



Darlington Town Centre Business Plan 2015 - 2020

June 2015

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Foreword

Darlington is a fantastic Market Town, with an excellent range of shops, cafés, restaurants, pubs, cultural and leisure facilities; with the Civic Theatre, Forum and Dolphin Centre adding a unique extra dimension to the visitor offer.

These are challenging, yet exciting times for the Town, soon we will have a new nine-screen Cinema at Feethams, in February 400 civil servants moved to the new office alongside the Town Hall; and the Central Park development, is bringing new high prestige jobs, an expansion of education facilities and new housing just a few minutes' walk from the Town Centre.

The business of Town Centres is highly complex, requiring energy, skill and enterprise; it is more than just retail, it encompasses businesses and services in all guises, private and public sector; it is a dynamic community which must change with the times.

In March 2014 more than 150 Town Centre business people took part in a Town Centre Conference, jointly promoted by the Council and Distinct Darlington (Business Improvement District). The event highlighted the passionate connection people have for the Town Centre, brought into the spotlight concerns over how the changing nature of Town Centre retail would impact on Darlington and importantly identified a number of key themes for future action.

The Business Plan responds to the findings from the conference and other recent consultation (e.g. Town Centre Regeneration game) and draws together in one document the policies and proposals (Local Plan, Transport Plan & Car Parking Strategy, Economic Strategy, Distinct Darlington Business Plan Feethams Brief etc.) impacting upon the Town Centre.

It is very clear our Town Centre has a great deal going for it, good accessibility, a unique and distinctive heritage character giving rise to a strong sense of place, a good leisure offer, and a substantial local catchment area of 300,000 people living in Darlington, North Yorkshire, County Durham and the Tees Valley.

Through working together, the Council, Distinct Darlington, Town Centre Businesses and all those with a stake in the future of Darlington Town Centre we can ensure that the Town Centre retains its place at the social and economic heart of our community.

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Executive Summary

With the benefit of a key strategic location at the gateway to the North-East, a distinctive character and a great quality of life, Darlington Town Centre is well placed to retain its vibrancy and vitality, despite challenging economic conditions.

To thrive Town Centres must adapt to changes in society (for example the rise in the proportion of older people with particular expectations and requirements) and to rapid technological change driving the move towards a multi-channel retail offer, with consumers visiting retail websites and increasingly using smartphones to review products and compare prices.

The Town Centre Business Plan

- Provides a statement of – Vision, Ambition, Outcomes and Priority Actions
- Brings together in one place the policies and proposals (Local Plan, Transport Plan & Car Parking Strategy, Economic Strategy, Feethams Brief etc.) impacting upon the vitality of the Town Centre.
- Responds to findings from the Town Centre Regeneration Game and Town Centre Conference.
- Considers the need to adapt to social, technological and demographic changes impacting on town centres (for example greater emphasis on leisure).
- Promotes the further development of a Partnership approach: – Darlington Council, Distinct Darlington, Town Centre Board, public/private/voluntary sectors, Arriva, Police etc.

Key issues impacting on Darlington Town Centre:

External factors (out of our control)

- Online retail increasing (nationally the amount spent online increased by 13.4% in June 2014 compared with June 2013)
- Demographic changes
(35,000 people currently living in Darlington today who are aged 50 or over. This is set to increase to over 40,000 by 2021)
- Reduction in public spending (more than 25% reduction in Council budget since 2009/10)
- Business Rates (review scheduled by government in 2017)

What we can influence (Council, Distinct Darlington, Businesses, Property owners)

- Quality of the Town Centre Environment - streetscape, properties, heritage character, car parks, bus stops...
- Welcome to Visitors – customer experience in shops, café's, leisure facilities, car parks ...
- Marketing and promotion – advertising, events, online & smartphone presence..
- Accessibility – by car, bus, rail, on foot and by bike
- Location of commercial and residential development
- Business support – for example training in use of digital technologies, marketing, customer care ...

What Darlington Borough Council will do:

- Work with Darlington market traders to refurbish and re-vitalise the covered and outdoor markets
- Invest in maintaining and improving transport infrastructure, roads, footways, cycle routes, car parks
- Encourage new residential and commercial development in and close to the Town Centre
- Work with partners (Tees valley Unlimited, University of Teesside, Distinct Darlington and others) to provide support to Darlington businesses
- Support events and promotional activities e.g. Christmas lights, Darlington 10K run, Darlington by the Sea..

