



## **Culture Matters In Darlington**

**A business plan for a  
sustainable Arts Centre -  
where the arts, craft and  
people matter**

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## **Introduction**

This paper is about how Darlington for Culture wish to work alongside Darlington Borough Council and others to secure the future of the cultural and artistic 'hub' of Darlington, the Arts Centre. We strongly believe in collaboration and are exploring ways in which we can work with prospective partners.

The paper sets out our Vision and objectives and describes who we are and what we think can be achieved. Our goal is to make the arts accessible, to engage with all users and potential users, to make the arts, culture and craft alive.

This paper is still work in progress. It was only in September that we were invited by the Council to begin discussions concerning Darlington for Culture potentially taking over the running of the Arts Centre. The Centre is a complex business and time is needed to examine all facets of its working to gain a firm understanding of its operation and appreciate its potential.

We are not unrealistic. We recognise the dire financial situation facing the Council and the fact that many difficult decisions will need to be made. It is even more important then that there are viable options on the table for consideration by the Council. We continue to work on those options and this paper describes our progress to date. We have met with Council officers on a number of occasions and we are grateful for the access to information afforded and the constructive manner in which the discussions have progressed. Nevertheless, in the short period of time since then it is not reasonable to expect that all the many issues involved in the completion of such a complex task would have been resolved.

This paper describes with whom we have been in discussions and from whom we are taking advice. We do provide a financial forecast which is based on information provided by the Borough Council. However, we also recognise that we are working within a volatile environment and the plan will need refinement and adjustment in the light of developments.

We would ask the Borough Council to consider this document in the context within which it is offered and has been written – that is, that it is a 'roadmap'; it is a way forward but much more detailed work needs to be done between Darlington for Culture and the Borough Council to arrive at our destination – securing the future of the artistic hub of Darlington.

We see that work happening between now and next Easter, with a potential date for take over as 1 August 2012.

We are also grateful for the opportunity to run the Arts Centre programming on Monday and Tuesday evenings and the chance to stage the Arts Fair in late summer. These activities seen our volunteers working closely with existing Council staff and it is encouraging to note that this partnership is developing well.

We believe that there can be a vibrant and creative future for the arts in Darlington which will greatly add to the town's future success but bold decisions need to be made and the willingness to entertain solutions not previously considered.

## **Section 1 - Vision, aims and objectives**

**Vision:** To develop a nationally recognised inclusive and resilient Arts Centre where creative endeavours flourish and craft and the arts matter - so as to improve the social cohesion, economic prospects and cultural life of Darlington and the wider region.

**1. Aims:**

- 1.1. To provide a focus for voluntary and professional cultural activity, where both artistic freedom and co-operation thrive in perfect balance.
- 1.2. To encourage the widest possible participation in the arts, craft and cultural activity.
- 1.3. To enable every child and young person in Darlington to engage in cultural life, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 1.4. To support the contribution of artists and creative industries to the Darlington economy.

**2. Objectives:**

- 2.1. To secure the continuing availability of the Arts Centre by building on current success.
- 2.2. To engage local voluntary and professional organisations in positive cultural partnerships and collaborations.
- 2.3. To maximise revenue from a range of income streams by bringing greater commercialisation and business focus to the Arts Centre, whilst ensuring this supports cultural endeavour.
- 2.4. To develop the Arts Centre complex on a zonal basis where independence and freedom are valued but co-operation and responsibility are key.

## **Section 2 – Strategic Context**

Darlington for Culture acknowledges the Council's current extremely challenging financial situation and we accept that the arts is not a statutory service.

Nevertheless, we would urge the Council to give careful consideration to the part that the arts and culture play in the life of Darlington. We agree with *One Darlington* (a sustainable community strategy) that amongst the key assets for economic growth in the town are arts, leisure and culture, and that it is important to recognise the significant role played by arts and culture in people's aspirations and personal development. Indeed, the document goes on to say that the maintenance and enhancement of the of the cultural life of the borough and 'making the most of established arts facilities' and 'looking for opportunities to expand them' ought to be a key strategic objective for Darlington.

