
DARLINGTON ECONOMIC REGENERATION STRATEGY

**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Councillor David Lyonette,
Regeneration and Planning Portfolio**
Responsible Director(s) - John Buxton, Director of Development and Environment

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the process followed to develop an Economic Regeneration Strategy for Darlington to cover the period 2004/05 to 2008/09, and to present the final draft for endorsement.

Information and Analysis

2. Since its development in 1999 Darlington's five year economic regeneration strategy 'For a Brighter Future' has guided activity in Darlington and enabled a considerable amount of external funding to be levered in. This is now due to be replaced with a further five year strategy provisionally entitled 'Gateway to Economic Quality'.
3. The new economic regeneration strategy will cover the period 2004/05 to 2008/09 and will outline the actions required to meet the Economy aim of the Darlington Community Strategy.
4. As with the previous strategy, the document has been developed through the Darlington Partnership and has been built upon the views and aspirations of all key partners. 'Gateway to Economic Quality' forms a key part of the Darlington Partnership's strategic planning framework, and progress against the strategy will consequently be monitored on an annual basis through the Darlington Partnership's action planning process.
5. 'Gateway to Economic Quality' has also been developed in line with other key sub-regional and regional strategies such as the Regional Economic Strategy and the Tees Valley Vision and will reflect the contribution made to them by the Darlington economy.

Legal Implications

6. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

7. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Outcome of Consultation

8. The strategy builds on the public consultation carried out in the development of the Community Strategy and the document has been subject to detailed consultation with DBC staff, key partner agencies and the Darlington Partnership itself. A focus group has also been held with businesses in the town, facilitated by North East Chamber of Commerce.
9. Environment Scrutiny Committee also considered the direction of the strategy at an early stage and their views were reflected in subsequent drafts.
10. The Darlington Partnership is due to consider the final draft of the document at their Economy and Environment Group meeting on 20 May and the Board meeting in July.

Council Policy Framework

11. 'Gateway to Economic Quality' sets the Council's policy framework for its economic regeneration activity.

Decision Deadline

12. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter

Key Decisions

13. In accordance with the Council's Constitution this matter is classed as a Key Decision and has been advertised in the Forward Plan as the strategy will affect the whole Borough.

Recommendation

14. It is recommended that the Economic Regeneration Strategy, 'Gateway to Economic Quality' be agreed and referred to Council for approval.

Reasons

15. This recommendation is supported by the following reasons :-

- (a) To provide direction to economic regeneration activities undertaken by the Council
- (b) To enable the Council to fulfil its role in delivering the Community Strategy.

**John Buxton,
Director of Development and Environment**

Background Papers

Darlington Community Strategy
Darlington Community Strategy Action Plan 2003/04

Richard Horniman : Extension 2681
RH

Draft Darlington Economic Regeneration Strategy 2004 to 2009

FOREWORD

Alasdair MacConachie & David Lyonette

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** Complete last**

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The Darlington Economic Regeneration Strategy aims to provide a focus to regeneration activity in Darlington and is a key supporting document to the Darlington Partnership's over-arching Community Strategy. The Economic Regeneration Strategy will also provide direction to activities developed within the annual Community Strategy action planning process.

Vision

The vision guiding the economic regeneration of Darlington is:

"To develop a more enterprising, vibrant and diverse local economy, situated in a high quality environment, that will attract investment, share prosperity and create better employment opportunities for local people"

This vision will require all organisations in Darlington to work together, tackling longstanding problems and maximising potential opportunities in a strategic and co-ordinated way.

Stimulating Growth

Despite retaining strengths in industries such as construction and civil engineering, the Darlington economy is now increasingly dominated by the service sector, and most future growth is expected to follow this trend. If the Darlington economy is to prosper, it needs to build upon these existing strengths and use its excellent location and quality of life factors to attract and stimulate growth.

The location and quality of life factors, which set Darlington apart from neighbouring areas, have been encapsulated within the Darlington Gateway concept, which defines Darlington's economic role and helps to identify particular types of employment that can be attracted to the Borough. To support the Gateway concept, a number of key strategic sites have been identified for development, where the type of development to be pursued is aimed at maximising the potential opportunities arising within targeted sectors. The main areas of growth targeted in Darlington over the period of this strategy will be:

- The distribution and logistics sector, centring on the new Faverdale East Business Park
- Financial or business services located in prestige accommodation to be developed at Morton Palms, Haughton Road and Lingfield Point

The success of these developments will have a significant impact on the growth of the economy, as will other key economic drivers, such as development of shopping facilities and the physical environment in Darlington Town Centre as well as the expansion and re-branding of Teesside International Airport.

Increasing Wage Levels

The period of this strategy will see a significant amount of physical development, which will create new employment within the Borough. Although Darlington already has a relatively low unemployment rate, average wage levels are much lower than in neighbouring areas. Much of this is the direct result of a service sector economy and can only be addressed by creating or attracting jobs in higher value-added sectors, such as financial services. The economic regeneration of Darlington will therefore be focussed on generating *quality* jobs.

Themes

The activity required to achieve the overall vision of this strategy has been divided into five key themes:

1. Support the economy
2. Support new and existing businesses
3. Support people into employment
4. Create a quality environment for economic growth
5. Promote Darlington as a quality location for business and tourism

Section xx details the specific aims and objectives within each of these themes, which will provide the long term direction to individual activities, developed on an annual basis, through the Community Strategy action planning process.

Performance

The overall performance of the Darlington economy will be monitored against four key strategic outcomes:

1. Increased levels of employment
2. Higher wage levels
3. Growth in business start-ups
4. More investment retained within the local economy

These strategic outcomes reflect the elements of the Economic Regeneration Strategy, which will have the most direct effect on the economy, and as such, will enable the performance of the strategy to be continually evaluated.

CONTEXT

The economic landscape has changed significantly since the development of Darlington's first Economic Regeneration Strategy in 1999. Each of the changes has impacted upon the way economic regeneration services are delivered, and how Darlington copes with continual change will be crucial to future economic performance. The key changes can be categorised as follows:

Economic

Globalisation

Recent years have seen the fastest rate of global economic change in history. Due to the nature of the Darlington economy, decisions on expansions, closures and relocations are increasingly taken outside the area and are rarely influenced at a local level. The remaining manufacturing employment in Darlington is becoming increasingly vulnerable to isolation and competition from low wage economies elsewhere in Europe, Asia and South America. This, combined with increasing globalisation, is leading to more companies having their fate linked to the global economy rather than regional performance.

Technology

The rapid pace of change in the global economy, together with technological advances, has required local businesses to be more agile and adaptable than ever before. For example, the development of internet based services are often viewed as restricting the growth of some service sector jobs such as those in call centres, which Darlington currently relies heavily upon. The future prosperity of Darlington is dependant upon a flexible local economy, reacting positively to technological advances.

Wage Levels

As the unemployment rate has fallen significantly in Darlington over the past five years, there has been a greater emphasis on the quality of jobs being created. As a predominantly service sector economy, Darlington is suffering from wage levels which fall well below its neighbours and is showing little sign of catching up. With relatively few research or head office functions, Darlington faces a real challenge to reverse this particular trend.

Organisational

Regional

The establishment of the Regional Development Agency, One NorthEast, has impacted heavily upon the way in which regeneration is co-ordinated and funded in Darlington. Since their formation in 1999, One NorthEast has developed its leadership role within the Region and is devolving funds and responsibility for delivery down through sub-regional structures. One NorthEast has also reviewed the provision of business support services across the region and is introducing a new brokerage model which will be demand based rather than supplier led.

Sub-Regional

It is at the Tees Valley level that the most change has been experienced, with the creation of many new sub-regional organisations and an increased emphasis on the five boroughs working together. The most strategic change has seen the Tees Valley Partnership become a significant force in determining the economic future of the sub-region, through the development of a co-ordinating role across a wide range of issues, and the production of the sub-regional economic regeneration strategy 'Tees Valley Vision'.

New organisations have also been created, such as Business Link Tees Valley, Connexions and Tees Valley Learning and Skills Council, which have clarified and improved the strategic co-ordination of services across common boundaries, whilst Tees Valley Regeneration have taken over the role of facilitating flagship developments across the sub-region and managing inward investment activity.