What Darlington Distinct Darlington will do:

- Multi-channel marketing of the Town Centre offer
- Develop a Town Centre Smart phone application
- Deliver a minimum of two major Town Centre events per year
- Employ Town Centre Rangers

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Why a Town Centre Business Plan?

The Town Centre is a key asset to the local economy and quality of life offer.

The Business Plan:

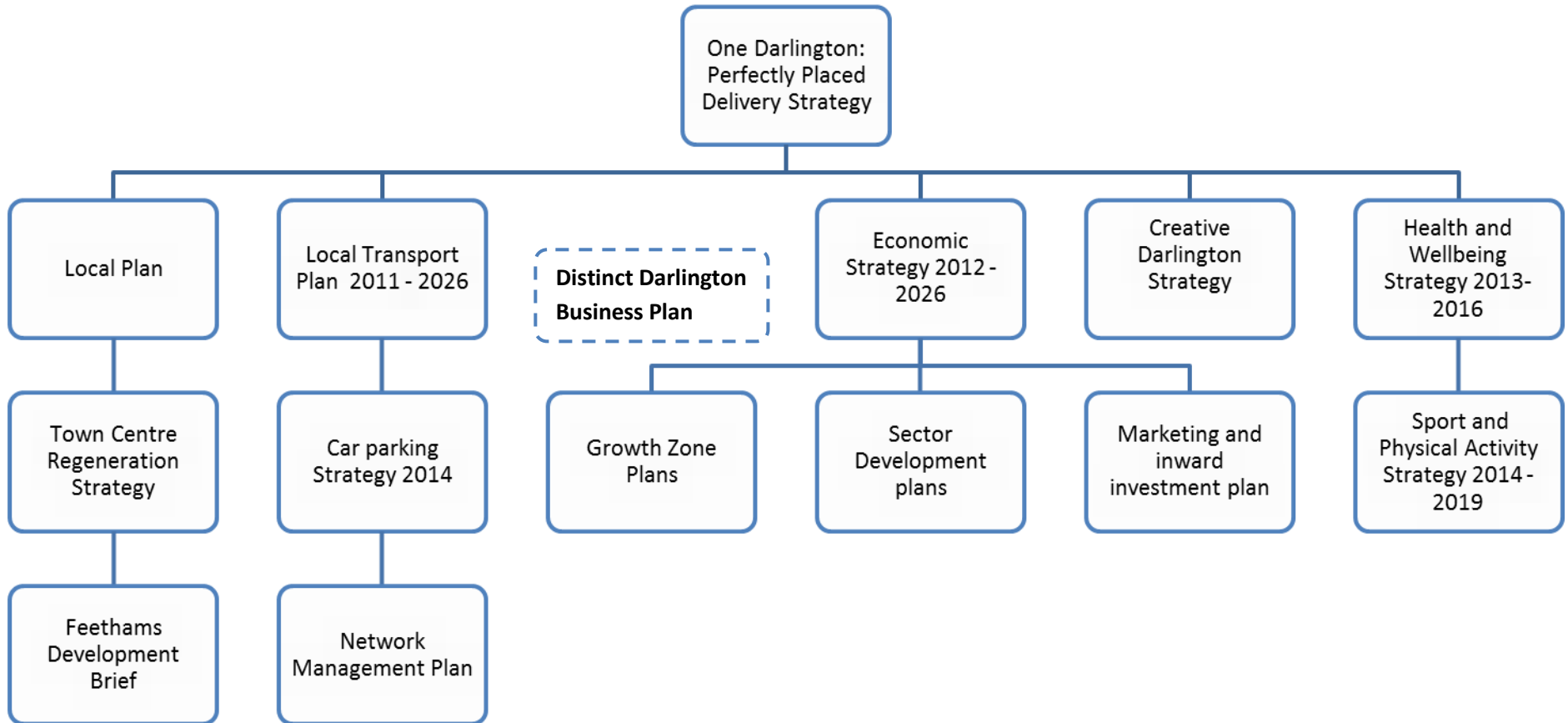
- Brings together in one place the policies and proposals (Local Plan, Transport Plan & Car Parking Strategy, Economic Strategy, Feethams Brief etc.) impacting upon the vitality of the Town Centre.
- Responds to findings from the Regeneration Game and Town Centre Conference.
- Considers the need to adapt to social, technological and demographic changes impacting on town centres (for example greater emphasis on leisure).
- Promotes the further development of a Partnership approach: – Darlington Council, Distinct Darlington, Town Centre Board, public/private/voluntary sectors, Arriva, Police etc.
- Provides a statement of – Vision, Ambition, Outcomes and Priority Actions