Darlington for Culture also agree with the Vision for the Arts in Darlington, developed by the recent Enquiry into Arts and Culture in Darlington carried out by the Local Strategic Partnership, that the arts have a vital role to play in the future identity and economic success of the town. In particular, Darlington for Culture supports the Enquiry Group's view that there needs to be a 'hub' for arts and culture in the town, a

conclusion supported by the independent Globe Report commissioned by the Council.

It is our view that Darlington is fortunate in already possessing such a hub. The Arts Centre provides a venue for a diverse range of arts, cultural activities and events, is a meeting place, an important venue for community groups and offers space and technical support for film, music, digital media, performing arts, comedy, visual and creative arts, etc., as well as being home to Theatre Hullabaloo – a national portfolio organisation - and other creative artists. No other building in Darlington can match the range and diversity of its offer. We only have one Arts Centre. It is a unique asset that has had a great deal of investment over 20 years plus.

The closure of the Arts Centre will naturally lead to the dispersal of the arts and creative activities currently taking place; many organisations and groups will move away from Darlington thus culturally impoverishing the town even further. The Globe Report is adamant that a 'polycentric' solution to the provision of arts is neither desirable nor viable.

Such an outcome will be detrimental not only to the cultural life of the town but to the ambition to make Darlington a place where people want to live and work and where companies want to invest.

### **Section 3 – Our Business Strategy**

#### **Our management strategy**

Our management strategy is to run the Arts Centre as an integrated whole and not as a set of related but separate operations as is currently the case. We believe that the Arts Centre requires a single management structure with clear targets and accountabilities responsible to the board of Darlington for Culture and through them to our membership and stakeholders..

#### **Trading income**

There are several ways in which the Arts Centre does already and could generate more trading income in the future but to maximise this investment is required to make more of the Arts Centre usable. We believe that the Arts Centre could become more efficient and the spaces made to 'work harder'.

#### **A zonal approach**

Our approach to managing the Arts Centre is one that can best be described as managing 'zonal cost/profit centres'. We see the Arts Centre as a set of facilities each with its own unique set of opportunities and associated costs, and each needs to be seen as a cost/profit centre in its own right.

Therefore, we are currently looking at each of the facilities in turn – the theatre space, the foyer area, the galleries, the club room, etc. – and identifying how each might best be used within the context of the overall objective which is to secure a broad and balanced arts offer for the town whilst providing space and support for

artists and cultural groups to work, share and celebrate their work. We want to make all spaces 'work' harder by maximising visitor spend – each area will need to contribute to this objective to a greater or lesser extent.

In effect, this 'zonal approach' means that each of the facilities within the arts centre has its own 'business plan', and there will be targets against which we can measure success. In the first instance, it might very well be the case that we do not exploit all the facilities available within the building. We believe we need to be realistic as to how many issues we can tackle at once. For example, we might focus in the first year of operation on the ground floor facilities - theatre space, bar and café, club room, etc. - whilst not attempting to bring into our business planning developments in other parts of the building until we have successfully put these ground floor operations on a financially secure position.

Below are identified our projected trading 'streams':

### ***The bar and cafe***

We understand that, in order to make any arts centre an economically viable proposition, it is necessary to maximise income from all revenue sources, particularly those which are non- arts based. To this end we are examining how best to manage facilities such as the café, the bar and commercial lettings in order that we are able to maximise the contribution that they each make to the 'bottom line'. We will either run these facilities ourselves or seek a partner to do it on our behalf. We are talking with both potential social enterprise and commercial partners concerning, in particular, the running of the bar and the café. These discussions are currently at an early stage.

Our financial forecast does indicate that we believe that more income can be realised from both the café and the bar than has been the case historically. We believe this because we do not think that the Arts Centre's services have been as effectively coordinated as they might have been, and that the bar and café need to be managed integrally alongside the general programming for the Centre. For example, the Arts Centre could be marketed more as a general place to have a drink and something to eat. This could be tied to the programming of more events within the bar area e.g. acoustic nights, DJ sets. As outlined above we could tender the operation of the café to local social enterprises or commercial organisations as a way of maximising funding.

### ***Commercial lettings***

There is potential to realise income from commercial lettings. It is our ambition to open up the building to new tenants although this might not be an important priority. We want to see artists using the Centre's space for creative work Adapting the Arts Centre to become more of a bespoke venue for conferences, maybe with services developed for arts based facilitation of conferences, could be a real growth area.