Local

As the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for the area, the Darlington Partnership has evolved over the past few years into a more inclusive structure, based on an executive board and themed working groups taking responsibility for specific elements of a newly developed Community Strategy. As a result of government policy, the LSP is increasingly replacing the local authority in the co-ordination of regeneration work.

Direction

Strategy

The Regional Economic Strategy, 'Realising Our Potential', now sets out a clear vision for the North East economy under the strategic leadership of One NorthEast. The Regional Economic Strategy represents the major strategy within which the future economic regeneration of Darlington will be influenced. The recently produced Tees Valley Vision has also set out the context for Darlington's role in increasing the performance of the sub-regional economy.

Funding

One NorthEast has devolved a significant proportion of its funding to individual sub-regions, placing a huge emphasis on delivery through sub-regional partnership arrangements. The resultant Single Programme funding stream, which is distributed and managed sub-regionally, has become a key source of funding for economic regeneration activities in the area. The importance of the Single Programme is likely to increase still further as a reduction in the availability of European Funding post 2006 will start to have an impact on longer term project delivery.

Best Value

The 2002 Best Value Review of the Council's Regeneration Service recommended a number of changes in strategic direction, service delivery and performance management. Some of the changes impact directly upon this strategy, and the corresponding Best Value Improvement Action Plan will continue to influence the delivery of regeneration over the coming years.

DARLINGTON PROFILE

Geography

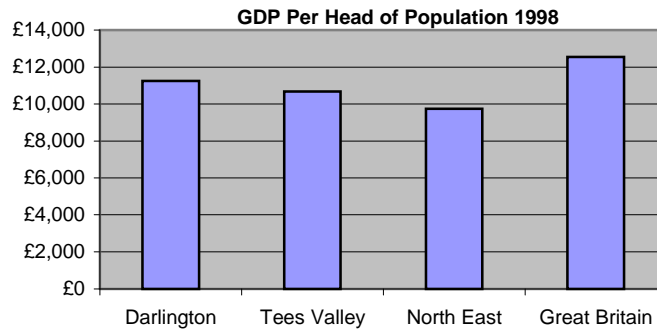
Located in the North East of England, Darlington covers an area of approximately 198 square kilometres (76 square miles). The River Tees and North Yorkshire lie to the South, the former coalfield areas of County Durham to the north and Teesdale to the west. The land to the eastern side of Darlington is made up of the boroughs of Stockton, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Hartlepool, which along with Darlington, make up the Tees Valley Sub-Region.

Demography

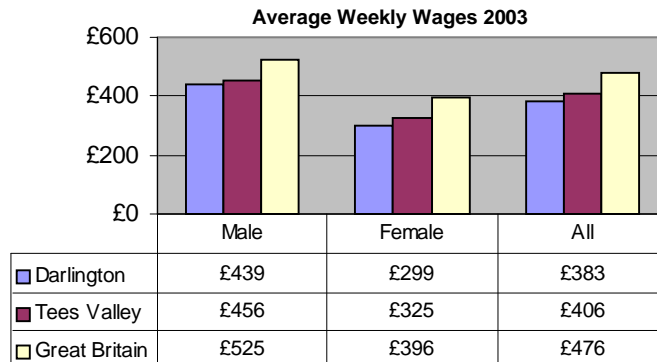
The Borough of Darlington has a population of 97,838 living in 42,309 households, with over 85,000 people living in the town itself. Although Darlington is the second smallest borough in the Tees Valley in terms of population, over a million people live within twenty miles of the town and almost 1.8 million within thirty miles. There are also over a million people of working age within 30 miles of the town centre. Darlington has an aging population, with fewer people in the 17 to 65 age group than regional and national comparisons.

Economy

The output of the Darlington economy is relatively high, set against a background of regional underperformance. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Darlington economy was measured in 1998 (latest figures available) as £11,254 per head of population, which is significantly above sub-regional and regional levels, indicating strong levels of production and profitability.



The relative strength of the Darlington economy is not, however, reflected in employee wage levels, which are considerably lower than in surrounding areas, and represent a significant local issue.



These low wage levels relate to people working in Darlington. Wages earned by people *living* in Darlington are generally higher, and closer to the Tees Valley average.

Education and Skills

Educational attainment in Darlington is considerably above sub-regional performance levels at all Key Stages and is largely reflective of the national picture. The town has a strong culture of further education and Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College is ranked among the top ten colleges in the Country.

Educational Performance 2003

	KS2 (Average Points)	KS3 (Average Points)	GCSE 5+ (A*-C)
Darlington	27.5	34.3	51.0
Tees Valley	27.3	33.2	45.8
England	27.4	34.3	52.9

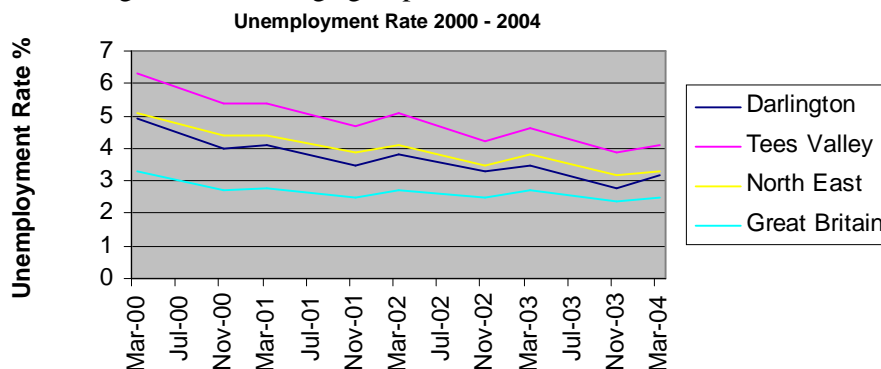
This positive trend dips slightly when considering progression into higher education, as fewer people in Darlington are going on to university than in some neighbouring areas, which is reflective of the lack of a university campus. This relatively low university progression rate is mirrored by higher than average progression straight into full time employment by school leavers. Despite this, skill levels among the adult population are high, as are those of the Darlington workforce, where skills are more in line with national levels than those exhibited in neighbouring areas.

Qualifications Held 2001

	% of 16-74 pop holding a degree or equivalent	% of workforce holding NVQ 1&2	% of workforce holding NVQ 3 or equivalent
Darlington	16.5	34.2	42.9
Tees Valley	13.8	32.5	40.6
North East	15.0	31.7	42.4
England and Wales	19.8	30.4	44.4

Employment

Although limited at the higher end of the jobs market, employment opportunities in Darlington are more numerous than in other areas and there are a greater proportion of people in full time work. This high level of employment is largely a result of the expanding service sector in the area, with a range of relatively low paid, employment opportunities available to school leavers. As a consequence, the unemployment rate is much lower than in surrounding areas and is particularly low among the under 20 age group.



Unemployment in Darlington has consistently remained lower than sub-regional and regional rates, but has followed the same trends very closely. Unemployment among the over 50 age group is a particular concern, especially for an economy with an aging workforce. Unemployment among the over 50's represents 20.8% of the area's unemployment, compared to 16.8% nationally and 16% in the Tees Valley. Unemployment also disproportionately affects certain disadvantaged groups and communities.

Another factor reflecting a strong service sector is the high employment rate among females.

Businesses

The (VAT registered) business stock in Darlington is shrinking by around 2% each year. This is a result of losing 10% of all businesses each year, with only 8% of new businesses taking their place. This is consistent with sub-regional performance, in contrast to more stable regional and national trends.

The number of self employed people in Darlington is significantly higher than neighbouring areas, and indeed sub-regional and regional averages. Darlington is still, however, ranked in the lowest 15% of local authority areas in the country and the low business birth rate is seen as a key factor in restricting further economic growth.

The vast majority (78%) of companies in Darlington employ less than 10 people, which is a higher proportion than regional and sub-regional comparisons, although still short of the national average of 83%. This is balanced out by a below average number of mid-range companies (11-199) and a significant over representation of large employers (200+).

The service sector dominates the employment base in Darlington, employing 79% of the workforce, with significant growth in the public administration and distribution sectors. Public sector employment is particularly prominent in Darlington, covering 23.4% of the workforce and includes two of the largest employers in the area - Darlington Borough Council (approx. 4,500) and Darlington Memorial Hospital (approx. 1,000). As in other areas, the manufacturing base is declining, with only 13.1% of the employment share. Construction and distribution are also key strengths of the Darlington economy, as the employment share for these sectors exceeds that of sub-regional, regional and national comparisons.