Context

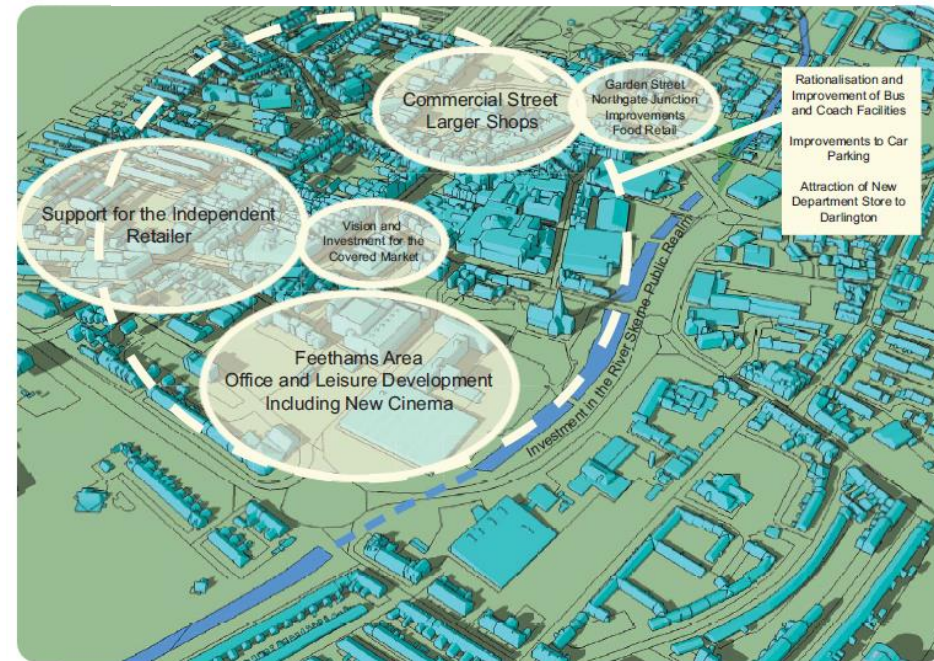
- Town Centres have had a challenging environment over recent years – Darlington Town Centre has remained relatively resilient but has seen planned development stall and greater volatility in the number of vacant units.
- There is a need to consider and adapt to the impact of external influences – retail developments outside of Darlington and national trends (detailed below)
- External influences –
 - Online retail increasing (the amount spent online increased by 13.4% in June 2014 compared with June 2013)
 - Demographic changes
(35,000 people currently living in Darlington today who are aged 50 or over. This is set to increase to over 40,000 by 2021)
 - Reduction in public spending (more than 25% reduction in Council budget)
 - Increase in partnership approaches post-recession, gradual economic revival
- The 2008/9 Economic downturn significantly impacted on Darlington's Economy.
The economy is now growing, with employment levels returning to pre-recession levels and new opportunities arising from recent development. e.g. Department for Education Office, Cinema & Leisure complex, new employment at Central Park and substantial growth in new housing.

The Town Centre Business Plan does not stand alone. It is drawn from other strategies (as illustrated below), the ambitions of the Town Centre Business Improvement District, Distinct Darlington and issues arising from the Town Centre Conference.

Summary of related strategies / plans impacting on Town Centre



Vision for Darlington Town Centre



Darlington Borough is a unitary local authority area that lies at the western end of the Tees Valley, a sub-regional grouping also including Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, and Stockton-on-Tees. The Borough is regarded as the 'gateway' to the Tees Valley and the wider North East region.

The town centre is one of the Borough's key economic assets, generating considerable turnover and wealth and employing thousands of people. It attracts custom for shopping, leisure, entertainment, recreation, personal and professional services, in part due to its distinctive and special character, a blend of modern centre and historic market town

Did you know?