### ***Arts based services***

Arts based conference/event facilitation services could be developed to sell to private companies, public bodies and voluntary organisations. These could be further broadened out to include arts based team development, consultation and planning workshops.

### ***Yearly events***

Large-scale events could bring many people to the Arts Centre, especially if these had a regional or national dimension. DfC could build on and learn a lot from existing events such as Spring Thing.

### ***Programming and ticket sales***

Central to the Arts Centre's mission is its programming. We intend a broad and diverse offer based both on the existing programming strategy and on affording local artists the opportunity to 'showcase' their work. Clearly this is a central income stream. However many shows do not make a profit and a balance needs to be struck between commercial appeal and artistic freedom. A pricing structure (with deals and offers) also needs to be developed that does not prove to exclude, yet still generates sufficient income.

We also want to see the 'foyer' area used for arts events and activities, so that we can bring performance forward to the front of the building, clearly displaying the purpose and function of the building and utilising what is, in essence, currently under-utilised space.

We recognise that the two evenings – Monday and Tuesday – which we are currently programming have had a slow start. We have learned quickly that it takes six months or longer to set a programme and promotion and marketing are key. We agreed to take on Mondays and Tuesdays at short notice and have had some success – notably the film club which goes from strength to strength. We are now planning for the new year and beyond recognising the need for relatively long lead-in times required. It should also be born in mind that those two days are traditionally the 'slowest' of the week.

We might also wish to contract with the Borough Council for ticketing services.

### ***Gallery and shop***

We also believe that the gallery spaces might be more effectively exploited. We understand the current arrangement whereby Darlington hosts travelling exhibitions and we would wish to see this continue. We also support the strategy for the smaller gallery to show work by local artists. However, we would wish to extend the offer to include more 3D work and craft work, and to develop the Arts Centre into a sales outlet for local arts and crafts people. To this end, we would wish to see more display space to enable work to be shown and sold.

We may wish to contract with Darlington Borough Council to continue the programming for the theatre space and Miles Meehan Gallery.

### ***Existing tenants***

Having outlined this possible 'zonal' approach we do recognise the importance of the Arts Centre's existing tenants. We would wish to retain Theatre Hulabaloo as a resident of the Arts Centre and believe that its presence adds immeasurably to the cultural life of the town. We also understand the need for Theatre Hulabaloo to be assured that the Arts Centre will continue to be able to host their activities. Similarly, we welcome Darlington Media Group's interest in remaining in the Arts Centre and look forward to working with them and Theatre Hulabaloo if we can agree terms with

the Council. We also acknowledge that there are other tenants of the Centre – and would hope that we could retain them in the future.

### ***Education and training***

We would want to see the Arts Centre being a place for education and training. Currently there is a healthy programme of arts-based courses. We wish to build on these to provide a vibrant and stimulating offer for the community.

We are also interested in creating opportunities for arts and cultural apprenticeships as well as developing a deeper relationship with Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form Centre based not on the Sixth Form as tenant but as partner.

### **The Need for continuing support**

Despite the above, our analysis tells us we need:

- Risk capital – to enable our new initiatives to become embedded and to show the improvements we plan
- Money to support artistic excellence – that high quality programming frequently costs more to mount than the income from a limited number of seats will cover yet from time to time such endeavours are essential to place the Arts Centre in the forefront of locations
- Support for access – that to provide access to all we need continuing support through for example the provision of subsidised seat prices

Darlington for Culture is a relatively young organisation and we are learning all the time. However, we not as naïve as to think we cannot learn from others and therefore we have taken, and will continue to take, advice from organisations undertaking initiatives such as we are planning to do. For example, we have consulted the Galtres Centre, Easingwold, Helmsley Arts Centre, Otley Courthouse, Richmond Station and Whitby Colliseum. We have also had the informal support of Globe Consulting and Brian Debnam Associates.

All advice tells us that, whilst social enterprise initiatives set up to run or take over arts facilities can be run without direct subsidy, in all cases, a measure of financial support was initially required in order for the new structures to become established. Darlington for Culture contend that this will also be the case if we are to take on the running of the Arts Centre in Darlington.

