Darlington

Our approach to improving community safety through the above priorities and actions is central to the delivery of the vision for Darlington. The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, Youth Offending Service and Drug and Alcohol Action Team will collectively drive this approach. They will contribute to bringing about the vision by

- Pursuing an intelligence led approach to neighbourhood policing - delivered in partnership across agencies.
- Working with partners to collaboratively provide and promote positive alternatives for youth activities.
- Aiming to design out crime at the master planning stages of major visionary projects and active participation in the detailed development control.

One Darlington – Narrowing the Gap

Narrowing the gap in the fear and prevalence of crime and disorder between different parts of Darlington, different groups of people within the borough and between Darlington and the rest of the country is integral to our approach. Specific focus in this theme will be given to those vulnerable for a variety of complex reasons including from domestic abuse and racially or sexually motivated abuse. We will work together as a partnership to ensure those wards with the greatest prevalence of crime and disorder receives targeted intervention and support concentrated on our most deprived areas.