- 1 The Town Centre has a catchment population of 300,000 people.
- 2 Darlington is ranked in top 3% of UK shopping venues (66th out of 2,711)
- 3 Vacant property trends are relatively healthy at 9.3% (better than national average)
- 4 Footfall counts indicate a steady decline (2-3% per year) over recent years
- 5 Car parking data shows some fluctuation in numbers parking, though overall slight increase over last five years
- 6 Town Centre has 24 out of 27 main high street retailers, e.g Next and House of Fraser
- 7 Rents have remained relatively stable in recent years
- 8 88 Listed Buildings e.g. Barclays, Nat West and Yorkshire Banks.
- 9 Dolphin Centre attracts around 1 Million visits per year.
- 10 Strong independent sector, 80 % independent retailers

What has been achieved / is happening already

Infrastructure & Physical Regeneration

- ✓ Regeneration of main area of Town Centre (Pedestrian Heart)
- ✓ Refurbishment of Dolphin Centre
- ✓ DFE – public sector hub opening Jan 2015
- ✓ Leisure Development (opening early 2016)
- ✓ Major transport infrastructure works – ring road improvements
- ✓ Recent resurfacing of car parks and plans to develop Multi Storey Car Park
- ✓ Refurbishment of Town Centre units through High Street Innovation Fund.
- ✓ Development of cultural assets based around Civic Theatre and Children & young people's Theatre (Hullabaloo)
- ✓ 'Art in the Yards' – large scale art gallery for the historic core of the Town Centre.
- ✓ Christmas Lights renewed
- ✓ Residential development in and close to Town Centre

Marketing, Events, Education & Training

- ✓ Successful marketing initiatives including television advertising campaigns; Darlington 'Shop Local' Campaign; Sunday Trading initiative and Darlington jute eco bags
- ✓ Award winning markets
- ✓ Ice rink / Darlington by the Sea/Other events
- ✓ Implementation of Safer Drinking - Safer Darlington
- ✓ Friday and Saturday evening sessions to tackle concerns about young people congregating in the town.
- ✓ Collaborative work on the Shopwatch and Pubwatch schemes for the Town Centre

Challenges / Opportunities

Challenges

- ✓ Adapting to changing nature of retail and changing role of town centres
- ✓ Adapting to demographic changes – ageing population;
- ✓ Responding to competition from online retail
- ✓ Declining footfall – nationally and locally
- ✓ Competition from out of Town Centres – Tindall Crescent Bishop Auckland / Teesside Park / Metro Centre, proposed Scotch Corner Retail outlet
- ✓ Rental levels holding up compared to north east but too low to attract significant investment
- ✓ Tackling the problem of empty units and re-defining role of primary and secondary retail areas.
- ✓ Balancing car parking provision and bus services to match demand
- ✓ Impact of reductions in public spending
- ✓ Impact of 'real term' decline in household incomes since the start of the economic downturn in 2008/9

Opportunities

- ✓ Improving customer experience - so Darlington is seen as 'a friendly town'
- ✓ Maximising Darlington's heritage value as a unique selling point attracting visitors
- ✓ Reinventing / re-invigorating the indoor and outdoor markets
- ✓ Digitising the Darlington shopping experience
- ✓ Providing a click & collect facility in the Town Centre
- ✓ Better promotion of the Darlington, as a shared responsibility of the Council, Distinct Darlington and Town Centre businesses'.
- ✓ Improving the leisure offer, encouraging more people to spend
- ✓ Improving the public realm through landscaping and opening up access to the Skerne riverside.

What will we do?

VISION

Darlington has a thriving Town Centre offering a high quality shopping, leisure and cultural experience, where businesses choose to invest and people want to spend time.

Ambition

To be the first choice shopping destination for residents of the borough and surrounding hinterland

Ambition

Maximise the town centre's potential as a vibrant leisure, entertainment and cultural destination, including promoting Darlington's heritage assets.

Ambition

Ensure that the Town Centre is easily accessible by all modes of travel, and once in the town centre it is easy for residents and visitors to find their way around.

Ambition

Ensure there is a strong business support offer to all Darlington Business (existing, newly formed and prospective start up businesses)

Ambition

Protect and build upon Darlington's status as an historic market town, while also achieving new high quality commercial and residential development in and close to the Town centre.

Outcomes

Darlington has a reputation as a 'friendly town' to visit shop and do business.

Increased number of people coming to the Town Centre to shop, do business and take part in leisure and cultural activities

Reduced % of vacant units

Increased number of Town Centre based employees

Increased number of people living in or close to the Town Centre (<10mins walk)

Maximise potential of Darlington's Cultural & Heritage assets to attract visitors and shoppers.