Large subsidies in this climate are a thing of the past and so profit making parts of the centre need to be developed to subsidise activities with broader social aims. Therefore it is clear that plans for income generation will need to be based on gaining revenue from a diverse range of streams, not only to raise the sums required but in order to aid sustainability if one of these streams becomes affected in the future.

We estimate the level of support needed in the first year of operation, 2012-13, will be £150K-£200K. We anticipate that we would be able to manage on a much smaller subsidy for 2013-14, if one was required at all. Our financial forecast for 2012-13 is at Appendix 2. This forecast is based on a number of assumptions and has been compiled with the very useful co-operation/support of Darlington Council.



It should be noted that when considering the level of subsidy available Darlington Council will need to take into account how much money it would take to close the Arts Centre. This not only applies to how much it would cost to 'mothball' the centre but also how much the Arts Council would seek to claw-back if a suitable replacement for the studio is not made available. It is costing Middlesbrough Council £86K per year to keep a similar, yet smaller building, secure and it is thought the Arts Council would look to claw-back around £250K.

Below we identify how those elements of risk capital, money to support artistic excellence and access might be achieved.

### **Income generation**

Apart from trading income the following have been identified as the main areas of income generation and they are expanded on below:

- Income from public bodies
- Income from funders/trust
- Traditional fundraising
- Corporate sponsorship
- Social finance e.g. loans, share issue

A detailed and robust income strategy will need to be produced with target income levels from each of these areas. Sub-groups or paid staff could then be tasked with achieving these targets.

Coupled with such an income strategy the whole nature of how the Arts Centre is run needs to fundamentally change based on a social enterprise approach, a coherent management structure and a mix of enthusiastic paid and volunteer workers.

### ***Income from public bodies***

Given the scale of public sector cuts, and the perception of the priority of arts and culture, securing any income from public bodies will be a challenge. Clearly given the long generous track record of funding arts and culture, as well as strategic fit, Darlington Borough Council are the most likely public body to provide ongoing funding to the Arts Centre. Such core funding is of prime importance however as it allows a base on which to leverage in much more additional income and to sustain a facility for the town that has a high degree of economic and social impact. Any long-term funding from the council will therefore depend on demonstrating high level of economic and social return on investment. This in turn will depend on developing quality measures. The use of a service-level agreement would also help here, demonstrating this is not about a hand-out but an investment based on specific outcomes.

Other public bodies are highly unlikely to provide such core funding but it may be that specific activities or events will attract funding from such bodies where the benefits can be shown to contribute to their aims and objectives. In addition public bodies should be targeted in relation to use of the Arts Centre, particularly rental of office space or hire for conferences/events.

### ***Income from funders/trust***

There are a range of public funders, trusts and foundations that have monies available to support arts, culture and community activities. The Arts Council is clearly a key funder who have already invested heavily and made a commitment to the future of the Arts Centre.

Arts Council England is being heavily cut and 'amateur' arts will be even less acceptable for funding bids. 'Great Art' is their slogan. So the Arts Council is under pressure to fund key programmes related to their core strategy: there are two that we can latch onto easily – young people and sustainability. The Arts Council are re-negotiating with the Local Authority where their funding for Darlington goes. The Arts Council want quality facilities for the groups they fund to perform/exhibit and may be willing to consider 'pump priming' the centre to enable this to happen. The Arts Council has recently announced the Catalyst Fund and it may be that DfC may be able to apply to this fund in 2012 to develop plans for the sustainability of the Arts Centre.

One of the main issues here is that funding is often available for capital investment or specific projects (and clearly this will be important) but rarely to contribute directly to running costs. However users of the Arts Centre should be encouraged to apply for funding on the basis of full cost recovery i.e. applying for amounts that cover the full cost of a project (including attributable overheads). Many funders now encourage this practice and this will allow organisations and projects to cover the costs incurred by the Arts Centre in delivering their project.

In addition there will be scope to apply for funds for projects that are connected with aiding the financial sustainability of the Arts Centre e.g. projects related to increasing access by marginalised groups, outreach activities and large events.

European monies, specifically European Regional Development Fund offer an opportunity for investment in creative industries, which the centre could act as a hub for.