Summary

The Darlington economy is performing well and has key strengths in a number of areas such as public administration, distribution and construction. Both the population and the workforce are highly skilled and able to take advantage of the numerous opportunities presented by a strong service sector. The dominance of the service sector does however appear to be constraining wage levels and limiting higher-level skills development in school leavers.

The shrinking business base and low rates of self employment (although high for the region) will also limit further growth unless trends are reversed.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Darlington Economic Regeneration Strategy has been developed in the context of the European, national and regional policy framework. As this framework changes over time, so must this local strategy. The past two years have seen a comprehensive examination of the strategy governing the way the North East and the Tees Valley aim to overcome an increasing gap between these areas and more prosperous areas of the country. The key strategies affecting economic regeneration in Darlington are summarised below:

The Northern Way (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister)

The Northern Way represents the first steps in a long-term vision to exploit the economic and transport corridors that connect the North. The Northern Way seeks to promote inter-regional collaboration and aims to boost connectivity and transport links that will ultimately create sustainable communities.

Although the focus on transport corridors will enable Darlington to play a key role in the emerging Northern Way, an emphasis on core cities and core urban areas will require the Tees Valley to demonstrate how it operates as an urban area and how Darlington can add value to the economy of the North.

The Regional Economic Strategy 'Realising Our Potential' (One NorthEast)

The vision of the strategy is:

"We will harness and enhance the human, cultural and environmental resources of the Region so that, by 2010, the North East is vibrant, self reliant, ambitious, and outward looking. To do so, we will raise the aspirations and profile of the region, making it more prosperous and more inclusive"

The strategy is divided into six key areas:

- Creating wealth by raising the productivity of all businesses
- Establishing a new entrepreneurial culture
- Creating a healthy labour market supported by a skilled workforce
- Recognising our universities and colleges at the heart of the Region's economy
- Meeting the 21st century transport, communications and property needs
- Realising the renaissance of our rural and urban communities

Tees Valley Vision (Tees Valley Partnership)

The strategy document 'Tees Valley Vision' sets out the sub-regional framework necessary to reverse social and economic trends that have existed over generations. The strategy includes the following aim for Darlington:

"Darlington is an attractive office location and a successful regional centre - for shopping, business services, visitors, leisure and arts - serving North Yorkshire, County Durham and the western part of the Tees Valley".

The strategy looks at three main areas:

Creating Sustainable Jobs

The first key objective of the strategy is to build a more diversified, sustainable and competitive economy, through a rebuilding of the enterprise culture, improving business formation rates and expanding the third sector.

Creating Attractive Places

The second key objective is to create liveable and inspiring environments in the towns and countryside, in our neighbourhoods, along the Tees and on the coasts. The Vision recognises that Darlington is an area with particular characteristics, which, if capitalised upon, would make a

significant contribution to the prosperity of the wider Tees Valley. This unique position has been harnessed under the Darlington Gateway concept.

Creating Confident Communities

The final element of the strategy is to build confident and vibrant communities. This includes strengthening the self-esteem and aspirations of the people of the Tees Valley, to equip them with the skills to compete in 21st century economies.

Where Quality Comes to Life - A Community Strategy for Darlington (Darlington Partnership)

The Community Strategy maps out a vision for Darlington based on:

"Together our community will expect and strive to achieve:

- *An area creating and sharing prosperity*
- *A location for learning, achievement and leisure*
- *A place for living safely and well*
- *A high quality environment with excellent communication links"*

The Strategy looks at improving the local economy through developing a more enterprising, vibrant and diverse local economy that strengthens local businesses and enterprises and will attract investment, share prosperity and create better employment for all. The indicators used to demonstrate progress against this aim are:

- Increasing levels of employment
- Higher wage levels
- Growth in business start-ups
- More investment retained in the local economy

DARLINGTON GATEWAY

Darlington Gateway

A piece of research carried out in 2003 by Donaldsons and SQW, examined whether the western end of the Tees Valley could, by virtue of its quality of life factors and communications infrastructure, attract economic activity and development which would not otherwise come to the sub-region. This research demonstrated that Darlington plays a vital 'gateway' role, linking Tees Valley with South Durham and North Yorkshire and has particular characteristics, which, if capitalised upon, would make a significant contribution to the prosperity of the Region. These unique characteristics have been harnessed under the banner of 'Darlington Gateway' and can be summarised in two main categories:

Communications

The A1(M) and A66 trunk roads pass through Darlington on the edge of the urban area, providing fast and efficient north-south and east-west connections respectively. Darlington's Bank Top Railway Station is on the East Coast Mainline and provides fast and frequent rail services to many parts of the country and is only 2½ hours from central London. The rapidly expanding Teesside International Airport, which lies within the

Borough, offers daily flights to London and other regional and European airports and Darlington is located just 25 minutes from the UK's second largest port (Teesport).

Quality Of Life

Darlington is an historic market town, which provides an attractive and pleasant living environment, with first class shopping facilities and further retail developments underway. The Borough also offers a wide range of 'lifestyle' facilities (health clubs, sports centres, restaurants) and there are good schools and first class housing both within the town itself and surrounding villages. Darlington offers good accessibility to high quality rural areas and is within easy reach of other large centres in both the North East and Yorkshire.

Darlington Gateway Development Framework (Donaldsons / Darlington Borough Council)

The Darlington Gateway Development Framework 2003 explored the Gateway concept and looked at key sites for development, which could potentially attract employment to Darlington by building on its gateway location and quality of life characteristics. The framework also provides a set of investment priorities principally for the Tees Valley Partnership, Tees Valley Regeneration and the Darlington Partnership.

The report concluded that Darlington is well placed to create new inward investment opportunities and if the right offer is created this will support any future growth and expansion of existing businesses in the town. The four key sites examined in the study were:

- Haughton Road
- Faverdale
- Morton Palms
- Darlington Great Park

Morton Palms, Haughton Road and Faverdale have been identified as crucial to the growth of the Darlington economy over the next five years, whilst Darlington Great Park will form part of the longer term development picture once Morton Palms Business Park is fully developed.

Demand

The Darlington Gateway Development Framework also demonstrated that there was sufficient demand for accommodation within specific sectors to justify major development. Demand exists particularly for modern, medium sized industrial units (900 to 20,000 sq m) and units in the 9,500 to 30,000 sq m range to accommodate large distribution and logistics operations. There is also significant demand for prestige office accommodation both in central and out of town locations.

Changing Role

Darlington's economy is becoming increasingly service sector focussed and work carried out as part of an economic futures study by the University of Glasgow and the Darlington Gateway Development Framework identifies the key sectors that Darlington is able to attract. The financial and business services market is growing in the North East and Darlington is ideally placed to add to its existing cluster of similar successful businesses (AMEC, Capita, Darlington

Building Society). Prestige accommodation will need to be developed (in the right location) to make the most of this opportunity.

The distribution and logistics sector is also an area of opportunity as existing distribution hubs elsewhere in the North are operating at capacity, and Darlington represents an attractive and potentially lower cost alternative. The decision by Argos to locate their Argos Direct distribution centre at Faverdale East Business Park is seen as confirmation that Darlington can fulfil this gateway role on a national scale.

The nature of the developments underpinning the gateway concept, have been designed to further develop these key sectors and maximise the opportunities where growth is expected.

FRAMEWORK FOR DELIVERY

As the lead body for the co-ordination of economic regeneration in the area, the Darlington Partnership is responsible for ensuring that the Economic Regeneration Strategy is delivered effectively and the economic benefits felt by Darlington residents are maximised.

As the Local Strategic Partnership for the area, the Darlington Partnership brings together the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to oversee the development and ultimate implementation of the Darlington Community Strategy. This Economic Regeneration Strategy details the approach to be taken in achieving the goals laid out in the Economy Section of that Community Strategy and is consistent with the remaining themes explored in the document.

****diagram - Darlington Partnership structure****

The strategic co-ordination of activities and the assessment of progress against each objective of this strategy will be managed through the Economy and Environment Group of the Partnership, which includes representatives of the key agencies involved in the direct delivery of economic regeneration activities in Darlington.