Our Priority Actions (Most of the actions arise from existing Strategies and Plans)

| | Ambition | Source | Action – further detail on each action is provided in appendix 1 |
|---|--|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | To be the first choice shopping destination for residents of the borough and surrounding hinterland | Distinct Darlington Business Plan | Project 1 - Clean, Safe & Welcoming Project 2 - Marketing, Promotions & Events |
| | | DBC Events Plan | Programme of Town Centre Events throughout the year. |
| | | Town Centre Conference | Understand and adapt to social, technological and demographic changes affecting Town Centres e.g. Provide click and collect facilities in the Town Centre, develop and integrate the leisure / retail experience. |
| | | DBC | Maintain a safe and attractive Town Centre environment. |
| 2 | Maximise the town centre's potential as a vibrant leisure, entertainment and cultural destination, including promoting Darlington's heritage assets. | Economic Strategy | Raise the profile of Darlington (marketing/influencing/informing) in order to generate economic growth |
| | | New Action | Develop and promote Darlington's Rail Heritage as unique attraction for visitors |
| | | New Action | Develop plans and seek funding for the revitalisation of the Indoor Market. |
| | | Sport & Physical Activity Strategy | Ensure access to quality sport, physical activity and recreational facilities. The Dolphin Centre provides the hub for Darlington's municipal sport and leisure offer and supports the town centre leisure offer |
| 3 | Ensure that the Town Centre is easily accessible by all modes of travel, and once in the town centre it is easy for residents and visitors to find their way around. | DBC Local Transport Plan | To support employment, economic activity and sustainable development by providing and maintaining a reliable, predictable and efficient transport network. |
| | | | To achieve a fairer society by enabling people to access jobs, education, training, health, food and green spaces |
| | | DBC Parking Strategy | Optimise Town Centre parking supply in right locations |
| | | | Ensure that management of parking (including fees) provides the right balance between encouraging visitors, covering costs and supporting One Darlington Perfectly Placed objectives |
| | | | Ensure that car park users feel safe and secure |
| | | | Ensure that the provision and management of parking for Blue Badge holders enables disabled drivers and /or passengers to access services and amenities |

| | Ambition | Source | Action – further detail on each action is provided in appendix 1 |
|----------|--|---|--|
| 4 | Ensure there is a strong business support offer to all Darlington Business existing, newly formed and prospective start up businesses) | Economic Strategy | Identify and target support where beneficial to SMEs with high potential for growth |
| | | | Work with partners(e.g. TEDCO) to ensure that the business start-up offer is closely aligned to client needs and that it addresses key business planning issues s(e.g financial management and marketing) |
| | | | Work with businesses to identify skills shortages and future skills needs and use this information to influence provision of skills training |
| | | | |
| 5 | Protect and build upon Darlington’s status as an historic market town, while also achieving new high quality commercial and residential development in and close to the Town centre. | DBC Local Plan | Safeguard the function of Darlington town centre and capitalise on its shopping, culture, leisure, tourism and employment opportunities so that it continues to develop as a vibrant, attractive, safe, friendly and comfortable historic market town centre |
| | | Town Centre Conference (Mar '14) | Develop process for encouraging reuse of empty properties. |
| | | Feethams Planning and Development Brief | Deliver Feethams Planning Brief |

How will we know if we are making progress?

Annex 1 sets out the detailed Action Plan required to implement the Actions identified above. For each Action we explain the rationale, set out the milestones and explain exactly what we and our partners will do to ensure delivery.

Annex 2 identifies what we will be measured, how and by whom. It is expected that the Strategy's Outcomes will remain valid for about five years. However, the detailed Action Plan will be reviewed annually. At that point, completed Actions will be removed and any new Actions will be added before the Action Plan is re-issued.

Annex 1 - Town Centre Business Plan Actions

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Ambition 1 | To be the first choice shopping destination for residents of the borough and surrounding hinterland |
| Action | Making Darlington Clean, Safe & Welcoming |
| Lead | Distinct Darlington / Darlington Borough Council - Streetscene |

Rationale

Making Darlington Town Centre cleaner, safer and friendlier is a prime concern. Distinct Darlington's Clean, Safe & Welcoming project has three distinct elements:

- Keep it Friendly - Up to 4 Town Centre Rangers
- Keep it Clean - Rapid Response Extra Cleaning/Maintenance
- Keep it Safe – Retail Radio Scheme & Night Time

Milestones

1. Town Centre Rangers employed 2012 to work and interact with the public, businesses and the wide range of partners / agencies with a Town Centre role.
2. Develop the retail radio link scheme so that all Town Centre businesses can benefit from the scheme
3. Programme of maintenance and refurbishment of Town centre Street infrastructure delivered by Street Scene and Highways – 2015/16, and ongoing with annual review.