### ***Traditional fundraising***

Traditional fundraising campaigns, based on the giving of individuals, lotteries and events can generate thousands of pounds. The Arts Centre itself is ideal for holding fundraising events. Individuals may also want to sponsor the Arts Centre in the same way as corporate sponsors (see below). A fundraising committee could be established to raise such income based on annual targets.

We are also exploring a 'Friends of the Arts Centre' scheme whereby 'friends; in return for a fee receive a percentage off ticket prices, are invited to first showings, etc.

### ***Corporate sponsorship/support***

Securing corporate sponsorship is very time consuming and companies are regularly bombarded with requests of this nature. So this would require dedicated paid/volunteer workers approaching many businesses with unique and exciting offers. Sponsorship could be of specific spaces in the centre, specific performances,

seasons of events, theatre seats and much more. Large sponsors could have events for their staff held in the centre.

DfC is also looking to set up a business alliance to contribute advice, mentoring, pro bono support and resources.

### **Social Investment**

Social finance is a growing area of potential investment. The government is planning to establish Big Society Capital to provide investment for social purposes, funded by money from dormant bank accounts and additional monies from high street banks. A number of other foundations and agencies are increasingly putting funding into social investment.

This flow of social investment could allow DfC to obtain loan or other financing. Transfer of the Arts Centre either by freehold or long leasehold would allow the equity to be used to secure loan financing. This could come from the private sector or an increasing number of social investors.

DfC already raises income from membership fees and will undoubtedly look to raise income from annual subscription fees. DfC is structured in such a way that with some rule changes could raise thousands of pounds in finance via a share issue (particularly suitable for raising capital monies).

### **Staffing**

Darlington for Culture cannot entertain the TUPE transfer of any staff currently employed by Darlington Borough Council because:

- DfC has no reserves and could not underwrite any possible redundancy costs
- DfC cannot take on the liability for pensions for the same above reason
- To agree to any transfer would be morally reprehensible for the two above reasons

We would wish to work with the Council to find solutions to the TUPE dilemma assuming that the Council is not prepared to compensate Darlington for Culture for taking on the TUPE liabilities.

DfC intend to employ directly a few 'core' staff, to cover the functions of:

- Arts Centre Management – dedicated entirely to the overall performance of the Arts Centre, and to strategic direction and leadership, financial management, external liaison, fund-raising, business development, etc.
- Arts administration including community engagement, programming
- Operations Supervision – responsible for the day-to-day operations of the centre, including the deployment of volunteers and training
- Marketing and partnerships
- Catering and bar management; chef

- Technical support

Darlington for Culture has budgeted £240K for salaries.

### **Our capital strategy**

Darlington for Culture is uncertain of the exact condition of the building. We have not seen the latest conditions survey but understand that it is a few years old. We have seen the Globe Report which suggests that the building, whilst requiring on-going maintenance, seems structurally sound (although Globe is not providing a professional opinion on the condition of the building). We are also aware that Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form Centre did undertake a survey in recent years but this has not been made available.

DfC's view is that the building was not purpose-built as an Arts Centre, but few such centres are. The foyer area, bar, seating, galley space is very good. The theatre space is good, as are the club room. There are other very good spaces in the centre but also some which clearly need refurbishment/refreshment.

On the whole, DfC is satisfied with the condition of the building – subject to survey - whilst recognising that it could benefit from some improvements.

It is our view that we will not spend any more on the on-going maintenance of the building than did the Borough Council in the last year.

Therefore, we believe that there will not be the need for major works for the next five years but that during that time we will work with Darlington Borough Council to develop a plan for the long term future of the Vane Terrace site and the future of the arts in Darlington

### **Lease**

DfC would wish a lease period of at least 5 years with a view to buying the building after that. A shorter period of time severely restricts the ability to raise funding (either through grant aid or raising money elsewhere). Also, a longer lease allows for the sponsorship of areas of the Arts Centre. We appreciate that this issue might be subject to some discussion, where lease periods are interspersed with reviews, etc.

### **Utilities, supplies and contracts**

We are aware of the costs associated with the major service suppliers and welcome the Council's offer for DfC to 'piggy-back' on its existing contract. DfC is taking further advice on this issue and will report back when more information is available. We await the Council providing DfC with further information concerning on-going contractual commitments.