The performance management processes required to monitor the effectiveness of this strategy will be included in the annual development of Community Strategy Action Plans. The Economy Section of these Annual Plans will include an update on progress made and the targets to be achieved in the forthcoming year. This process will also be used to continually review the objectives of the Economic Regeneration Strategy and identify the point where the relevance of the document and its contents begins to come under question.

As the responsibility for delivering specific actions contained in the strategy falls to individual organisations within the structure of the Partnership, the Economic Regeneration Strategy has been developed with reference to the aims and objectives of key partners. To maintain this consistency, the Strategy will be constantly reviewed to ensure that it remains in line with the evolving objectives of partner organisations and will be adapted where appropriate, to reflect reviewed priorities or changes in policy.

KEY DRIVERS

The performance of the Darlington economy is dependent upon a range of factors, many of which are beyond local and sub-regional influence. There are however a number of key drivers which will have a marked impact on the economy over the next five years. These are identified

as priorities for development and are the subject of significant investment to maximise their potential.

Darlington Town Centre

The vision for the town centre is to develop its role as a sub-regional centre by:

- (a) Improving the environment of the town centre, taking advantage of its natural and historic assets;
- (b) Providing a high quality public realm, capable of being used for activities which will bring commercial as well as social benefits to the town centre;
- (c) Using land available for development to address gaps in what the town centre offers;
- (d) Providing units capable of attracting larger retailers to the centre, increasing employment levels;
- (e) Strengthening the representation of both multiple and specialist independent retailers, locating them so that they support and strengthen existing areas.

The development of the town centre has been mapped out in its development strategy 'Adding to Quality' which includes the creation of a new 'pedestrian heart' to the town centre. The proposals will add to existing pedestrian space in and around the town centre and will create a critical mass of pedestrian-friendly streets and open spaces.

The town centre also contains a number of sites for development, which will form a crucial part of the town centre's future. The key site in the town centre is Commercial Street, which will see the construction of around 25 shop units, with 20,000 sq m of retail space. The development will enable Darlington to attract the national multiples with larger units and associated leisure uses.

Haughton Road

Haughton Road is a flagship development for Darlington and a key project for Tees Valley Regeneration, the Urban Regeneration Company for the area. The site covers over 30 hectares of brownfield land in the centre of town, next to the East Coast Mainline. Good access to Darlington's main railway station and the town centre provides the ideal location for a high quality, mixed use development including potential for offices, housing, public open space, hotel and conference facilities. Early estimates for the site indicate the potential for up to 600 dwellings and 30,000 sq m of commercial accommodation.

The centrepiece of the site will be a £30 million state of the art Learning Park which will be the new home of Darlington College of Technology from 2006. The College development will include a Young People's Centre, University Centre, Sports and Leisure complex, Health and Childcare Centre, Technology Centre for engineering computing and construction and high tech Media Centre. The college relocation and accompanying 10,000 full time students will add vibrancy and life to the Haughton Road development.

Faverdale East Business Park

The Darlington Gateway Development Framework concluded that the western edge of town at Faverdale would be an attractive location for development of a new, high quality business park. The development of Faverdale East Business Park will provide modern accommodation capable of attracting new business to Darlington and space for indigenous businesses looking to expand.

Due to its strategic location and links to the communications network, Faverdale East represents an ideal location for businesses in the distribution, warehousing and logistics sectors.

The first stages of the development will see serviced infrastructure introduced to open up the first phase of 10.8 hectares by 2010. This will accommodate 31,500 sq m of floor space, to be developed by the private sector. This will allow 7 years of much needed employment land to be brought forward at a rate of approximately 4,500 sq m per annum. Phase II can accommodate 65,000 sq m of warehousing, providing space for logistics operations serving the North of England.

Development of Faverdale East Business Park will also provide a means of access to a further 18 hectares of brownfield land and 24 hectares of greenfield land for future development.

Morton Palms Business Park

An 11.3 hectare site, adjacent to the A66 at Morton Palms, is being developed as a joint venture between Darlington Borough Council, One NorthEast and the developer City & Northern. The site will be developed for prestige office accommodation, built to high design standards and offering broadband connectivity. The quality of the product to be made available at Morton Palms will enable the Borough to capture the large increase in financial, business and professional service industry employment growth forecast for the North East and the Tees Valley. The Business Park will see the provision of 31,000 sq m of accommodation, which will ultimately attract over 1,000 jobs.

The key feature of Morton Palms Business Park is its capacity to accommodate *high value-added* service sector industries in Darlington.

An initial phase of two high specification four storey office buildings providing 6,613 sq m of space with parking for 250 cars will be built in 2004 following extensive infrastructure works to the site. Future plans for the development include complementary leisure facilities and hotel as well as an on site crèche. Morton Palms will provide an extremely attractive and accessible working environment and will set the standard for new office development in the Darlington area.

Teesside International Airport

Teesside International Airport is undergoing a major transformation after many years of limited growth, following the acquisition of a 75% interest in the business by Peel Airports Ltd. Engaging a private sector partner has provided the impetus for a major investment programme worth around £32m over the next 5 years, which will be funded jointly through Peel Airports Ltd. and Tees Valley Regeneration.

The development will include public sector investment in the Airport's infrastructure, transport links and private sector investment in the Airport facilities, including terminal improvements. The development potential of land adjacent to the Airport is also to be exploited.

The redevelopment of the Airport will include a major re-branding exercise to promote the new name of 'Durham Tees Valley Airport'. Re-branding and marketing activity will reinforce the new 'Tees Valley' and Durham brands and will market the Airport and the area as a destination for new economic activity and investment. A new Flightlink service will also be developed,

providing a regular bus link between the Airport, Darlington Bank Top Railway Station and Darlington town centre (National Bus station).

Darlington Eastern Transport Corridor

The strategic road network in Darlington is to be improved through the development of the Eastern Transport Corridor, which will form part of the Darlington Cross Town Route once complete. The Eastern Transport Corridor comprises three kilometres of single carriageway linking the A66 to the east of Darlington, and the B627 Haughton Road, to open up access to industrial land and relieve pressure on existing roads.

The road will relieve congestion on key routes such as Yarm Road, McMullen Road and Haughton Road, which will improve traffic flow through the town and further enhance Darlington's position as a gateway to the rest of the Tees Valley.

The route crosses the historic Stockton to Darlington trackbed, which will incorporate improved cycling, equestrian and walking links and provide an opportunity to develop an iconic 'gateway' feature on a historically important route.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Theme 1	Support the Economy
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Aim	To maximise the potential of the area and its people to develop and sustain a strong and diverse economy
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The economy of Darlington relies on many factors, which are beyond the control of organisations in the area, such as worldwide economic trends. By working together and focussing on a shared agenda, the organisations that contribute to the Darlington economy can, however, exert real influence over many of the more locally responsive factors and soften the impact of global change.

These organisations can also act together to influence the strategic direction of higher level bodies, whose policies will ultimately impact upon the area. Again, the shared weight of this influence needs to be co-ordinated, and used effectively, to enable the maximum benefit to be derived for Darlington.

Objective 1 - Support Key Economic Drivers

The key drivers for the Darlington economy over the next five years, will require input from many partners to develop them to their full potential. The main element of support required will be funding, as development of each of the key drivers is dependent on substantial levels of investment. As these drivers exert such influence over the performance of the Darlington economy, it is important to recognise them as our investment priorities. These drivers also represent the areas where Darlington can make the biggest impact upon the sub-regional and regional economies, and efforts will be geared towards ensuring the strategy and investment decisions taken at these higher levels reflect their importance and consider their development in full.

Although the vision for each driver is identified within this strategy, it is necessary to retain an element of flexibility to enable us to be responsive to considered changes in direction and to new opportunities. This flexibility will be crucial in reacting to changes in funding or strategic direction at a regional or national level.

Objective 2 - Deliver Major Projects

The creation of Tees Valley Regeneration (TVR) and other sub-regional structures has changed the way that major projects will be delivered in the Tees Valley, with an emphasis on larger, more strategic projects. The role of TVR in the delivery and co-ordination of major projects needs to be supported by all partner organisations.

How projects are delivered by other organisations and partnerships in Darlington will also be crucial to maximising the effect they can have on the economy. Within all organisations in Darlington, the management and delivery of projects needs to be of the highest quality, with the appropriate level of resource put into planning and developing projects prior to seeking and securing funding. For Darlington to ensure it makes the best of what resources are available, it needs to develop and deliver projects that fit the strategic picture, represent value for money and are funding fed, rather than funding led. These criteria will be applied to all projects developed through the Darlington Partnership.