Ambition 1 **To be the first choice shopping destination for residents of the borough and surrounding hinterland**

Action **Marketing, Promotions & Events**

Lead **Distinct Darlington / Darlington Borough Council – Events Team**

Rationale

A comprehensive marketing, promotion and events campaign which will ensure that the Darlington Town Centre offer translates into an improved identity and perception of the town, improved sales and an improved customer experience.

This will be delivered through four key projects:

- Darlington Voucher Scheme
- Marketing & Promotion Campaigns
- 2 new Distinct Darlington Events p.a.
- A Customer-focused Website and Social Media Presence

Milestones

1. Introduction of Little Book of Offers – 2012
2. Distinct Darlington Town Centre Advertising in the press and on television during the Christmas shopping period.
3. Distinct Darlington Ice rink on market square Nov – Jan, first introduced 2012.
4. Darlington Council Town Centre Events Programme ; comprehensive programme of events including Sunday Markets, 10K run, Rhythm and Blues festival, Street Theatre etc..
5. Distinct Darlington website and social media campaigns, first introduced in 2012
6. Communications plan adopted by Town Centre Stakeholders updated and reviewed at quarterly Town Centre Board meetings.

Ambition 1 **To be the first choice shopping destination for residents of the borough and surrounding hinterland**
Action **Understand and adapt to social, technological and demographic change**
Lead **Distinct Darlington / Town Centre Businesses**

Rationale

Town Centres are changing, multi-channel trading (internet/smartphone) is increasing. Physically based retailers must grasp digital retail in order to survive and local authorities need to consider how planning policies / regulations and support mechanisms need to adapt to support the re-invention of the Town Centre offer.

Milestones

1. Develop and promote a Darlington Town Centre smartphone app - 2014
2. Deliver training and guidance to support Town Centre businesses to adopt and maximise opportunities to benefit from digital technologies –partnership between the Council, Digital City and Distinct Darlington to start training programme in 2014/15
3. Investigate potential for a Town Centre Click & Collect service, with a view to implementation by 2016.

Ambition 2 **Maximise the town centre’s potential as a vibrant leisure, entertainment and cultural destination, including promoting Darlington’s heritage assets.**

Action **Raise the profile of Darlington (marketing/influencing/informing) to support economic growth.**

Lead **Darlington Borough Council**

Rationale

Building upon Darlington’s strengths (what sets Darlington apart from any other market town), the aim is to develop a distinctive brand for Darlington, which puts the town on the map. Helping to attract economic investment, encouraging people to visit and to live and work in Darlington.

Milestones

1. Private / public sector partners commission Marketing Darlington branding and toolkit – summer 2014
2. Agree on Darlington branding – Autumn 2014
3. Develop partnership approach to implementing marketing, utilising new Darlington brand – 2015
4. Marketing of key developments / events e.g. National Biologics centre, Business Central, Cinema development – to start 2014/15

Ambition 2 **Maximise the town centre’s potential as a vibrant leisure, entertainment and cultural destination, including promoting Darlington’s heritage assets.**

Action **Develop and implement plans to celebrate Darlington’s unique Rail and architectural heritage.**

Lead **Darlington Borough Council**

Rationale

As the birthplace of passenger rail Darlington has a unique heritage offer, with the potential to attract visitors from throughout the world.

Darlington Town Centre has largely retained its distinctive Victorian architecture, notably the Grade II listed Victorian Market Hall the Backhouse's Bank building and neo gothic clock tower, gifted to the town by Joseph Pease in 1864.

Milestones

1. Secured £6.5M funding for Civic Theatre and Young people’s Theatre - 2014
2. 2025 Festival; celebration of invention and innovation of rail and its contribution to the world – project initiated 2014
3. Series of Rail Heritage events over 10 yrs. leading up to 2025
4. Agree business case for redevelopment and future management of ‘Head of Steam’ – 2015
5. Town Centre Conservation area extended – 2012
6. Investigate funding mechanisms for heritage led improvement schemes to improve Town Centre properties - 2015
7. Review planning and regulatory frameworks so that policies support appropriate redevelopment / repurposing of Town centre properties, for example greater levels of residential use

Ambition 2 **Maximise the town centre’s potential as a vibrant leisure, entertainment and cultural destination, including promoting Darlington’s heritage assets.**

Action **Develop and implement plans for Darlington’s Indoor & Outdoor Markets**

Lead **Darlington Borough Council**

Rationale

Operating since 1863 Darlington’s covered market is a unique trading space in the heart of the Town Centre. Coupled with the Monday and Saturday outdoor market, monthly Sunday Market and craft and farmers markets, Darlington’s Markets have an important role in boosting the variety and quality of the Town Centre offer.