## **Section 4 – About Darlington for Culture Limited**

Darlington for Culture Limited (DfC) was formed in May 2011. Those who formed this organisation are passionate local people who first came together in November 2010 to secure the continuing integrity of arts and culture for the town, especially in the face of potential cuts to funding.

The committee of DfC has a great mix of relevant skills and experience, including those with a rich background of working in culture and the arts, a qualified accountant, those who've held directorships of voluntary organisations, those with significant commercial experience and members with broad experiences of paid and unpaid work in the voluntary sector.

The committee of DfC has a number of sub-groups with a large number of additional people with wide ranging skills and experience. More information about the committee, including it's structure and members can be found in Appendix 1.

DfC is a Community Benefit Society, a kind of co-operative. A Community Benefit Society, or Bencom for short, is a type of Industrial and Provident Society (IPS) that puts individual and group members at the heart of everything. An IPS is an incorporated body with limited liability under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965-2002 and the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2003, and is registered with the Financial Services Authority.

IPS's are limited by shares, but these are different from company shares – they do not gain in face value and can be bought back by the IPS. One member, one vote always applies, no matter what a member's shareholding (which can be up to a legal limit of £20K). IPS shares provide equity that the society can use to raise investment and secure additional loan finance.

DfC can, at a future date and if required, convert to a multi-share Bencom able to carry out a community share issue or convert to a Bencom with charitable status.

The objects of DfC shall be to carry on any trade, industry or business for the benefit of the community:

- either alone or in partnership with others, to provide cultural and arts activities, events, services and facilities in Darlington the area of benefit, which shall include co-ordinating programmes of cultural events and activities;
- to support and contribute to the sustainability of Darlington Arts Centre;
- to provide support, services and opportunities for artists, user groups, cultural organisations, creative industries and the wider public within the area of benefit;
- to provide opportunities for the public, regardless of their age, infirmity or disability, financial hardship or social circumstances, to participate in arts and culture.

DfC is not a direct provider of the arts – although individual members of Darlington for Culture are artists and there are a number of arts organisations who are members.

Throughout 2011 DfC has increasingly been seen as the voice of arts and artists in Darlington, and to speak for those in the community who see art and culture as central to the fabric of the town.

DfC has focused efforts on saving the Arts Centre as the cultural focus of the town. To this end, DfC has not only engaged with the Darlington Arts Enquiry Group but also with artists, user groups and the wider public. Via public meetings, email, social media, market stalls, events and a website DfC has already directly engaged with over 1,500 people. In addition DfC have featured very heavily in the local press,

appearing on the front page of all of the local papers, and so indirectly reaching tens of thousands of others.

DfC has over 150 paid up members, including 16 organisations, and has recruited and inducted over 70 volunteers.

DfC is working in close partnership with Darlington Council and others and this has led to the co-ordination of a week of cultural activities (culminating in a centrepiece event that attracted over 1,500 people) and programming of activities in the Arts Centre on Mondays and Tuesdays.

DfC believe that there can be a vibrant and creative future for the arts in Darlington, based on a vibrant and sustainable Arts Centre. This is best achieved if public, voluntary and private sector organisations work together based on a shared understanding of the value that culture can bring to the people and economy of the town.

### **Section 5 – Partnerships and support**

Working in partnership is vital, particularly in a climate where funding is being cut and working together is seen as important to funders and many other agencies. The local authority, with Darlington Partnership, has signified the importance of new ways of partnership working in 'One Darlington' (a sustainable community strategy). DfC recognise that partnership working is key to maximising knowledge, experience, skills and resources.

The following are some of the key organisations that DfC has worked with or sought advice/support from. They are all organisations with whom we increasingly want to work.

**Darlington Borough Council** - From the very beginning, Darlington Borough Council has been very supportive of DfC. This is demonstrated most clearly by the collaborative work that led to DfC's week of cultural activities at the beginning of September, which culminated in a market event attended by over 1,500 people. DfC have engaged and worked positively across the council - from councillors to directors to frontline staff. To DfC this is a central relationship. Darlington Borough Council has also agreed to DfC organising events and activities in the Arts Centre on Monday and Tuesday evenings.