As resources are inevitably limited, organisations developing projects in Darlington will be encouraged to demonstrate an entrepreneurial spirit in putting together creative funding packages and delivery mechanisms, with maximum use made of partnering arrangements.

Objective 3 - Secure Inward Investment

For the Darlington economy to grow, there is a need to create new businesses, grow existing businesses and encourage a flow of businesses into the town from the rest of the UK and beyond. Although major inward investments such as Nissan are less commonplace now, there are still opportunities to attract companies seeking to relocate from other areas in the UK due to expansion plans or location based needs. New investment also provides additional trading opportunities for existing local companies and can help to raise Darlington's wage levels.

Darlington Borough Council will retain a role in attracting inward investment, in partnership with other local organisations, and will work to ensure the right conditions for investment exist and provide assistance where practicable. Local organisations will also work with Tees Valley Regeneration, who will co-ordinate major inward investment work for the sub-region.

Major international investments will be pursued in conjunction with One NorthEast, who have developed links in key international centres and Darlington organisations will support this work where required.

Objective 4 - Harness the Contributions of Key Partners

Darlington has developed a strong culture of partnership working, which is particularly important in times of adversity, or when unexpected opportunities present themselves. The partnership principle is therefore vital to enabling the economy to prosper and will continue to be fostered wherever possible.

Working together at a local level will also help Darlington 'punch its weight' at sub-regional and regional level, where influencing strategy and programme development is crucial to the flow of funding for major projects and economic regeneration services.

The development of the Community Strategy has placed the Darlington Partnership firmly at the heart of economic regeneration in the town. The key organisations involved in fostering economic growth are all represented in the structures and are focussed on a common agenda. The Darlington Partnership's influence on the economy will increase due to the direction of government policy, but will also increase as the strategic direction of partner organisations becomes further influenced by the Community Strategy. The Darlington Partnership will remain at the core of strategic economic regeneration in Darlington and all organisations should recognise it as **the** vehicle for working together to ensure Darlington's prosperity.

Objective 5 - Maximise Linkages with Local Universities and Colleges

The contribution of universities to the economy is well documented, but is limited in Darlington by the lack of a physical presence. The close proximity of Durham University at Stockton, and Teesside University at Middlesbrough, presents an opportunity to overcome this, and linkages between them and the town need to be strengthened and well marketed. An increased role in the economic future of the sub-region provides the perfect backdrop to engage with the universities and work more closely on projects that will directly benefit Darlington.

Links between FE providers in the town and partners in economic regeneration have traditionally been strong. The development of the Learning Park at Haughton Road will strengthen this bond still further and provide an additional link with the University of Teesside. Aside from the benefits of FE provision being available in Darlington, it will also act as a further catalyst for generating new businesses through close liaison with the business support network.

The relationship between the private sector and the HE/FE sector also needs to be strengthened. Both universities have considerable research facilities that are important tools for business development, as well as the opportunities for 'spin out' projects and the flow of new entrepreneurs.

Objective 6 - Encourage the Creation of Quality Jobs

Although Darlington has relatively low levels of unemployment, there will always be a need to stimulate job creation. As wage levels in Darlington are lower than sub-regional and regional averages there is clearly a need not just to create employment, but also to create the type of employment that will increase wage levels and bring more benefits to the economy than those at the lower end of the scale. This will be pursued through the stimulation of 'quality' jobs, i.e. those that are in-keeping with the positive image of the town and the developments that are currently programmed.

A predominantly service sector economy like Darlington's will inevitably lead to low wage issues, so new developments will be targeted at service sectors where wage levels are high and Darlington already has a core of companies operating within the marketplace, such as legal and financial services. To establish and grow these sectors will require the development of appropriate accommodation and supporting services, as well as marketing activity targeted at promoting, and therefore attracting, quality.

Theme 2	Support New and Existing Businesses
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Aim	To encourage the initiation, growth and development of businesses in Darlington
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The cornerstones of the Darlington economy are the businesses that are located in the town, generating employment and wealth for the area. Supporting existing local business, securing their futures and encouraging them to grow is a vital part of the work carried out by local organisations, but can only form part of the picture. Every year over 10% of the businesses in the area is lost and needs to be replaced to sustain current levels of activity. All successful economies, however, have business start up rates way in excess of that required merely to replenish the existing stock and achieving these high rates of new business formation represents the biggest challenge for the Darlington economy.

Objective 1 - Develop an Entrepreneurial Culture

The number of people in Darlington who see starting their own business as a feasible option needs to be increased if business formation rates are to close the gap on those experienced in more successful economies. Darlington has relatively few people who aspire to run their own business or who recognise the level of support available to them. This will be countered by promoting self employment as an option at an early age and fostering entrepreneurial thinking through the curriculum. Close links between learning establishments and the business support network will be encouraged, and their ongoing support in developing and delivering the curriculum will be crucial to long term change.

The image of self employment and what it entails will also need to be addressed if it is to become an option more young people aspire to. Appropriate marketing, the use of positive role models and mentors etc., will all be important when young people receive careers advice and formulate their future plans.

There is also an opportunity to promote self employment within some of Darlington's more deprived communities, through involvement in social enterprises. Partners in the business support network will work together to support Business Link in their role to co-ordinate and fund the development of social enterprises.

Objective 2 - Support the Development of New Businesses
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The support required for individuals starting a business can be intensive and will vary significantly in type, depending upon the nature of the business idea. The customer led Business Brokerage Model, agreed with One NorthEast will be supported as the mechanism to provide this support to new and fledgling businesses. Business support organisations in Darlington will work within the Brokerage Model, under the co-ordination of Business Link, to provide support

on business plans, marketing and financial planning etc. Partners within the business support network will also provide access to finance for new businesses, through the Start Up Service.

The lack of suitable, modern accommodation for business start ups needs to be addressed in Darlington and development of suitable managed workspace is a priority. This will be linked to the supply of entrepreneurs generated through organisations like Darlington College of Technology and Business Link, to enable maximum support through the difficult early period. Analysis of business sectors that are under-represented in Darlington, will also be crucial in identifying gaps in the market for potential entrepreneurs to take advantage of.

Partners in the business support network will also work with local people to develop social enterprises in deprived communities, in line with the Darlington Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

Objective 3 - Raise the Competitiveness of all Businesses

The productivity or competitiveness of businesses can be greatly enhanced through the receipt of specific support looking at processes, marketing, exporting and skills development. Support to improve these more traditional aspects of performance will continue to be available through partners in the business support network, whilst Durham and Teesside Universities offer opportunities to work with companies at the more specialised end of the market by promoting higher-level skills development, technology transfer and agile process methods.

The development of clusters will also be encouraged, with support for companies working together to improve their productivity and reduce costs. These clusters can be either geographically based (i.e. different types of business on one industrial estate) or sector based (i.e. construction companies spread across town) and can work together to address issues such as joint marketing, joint purchasing and joint security arrangements.

Growth within the existing business base will be encouraged through support given to enable businesses to learn from each other, particularly those learning from individuals who have started and developed highly successful businesses in the Darlington area.

Work will also be carried out with local businesses to ensure, within appropriate legal boundaries, that companies in Darlington are equipped to win contracts from public and private sector organisations thereby retaining money within the local economy where possible.

Objective 4 - Encourage Greater Levels of Business Survival

A large number of the businesses closing down each year are doing so after a relatively short period of trading. This will be reduced through increased levels of 'after care' provided through partners in the business support network. The ongoing support needed once established as a small business can be as intensive as that required in the initial stages of formation, particularly when moving towards becoming a limited company. Other, larger businesses under threat of closure in Darlington will require a different type of support to maintain sustainability and to prevent closure.

Intensive support will be focussed on sectors where threats of closure and job losses are greatest, such as manufacturing and call centres, so that intervention and support can be offered at an earlier stage.

Support will also be provided to companies considering relocation outside Darlington to secure a solution which fits their needs and retains their presence in the area. Close relationships between major companies and sub-regional organisations such as Tees Valley Regeneration and Business Link will need to be particularly strong where major companies are forecasting substantial job losses. Understanding the issues faced by any companies leaving the area will also need to be an outcome of the relationship.