Milestones

1. Develop Markets Action Plan – 2014/15, key actions being to
 - a. Review current Market offer (opening hours, stalls, capacity, building infrastructure)
 - b. Agree short term improvement plan for Indoor market
 - c. Agree improvement plans for outdoor markets
 - d. Develop and implement PR/Communications plan
 - e. Develop a traders strategy to support successful trading and growth
- The Markets Action plan will provide further detailed information.

Ambition 2 **Maximise the town centre’s potential as a vibrant leisure, entertainment and cultural destination, including promoting Darlington’s heritage assets.**

Action **Ensure access to quality sport, physical activity and recreational facilities. The Dolphin Centre provides the hub for Darlington’s municipal sport and leisure offer and supports the town centre leisure offer**

Lead **Darlington Borough Council**

Rationale

Darlington has an excellent track record in delivering sport and physical activity opportunities. With the Town centre based Dolphin Centre the key indoor leisure facility for Darlington, catering for around 1 Million visitors per year. Working with partners the Council will ensure that the Dolphin Centre provides a wide range of sporting activities and acts as an important community hub, facilitating a comprehensive programme of social and cultural events.

Milestones

Milestones impacting on the Town Centre

1. Sport and Physical Activity Strategy 2014-2019 – agreed in 2014
2. Opening of one-stop health hub at Dolphin centre – Oct 2014

Ambition 3 **Ensure that the Town Centre is easily accessible by all modes of travel, and once in the town centre it is easy for residents and visitors to find their way around.**

Action **To support employment, economic activity and sustainable development by providing and maintaining a reliable, predictable and efficient transport network**

Lead **Darlington Borough Council**

Rationale

A reliable and efficient transport system is essential cornerstone of a well-functioning economy. In line with Darlington's Local Transport Plan the Council will work with key partners (Tees Valley LEP, Department for Transport, Bus and rail operators) to manage & maintain existing transport assets and where there is a strong business case invest in new transport infrastructure.

Milestones

- Key projects transport projects impacting on the Town Centre / Town Centre Fringe:
1. Town Centre ring road improvements Stonebridge / Parkgate – 2014
 2. Structural maintenance – Stonebridge – 2015
 3. Multi Storey Car park Feethams – 2015/16
 4. Bus stop & coach stop improvements at Feethams – 2015/16
 5. New highway signage inc. to car parks - 2015/16

Ambition 3 **Ensure that the Town Centre is easily accessible by all modes of travel, and once in the town centre it is easy for residents and visitors to find their way around.**

Action **To achieve a fairer society by enabling people to access jobs, education, training, health, food and green spaces**

Lead **Darlington Borough Council**

Rationale

By working with local communities, transport operators, education providers and businesses to the Council will help facilitate independent travel for all members of the community, for example through better provision of dropped kerbs / raised platforms at bus stops enabling people with mobility problems to access services.

Milestones

- Transport projects impacting on the Town Centre / Town Centre Fringe
1. Cabinet approval of Active Travel Strategy – 2015
 2. Proposed programme (subject to funding) of footway improvements, including on key routes to/from Town Centre – 2015/16 – 2017/18
 3. Improved pedestrian crossing facilities on town centre ring road.
 4. Improvements to Town Centre Bus Stops 2015
 5. Ongoing consideration of transport implications of new development, so that the appropriate infrastructure is provided as new developments take place.

Ambition 3 **Ensure that the Town Centre is easily accessible by all modes of travel, and once in the town centre it is easy for residents and visitors to find their way around.**

Action **Optimise Town Centre parking supply in right locations**

Lead **Darlington Borough Council**

Rationale

Although Darlington has a good supply of off and on street parking, there are areas of the Town Centre where at peak times demand for parking exceeds supply. New developments, for example at Feethams are impacting on existing parking and will when complete result in additional parking demand.

Milestones

1. Development of a multi-storey car park within the Feethams area to mitigate against loss of current supply and accommodate increased demands – 2015.
2. Ongoing review impact of new developments on parking, so that the right levels of parking are provided and development takes place.