**Darlington Partnership** – As a key member of the Arts Enquiry Group, DfC was unique in engaging in every single main and sub-group meeting to positively engage in this vitally important process about the strategic future of culture in the town. DfC has also positively engaged with the Chair of Darlington Partnership.

**Darlington Media Group** – As a community led arts group DfC feel a lot of affinity with DMG and have not only met with representatives on a number of occasions but have also benefited from DMG's support in relation to our website and posters/flyers for key events. DfC see DMG as continuing to be a key tenant and would like to work with them in their aspiration to take on the running of the Blanche Pease building as part of our zonal approach to the Arts Centre.

**Theatre Hulabaloo** – As a nationally recognised specialist youth theatre provider (who have just had their Arts Council funding increased) we see Theatre Hulabaloo as another key tenant and continue to meet with them in relation to how we can best work together. DfC recognise Theatre Hulabaloo's huge contribution to Darlington and want to work with them to ensure the town remains their home. As stated elsewhere having national expertise is core to the sustainability strategy for the Arts Centre.

**Queen Elizabeth College** – Currently an anchor tenant Queen Elizabeth College now have plans to create their own arts facilities, with plans to have these operational by Autumn 2012. Although this means that they will not need to use the Arts Centre as much as now it seems that they will still have requirements for additional space. We have made links with the College and wish to build on these further to bring mutual benefit to our endeavours.

**eVOLution** – DfC recognise Evolution's key role as the umbrella body for third sector organisations in the town and share their ethos 'community at heart, business in mind'. DfC has already benefited from the support of Evolution, particularly in relation to work with volunteers, and know they will be a key source of specialist advice in relation to the practical realities of facility and service management for a social enterprise.

**The Arts Council** – Clearly a major source of funding in the arts we have met with and communicated with representatives of the Arts Council on a number of occasions. DfC is very aware of the potential for The Arts Council to claw back funding provided to the Arts Centre if facilities do not continue to be used for their intended purpose.

**The Forum** – As a social enterprise with success in arts provision within the town Darlington for Culture recognise the importance and rich experience/knowledge of Humantics. DfC has had a number of meetings with Humantics and know it is key that activities of both organisations are clearly aligned and complimentary.

**Gem Arts** – a Gateshead based multi-cultural arts agency – a national portfolio organisation – who are keen to work with us.

**Ruskin Mill** – a national charitable trust with an interest in education and innovative initiatives for young people is in discussion with us concerning a potential partnership in the running of the Arts Centre

There are a number of cultural and other experts that DfC have liaised with in putting together this business plan, including senior arts officers in other local authorities, leaders of local, national and international cultural organisations, as well as present and past staff members from the Arts Centre. DfC have a number of offers of expert support, including from Globe consultants (who wrote a report future options for the Arts Centre), Brian Debnam Associates, other arts organisations, commercial advice from the Metro Centre and pro bono advice from a commercial solicitor.

DfC recognise that more support is required to further sharpen our business planning. So DfC already have two days support from the Co-operative Enterprise Hub available and are currently looking for grant funding to aid feasibility and

business planning work. DfC are also looking to set up a business alliance to contribute advice, mentoring, pro bono support and resources.

More broadly DfC recognise that we do not necessarily have the ability to acquire all the skills required to manage the Arts Centre. Therefore strategic partners will be sought to help with activities such as lettings, marketing and running the café.

It is important for DfC that user groups and other relevant organisations have a voice within Darlington for Culture so we have allowed organisations as well as individuals to become members, have held meetings with user groups, advertise the activities of local cultural organisations via our email list and are now developing part of our website as an online hub for local cultural organisations.

Vital to the success of the future of the Arts Centre would be a Management Committee, which would involve all leaseholders, key tenants and representatives of user groups.

The following organisations are paid up members of Darlington for Culture, who have signed up to our objects:

- Benet House Writers
- Darlington Arts Centre R&B Club
- Darlington CAMRA
- Darlington Community Carnival
- Darlington & District National Childbirth Trust
- Darlington Folk Club
- Darlington Green Theatre
- Darlington Media Group
- Darlington & Teesdale Naturalist's Field Club
- First Stop
- Gasto Promotions
- Inkerman Writers
- National Council of Women
- Press Gang
- U3A Darlington
- Vane Women