Objective 5 - Provide Advice and Guidance for all Businesses

The advice and guidance required by businesses across the board will be provided, as for business start ups, through the Business Brokerage Model. Support will be co-ordinated by the Tees Valley Business Support Partnership and delivered through a network of specialist providers. Specialist partners within the network will provide tailored advice on issues ranging from legal matters to financial packaging.

Darlington organisations will be encouraged to participate in the network under the Business Link branding to promote a consistent approach. The network of providers will deliver user-friendly services and support appropriate to the requirements and profile of the businesses assisted. This will be underpinned by ensuring that the range of organisations engaged through the Brokerage Model covers the breadth of advice required.

The relationship between existing companies and the organisations within the business support network needs to be maintained on an ongoing basis through regular contact with specified individuals. This will be crucial in identifying potential problems at an early stage and will allow effective interventions.

Specific support will continue to be provided to centrally based businesses through the Town Centre Management initiative, working in partnership with town centre businesses to support and maintain one of Darlington's biggest economic assets.

Objective 6 - Address the Needs of Expanding Businesses

The growth of local companies provides a wealth of benefits to the local economy, but also presents a challenge in terms of providing the right level of assistance to prevent them becoming another area's new inward investment. The needs of expanding businesses will vary and the organisations within the business support network will work closely with companies to ensure that all available help and support is provided. The relationships built throughout the companies life will be crucial in facilitating the maximum level of support at the most appropriate time.

Expanding businesses will be supported through the provision of advice and guidance, as with all businesses, through the Business Brokerage Model. Local organisations will need to ensure that the assistance they are able to provide is appropriate to the needs of expanding businesses, particularly in the areas of available premises, workforce development, recruitment and finance.

It is important that expanding businesses are dealt with in the same entrepreneurial way as inward investment opportunities, as their continued presence in Darlington is equally important to the local economy.

Theme 3	Support People into Employment
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Aim	To develop a skilled, educated and flexible workforce capable of responding to the needs of a changing economy
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In comparison to neighbouring areas, Darlington has relatively high levels of employment and the economy continues to provide opportunities for a high proportion of the local population. Although this high level of employment is an indication of good economic performance, it masks two significant problems that will need to be addressed if the economy is to reach its full potential:

- Average wage levels in Darlington are the lowest in the sub-region; and
- Unemployment rates within disadvantaged groups and communities are disproportionately high

Behind the low wage levels is a reliance on low paid, low skilled jobs within the service sector, which provides plentiful opportunities for young people leaving education, but perhaps prevents people from further developing their skills and entering the employment market later, but at a higher level. This situation enables a higher proportion of the population to be economically active, but can restrict long term skill development across other sectors.

The Regional Skills Strategy recognises that the North East workforce is relatively low skilled and poorly qualified and that the gap with national skill levels is widening. Clearly, if the Darlington economy is to succeed within this context, then the skills agenda presents a major challenge and local issues will need to be addressed in line with the regional drive to move to a high skills equilibrium.

Objective 1 - Raise Peoples Aspirations
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Although the economy in Darlington presents many opportunities for people of all ages and abilities, there are some people who do not have a positive view of working life and are consequently limited in their aspirations for employment and learning. Low aspiration, (or expectation) amongst young people in Darlington is evident through a drop in pupil attainment from Key Stage 2 onwards and low levels of university progression, both of which can prevent people from reaching their full potential. The raising of people's aspirations and expectations will take place across the board, from encouraging people to aspire to a particular career, through to encouraging more people to develop high level skills in further education.

Raising aspirations is an issue across all age groups, but particularly within the school/college setting and the 14-19 age group. Working together with key agencies such as Tees Valley LSC and Connexions will help people in mainstream and non-mainstream education and ultimately lead to fewer people who are unemployed or under-employed as a result of low aspirations.

Objective 2 - Prepare People for the World of Work

Darlington companies need a constant stream of well-educated and motivated young people to join the workforce each year if the economy is to grow. Due to longstanding population trends there are fewer people forecast to enter the labour market each year, hence the quality of

education, particularly in core skill areas is becoming ever more important and is supported locally through the Darlington Education Development Plan.

Alongside core skills, there is also an increased emphasis on vocational skills, which will help to prepare young people for current employment opportunities, as well as those forecast for future growth. The provision of appropriate work experience and placements within Darlington companies will be encouraged, particularly in areas linked to vocational skills development.

As well as developing skills that are relevant to the type of work available in Darlington, young people need to be able to demonstrate their general 'employability' to maximise their chances in the labour market. Increasingly employers are identifying flexible, transferable skills such as communication and ICT as the foundation for an effective transition from education to employment. Direct links between employers and education providers will be encouraged and intermediary organisations will continue to work to ensure that curriculum development reflects the current and future needs of business.

Objective 3 - Increase Participation in the Labour Market

Although participation in the labour market is relatively high in Darlington, it is still far from ideal, with many people feeling unable, or unwilling, to take up employment or training, due to a range of issues. Within the economically inactive population there are distinct groups who face barriers, (real or perceived), to participation, which if removed could bring valuable skills into the labour market. These groups who are traditionally under represented include:

- Women (entering or returning to the labour market)
- Lone parents
- People over 50 years of age
- People with a disability

Support will be provided to these under represented groups to enable them to take up employment or training, through joint working between learning providers, members of the business support network and Jobcentre Plus. Support will include provision of appropriate advice and guidance, jobs matching, assistance with application forms and CVs, help with interview preparation and financial assistance with training. Access to affordable childcare provision will also be addressed, where it represents a barrier to inclusion in the labour market.

Although the unemployed population in Darlington is relatively low for the North East, there is a core of people who have been unemployed for over twelve months and need specific support to enable them to enter the labour market. Particular focus will be placed on providing appropriate help and assistance to break the cycle of unemployment, through targeted training or job search support.

Objective 4 - Raise Skill Levels Across all Ages

Raising skill levels across all ages will enable a greater number of people to reach their potential and increase their input into the Darlington economy.

The concept of lifelong learning will be increasingly relevant as retraining and learning new, flexible skills becomes a fact of life for people working in declining traditional industries. The

expected drop in the number of young people joining the workforce will also place greater emphasis on developing the skills held by people in the 40+ age bracket as their importance to the labour market increases.

Improving basic level skills among target groups will be a priority as it will help to increase participation in the labour market and reduce unemployment, whilst improving skills at the higher end of the scale will be essential in order to attract higher quality jobs to Darlington that will boost average wage levels.

Raising the skills base of the workforce (and the future workforce) will be essential in attracting companies to Darlington. Demonstrating the presence of a highly skilled, flexible workforce will be as important a selling point as the location based advantages offered by Darlington, and will also enable the number of local people taking up newly attracted local jobs to be maximised.

Objective 5 - Increase the Skills of the Darlington Workforce

The most recent skills survey carried out in Darlington identified that only the larger companies in the area were investing in long term workforce development. For smaller companies to gain ground they must look to build the skills of their workforce and invest in the future. Smaller companies will be supported in taking this long term view and will be encouraged to introduce, enhance and support training in the workplace. There is clearly a need to encourage a training culture and promote the benefits to employers if it is to become part of their long term planning.

The use of Training Needs Analysis to inform future skills development will be encouraged to enable companies to access tailored training packages.

Tees Valley Learning and Skills Council will play a key role in establishing a workforce development culture, which addresses the needs of employers and employees and prepares them for current activities, as well as those aimed at the future productivity and competitiveness of the company. Demand for learning among employers will be stimulated through the promotion of Investors in People and work with the Trade Union Learning Representatives.

Objective 6 - Target Disadvantaged Groups and Communities

The major benefit of a strong Darlington economy is the number of jobs created which can be accessed by local people. To achieve this, it is important to work with groups and communities who are currently disadvantaged in the labour market, to identify and remove the barriers in their way.

It is important to recognise that a relationship exists between the Economic Regeneration Strategy and the Darlington Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, which aims to reduce deprivation in the eleven most affected wards in Darlington. It also links with the Social Inclusion Strategy, which identifies a number of non-geographic communities of interest who inevitably face barriers in the labour market. The long term issue of disadvantage within the groups identified by these strategies will be challenged through the promotion of socially sustainable recruitment practices, linked with targeted support within the groups themselves.

The recruitment and training of people from disadvantaged groups and communities will be linked, where possible, to the creation of new jobs through the major projects and investments taking place in Darlington, throughout the life of this strategy. Partners will work together with

Jobcentre Plus to prepare packages to assist companies expanding or moving into Darlington, with their recruitment and training needs.

