

# Darlington Town Centre

*Where Quality comes to Life Logo to be inserted*

TITLE

*? A Town Centre with More Quality*

**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: to maintain and enhance the distinctive character of Darlington Town Centre and its position as a premier destination for visitors, shoppers and businesses.

Partnership, co-operation and active participation will be our main assets in securing Darlington's commercial future. 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.

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

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.”

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, 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.

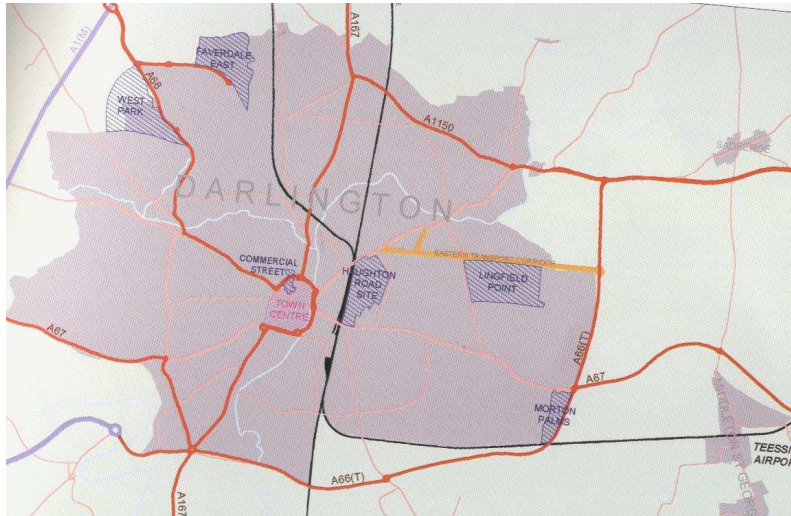
### Key Aspirations

- To make more of 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 more high quality restaurants
- Encourage the development of 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, housing schemes, shopping centres and attractive environmental programmes for the town centre in the next three to five years.



\*\* 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 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

Bondgate Improvements

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.”

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.

### Key Aspirations

- Encourage Sunday Trading
- Develop an Evening Economy and address public perceptions regarding safety at night, and licensing / cultural issues
- Make better use of branding (ensuring clarity of the Darlington offer) through marketing and promotion
- Address public perception regarding transport accessibility
- Engage with business to manage the ‘change’ during the period 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.

\*\*A number of current performance indicators (from the Darlington Retail study) could be added to highlight what Darlington has to offer eg

Total retail floorspace  
Catchment population  
Experian Retail Centre ranking  
Vitality Score  
Vacancy rates  
Secure Car parks

Footfall figures – based on an average weekly flow  
With map and locations for footflow count

Socio-economic profile

Zone A Rents

Sunday trading figures

\*\* 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, 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 to 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 take action on the kind of problems that face any town, for example

Litter,

Graffiti

Flyposting

Keeping empty retail units tidy

Chewing gum



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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