Theme 4	Create a Quality Environment for Economic Growth
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Aim	To provide a first class physical environment with excellent communication links, capable of stimulating, attracting and sustaining economic growth
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To enable the town to prosper it is essential that the physical environment in Darlington is conducive to economic growth. It is vitally important to ensure that the right sites and premises are available in the right locations, and that the overall environment and transport infrastructure reflects the requirements of new and expanding businesses. Darlington has developed a strong reputation for environmental quality and is seen as being able to attract investment that would not otherwise come to the Tees Valley. This key strength needs to be preserved and enhanced if the goals of this strategy are to be achieved.

Objective 1 - Provide the Best Possible Physical 'Gateway'

The 'gateway' role that Darlington plays, will bring many benefits, but is dependent upon retaining the environmental quality of the town. The areas where people enter and exit the town will be prioritised, as these make the biggest impression on visitors and potential investors. The 2002 Darlington Gateway Study (Janet Benton/Willie Miller) identified design principles to guide environmental improvements along the main road and rail routes into Darlington, so that a consistent, high quality environment is developed. This document will continue to be applied as the standard required.

Maintaining and enhancing other key features of the town will also be supported, as the quality of assets such as the town centre will also create an instant, yet lasting, impression.

Due to Darlington's links with the birth of the railways, the most high profile point of entry into the town is Bank Top Railway Station. Significant improvements to the Station and its environs are needed if this key entry point is to reflect its historic status in a positive way. The visual link between road and rail will also be improved by making a feature of the historic rail bridges crossing some of the main roads into town, such as North Road and Yarm Road (Parkgate).

Objective 2 - Provide the Infrastructure to Facilitate Economic Growth

One of Darlington's key strengths is a transport infrastructure that is unrivalled in the area. The presence of an airport, East Coast Main Line Railway Station and excellent links with the national road network, make Darlington an ideal place from which to access the Tees Valley and the wider North East. This transport infrastructure needs to be constantly maintained and enhanced if location based advantages are to be maximised.

If Darlington is to market itself as an ideal location for businesses in the distribution and logistics sectors, then access to the external transport infrastructure needs to be supported through measures to tackle congestion on main internal routes and the implementation of sustainable travel methods within the town. The additional traffic generated by new developments will be carefully managed, to ensure that economic growth is not stifled. Upgrading of the A66 around

Darlington remains a priority, if the potential of development sites in Darlington is to be maximised.

In order to attract, retain and encourage modern businesses to grow, there is a need to improve access to the telecommunications infrastructure throughout the town. The broadband network will be developed across Darlington, in conjunction with all investment partners, particularly where the development of high quality, modern business accommodation is planned.

Objective 3 - Meet the Property Requirements of 21st Century Businesses

The quality and location of business accommodation is becoming increasingly important to the Darlington economy. Meeting the property requirements of modern businesses requires high quality developments, in the right location, with the appropriate infrastructure. The most notable gap in Darlington's property portfolio is modern accommodation in the mid range of 450 to 1,800 sq m. This will be addressed by the development of Faverdale East Business Park, which will provide an additional 34,745 sq m of modern space. This development will also satisfy demand for larger units, (over 9,000 sq m), required by the distribution and logistics sectors.

A shortage of quality office accommodation in Darlington will be addressed, in part through the developments at Morton Palms Business Park, Haughton Road, Lingfield Point and Hopetown Studios. Whilst these developments will provide sufficient quality stock to meet demand over the next five years, there is a requirement for space beyond this, which will need to be addressed.

The development of new accommodation also needs to be supported by constant improvement of the existing stock. Upgrading, improving and re-developing existing sites will be supported, where they reflect the principles of high quality design and construction.

Objective 4 - Prepare Sites for Future Employment Generation

Speculative development in Darlington has not always shown a commercial return and attracting private sector investment has been a longstanding problem. The high cost of introducing infrastructure, and the resultant low level return, has historically deterred the private sector from bringing certain sites forward. Where market failure exists, there is a need for public intervention.

Sites requiring intervention will be supported for development where the cost to the public sector is balanced by the level of job creation stimulated. Funding the infrastructure to specific sites will enable a much greater range of serviced sites to be offered to the market place and allow Darlington to compete with areas where commercial returns are higher.

Options for developing sites such as Darlington Great Park, a 52 hectare site fronting on to the A66, will be evaluated and progressed where appropriate, to provide the next generation of prestige accommodation beyond that currently identified. Innovative ways of working with the private sector and other public agencies will be explored to bring such developments forward.

The 120 hectare Faverdale Strategic Reserve site will continue to be retained for major inward investment projects, and steps will be taken to prepare the appropriate studies and permissions to ensure its readiness.

Objective 5 - Ensure an Environment Conducive to Retail Growth

The retail economy in Darlington continues to perform well against competing areas. As the core of this activity, it is essential that the vitality and viability of the town centre be maintained. Continual investment is needed to sustain current economic activity and grow the retail sector to meet the ever-increasing aspirations of its customers.

Significant investment is in place to develop the town centre environment and create a new 'pedestrian heart', which will raise the quality of the public realm and provide new space for events. The principles of high quality design and materials will be central to the environmental improvements, as will the inclusion of public art.

Development of the town centre will be aimed at providing an environment capable of attracting national multiples who require larger units than those currently available. Development of land in the town centre (particularly Commercial Street) will focus on provision of units over 300 sq m. Developments at other key town centre sites, including Abbots Yard and Feethams, will be pursued and should see a mixture of high quality office and retail developments, given the catalyst of an improved public realm.

It is also important to ensure that the retail sector outside of the town centre continues to prosper, by maintaining and enhancing their physical environment, particularly when located along key gateway routes.

Objective 6 - Ensure an Environment Capable of Attracting Visitors and Investors

To promote Darlington as a high quality location to visit, or invest in, will need the whole town to be well presented. As well as ensuring key entry points and major hubs such as the town centre boast a first class environment, it is also important to ensure that all other areas and attractions meet the same high standards.

The tourism sector in Darlington continues to flourish and is heavily reliant on continual investment in the physical environment. Individual tourism businesses will be encouraged to work together with key partners to improve their facilities and immediate surroundings, to support the overall image.

Much of Darlington's image is based on a floral/horticultural theme, which sets it apart from other neighbouring areas. This emphasis on the floral/horticultural theme will be continued and further links with private sector sponsorship developed. Development of linked attractions such as the historic South Park will also enhance the environment for people visiting the town, as well as being an excellent facility for residents of the area.

Theme 5 | Promote Darlington as a Quality Location for Business and Tourism

<i>Aim</i>	To develop and promote Darlington as a location for investment, and as a contemporary visitor destination
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Promoting Darlington as a tourist destination and a place to do business is crucial to future economic success. The financial benefits of tourism on the economy increase year by year, whilst

the attraction of businesses to the area, provides many economic benefits beyond the creation of new jobs.

Effective promotion of the town and its strengths, to encourage economic growth requires not only the right marketing approach, but also work to develop and maintain the product. Darlington has many historic strengths to be promoted, but these need to be constantly enhanced and supported by new areas if the overall package is to reach its full potential.

The emergence of sub-regional organisations charged with marketing and promoting the Tees Valley provides an opportunity for widening the appeal of the area, whilst also allowing Darlington to further develop its own distinctive brand.

Objective 1 - Raise the Profile of the Darlington Brand

The branding 'Where Quality Comes to Life' continues to represent the most effective identifier for the area. Use of the branding by local businesses will be encouraged, particularly where the image of quality is of vital importance, e.g. tourism. As well as encouraging its use, it is also important to increase awareness of the branding and what it represents, from a local level through to an international perspective. This will be achieved through both targeted marketing, and work at a local level to ensure the quality of the product meets expectations.

The emergence of the Tees Valley brand presents an opportunity for Darlington to reach new markets and enhance its role as a business location, gateway, or hub, from which the sub-region can be explored. This will be pursued in addition to, rather than at the expense of, marketing the distinctive Darlington brand.

The increased use of electronic media to promote Darlington opens up opportunities for more co-ordinated marketing by businesses, agents, developers and attractions in the area. The unlimited reach of electronic communication will be utilised to access untapped markets and increase awareness of what Darlington has to offer.

Objective 2 - Market Darlington as a Location for Investment

The Darlington economy offers many advantages to companies looking to relocate. The marketing and promotion of the area to potential investors will focus on Darlington's unique selling point, i.e. the combination of location, communications network, built environment and quality of life. These factors enable Darlington to attract investment which would not otherwise come to the Tees Valley and should consequently feature in any marketing of the sub-region.

The private sector also has a role to play as ambassadors for the area. Advice to potential investors from existing Darlington business people will carry greater weight than that given by the public sector and will be co-ordinated and resourced where appropriate.

The promotion of Darlington to a wider audience will be carried out by Tees Valley Regeneration, who are able to reach international markets and integrate Darlington's offer with that of the wider Tees Valley. Partners in Darlington will work closely with Tees Valley Regeneration to ensure the quality and direction of the marketing are right for the area. There is also a need to link closely to the marketing of the Region by One NorthEast and ensure that their marketing of the area fits with the local and sub-regional picture.

Objective 3 - Promote the Quality of Life Experienced by Those Living and Working in Darlington

The basis for promoting Darlington is that the area has a number of key strengths, which combine to provide those living and working in the area with a high 'quality of life', for example:

- Excellent location based advantages
- A first class urban and rural environment
- A thriving retail sector
- A wide range of cultural and leisure activities
- High quality, accessible local facilities
- Excellent local schools
- Range of good quality housing

This message will be conveyed to people looking to visit Darlington, or establish a business presence in the area.

As well as carrying out external marketing, there is a need to promote these quality of life advantages to people who already live and work in Darlington, and encourage them in their role as ambassadors for the area. The cultivation of local pride and increased local awareness of the economic impact of tourism, will add value to the work carried out to attract people and businesses in.

Objective 4 - Develop Darlington's Tourism, Cultural and Heritage Product

Due to its history and unique character, Darlington has a range of key assets, which attract visitors to the area. Maintaining and enhancing the appeal of these assets will remain a priority, whilst ensuring that they link together alongside other local points of interest, to form a co-ordinated visitor experience. The development of Darlington Railway Centre and Museum and associated Rail Heritage packaging will provide the first step towards this.

The excellent retail and cultural opportunities which exist in Darlington also need to be developed to reach their maximum potential, not only in bringing visitors in, but in how they link with other attractions to increase overall dwell times and visitor spend.

A key area for improving Darlington's tourism, cultural and heritage product is in the development and co-ordination of events. A co-ordinated programme of events across all themes would not only bring visitors in, but also increase awareness of the brand and raise the profile of the town. Co-ordination of a programme of complementary events across heritage, cultural, tourism, and retail sectors will be crucial in developing sufficient critical mass to make a sustained impact.

Objective 5 - Promote Darlington as a Contemporary Visitor Destination

Darlington has developed a strong reputation for boutique/lifestyle shopping and an emerging (pavement) cafe culture, which can be built upon to encourage a more contemporary feel to the visitor experience. The development of cultural activities, events and the creation of outdoor performance space in the town centre, will further increase the opportunities to attract and retain

visitors. Creating this 'cultural atmosphere' in the town will add to the general appeal of the town centre, which draws people, and associated spending power, from a wide catchment area.

Attracting visitors to the town, will be supported by improving the range and quality of services offered in the town, to maximise their dwell time and encourage repeat visits. Service providers and local businesses, particularly those involved in tourism related activities, will be supported in their work towards achieving the highest standards of customer care.

The options available to visitors need to be clear and co-ordinated, through the provision of up to date information, promotional literature and signage. Visitors attracted by one aspect of the town will be encouraged to explore other attractions and increase their dwell time. The role of Information Darlington in providing a 'one stop shop' for visitors will become increasingly important.

The marketing of Darlington through a Tees Valley Destination Management Organisation will be pursued to reflect the area's defined role and its contribution to wider sub-regional packaging.

Objective 6 - Maximise the Economic Impact of Visitors to Darlington

The benefits to the local economy brought by visitors to the town are considerable. The time spent by visitors in the town is directly related to levels of additional expenditure and should be increased wherever practical. The linking and packaging of different attractions and events will encourage longer stays, as will better signposting of services and an improved tourism/cultural/heritage offer.

Areas where visitor spend per head is higher than average will be targeted as a priority, for example business tourists. The provision of appropriate hotel/conference facilities and accompanying restaurants and accommodation providers would increase the attractiveness of Darlington to this lucrative market. The development of facilities for this market is a priority, as it not only increases business tourism spend, but raises the profile of the town among the business community on a national basis.

TARGETS AND TIMESCALES

This Economic Regeneration Strategy details the approach to be taken in achieving the strategic outcomes laid out in the Economy section of the Darlington Community Strategy and consequently shares the same vision and performance management framework.

The overall strategic outcomes for the regeneration of Darlington, as defined in the Community Strategy, are:

1. Increased levels of employment
2. Higher wage levels
3. Growth in business start-ups
4. More investment retained within the local economy

These strategic outcomes reflect the elements of the Economic Regeneration Strategy, which will have the most direct effect on the economy and as such will enable the performance of the strategy to be continually evaluated.

Within each of these strategic outcomes are performance indicators, which will allow monitoring of progress to take place, through the Community Strategy action planning process. These indicators are as follows:

Strategic Outcome	Indicators to Measure Success
1. Increased levels of employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of people of working age in employment • Unemployment levels by age and duration
2. Higher wage levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average weekly earnings • Percentage of population of working age who are claiming benefits
3. Growth in business start-ups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage increase in the total number of VAT registered businesses in the area
4. More investment retained within the local economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of goods and services procured within the Borough

Progress against these key performance indicators will be regularly monitored by the Economy and Environment Group of the Darlington Partnership as part of the Community Strategy Action Plan monitoring, and will inform the programming of economic regeneration activities in future years. Any quantitative targets set against these indicators will be included within annual Community Strategy Action Plans (rather than the longer term strategies) to reflect current trends and the evolving local context.

Other local economic targets will also be monitored, through regeneration programmes and Local Public Service Agreements, and will be reported through the Darlington Partnership in the same way as those identified above.

CROSS CUTTING THEMES

Quality

The image of Darlington supported by this strategy is one of quality. Principally this relates to quality of the 'Darlington experience' and is reflected in the branding 'Where **Quality** comes to **Life**'. This principle of quality will be applied as a standard in all aspects of economic regeneration in the town and all partners will work to ensure that the quality of the product matches that of the image.

Sustainability

All partners are committed to developing a successful, sustainable economy, combining (as defined by the Government's strategy for sustainable development) 'A Better Quality of Life':

- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment
- Effective protection of the environment
- Prudent use of natural resources
- Social progress that meets the needs of everyone

The long term future of the town will depend upon achieving a suitable balance between the need to create wealth through physical development, and maintaining the high quality environment which makes wealth creation possible in Darlington.

Equality

A strong Darlington economy will only be sustainable in the long term, if all members of the community are given the opportunity to contribute towards it. All groups at risk of social exclusion will be given the support required to enable them to play a full part in the economy, regardless of the barriers preventing their participation.

Partnership Working

No single organisation can achieve the regeneration of Darlington alone. Only by working together and adopting a co-ordinated approach will significant progress be made, and value added to the individual efforts of each organisation. Partnership working is therefore at the core of this strategy and progress will be built upon the successful partnership working arrangements already in existence in Darlington. The objectives of the strategy will be achieved by improving co-ordination and enhancing commitment to clear, shared priorities.

Funding

The identification and securing of financial resources will be essential to the success of this strategy. Elements of the strategy have significant funding requirements and cannot be successfully pursued without substantial additional resources. A co-ordinated approach to seeking funding will be adopted, with additional resources only being sought to support targeted, well developed, projects and initiatives, which meet the objectives of the strategy and address the key economic targets. The strategy itself will be an important means of supporting and justifying bids for funding from external sources, which will be done through the promotion of Darlington's opportunities, as well as its needs.

Marketing

This strategy identifies many principles and actions, which will grow and strengthen the Darlington economy. Key to the success of these actions, is the marketing and promotion of Darlington, both as it is at present and how it will develop in the future. The marketing of the area will be clear, consistent and reflect the 'quality' aspect of Darlington. Central to this will be the continuation of the branding 'Where **Quality** comes to **Life**'.