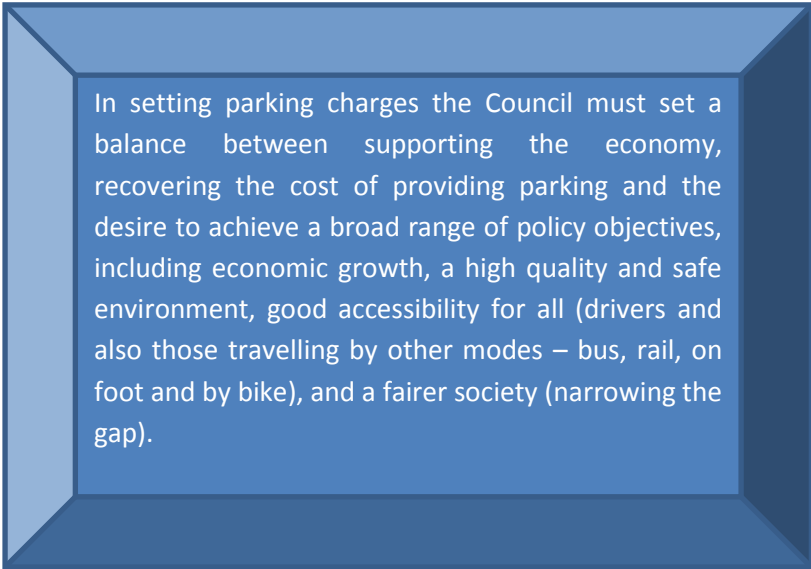
Ambition 3 **Ensure that the Town Centre is easily accessible by all modes of travel, and once in the town centre it is easy for residents and visitors to find their way around.**

Action **Ensure that management of parking (including fees) provides the right balance between encouraging visitors, covering costs and supporting One Darlington Perfectly Placed objectives**

Lead **Darlington Borough Council**



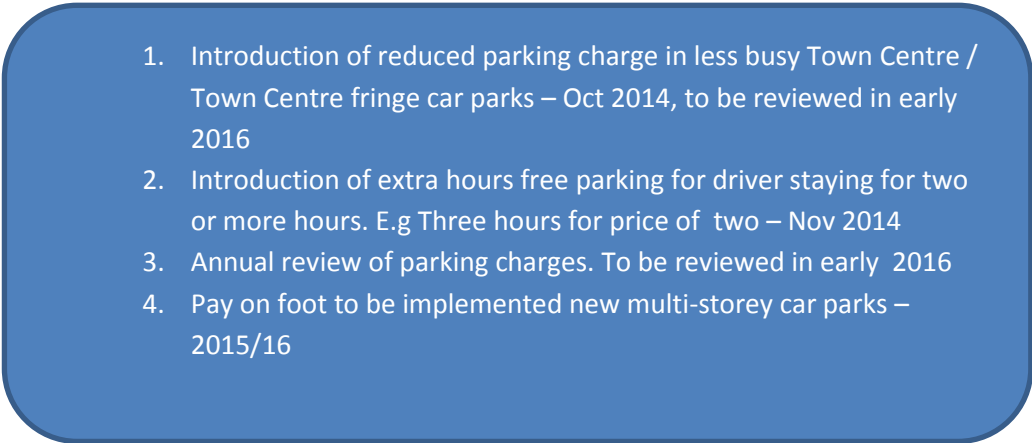
Rationale



In setting parking charges the Council must set a balance between supporting the economy, recovering the cost of providing parking and the desire to achieve a broad range of policy objectives, including economic growth, a high quality and safe environment, good accessibility for all (drivers and also those travelling by other modes – bus, rail, on foot and by bike), and a fairer society (narrowing the gap).



Milestones

- 
1. Introduction of reduced parking charge in less busy Town Centre / Town Centre fringe car parks – Oct 2014, to be reviewed in early 2016
 2. Introduction of extra hours free parking for driver staying for two or more hours. E.g Three hours for price of two – Nov 2014
 3. Annual review of parking charges. To be reviewed in early 2016
 4. Pay on foot to be implemented new multi-storey car parks – 2015/16

Ambition 3 **Ensure that the Town Centre is easily accessible by all modes of travel, and once in the town centre it is easy for residents and visitors to find their way around.**

Action **Ensure that car park users feel safe and secure**

Lead **Darlington Borough Council**

Rationale

Car parks should be as safe as possible for users – it is therefore essential that walk routes providing access to car parks should be well lit to minimise the possibility of crime. Where possible CCTV should also be installed in off street car parks to maximise safety levels

Milestones

1. Car park resurfacing – commercial St, Kendrew St, Winston St – 2015
2. Walk routes to car parks to be signed and lit to acceptable standards and CCTV to operate where possible in off street car parks. Audit - 2015
3. The principles of Park Mark accreditation or equivalent will be the ambition in each off street car park. All new car parks to meet standard.

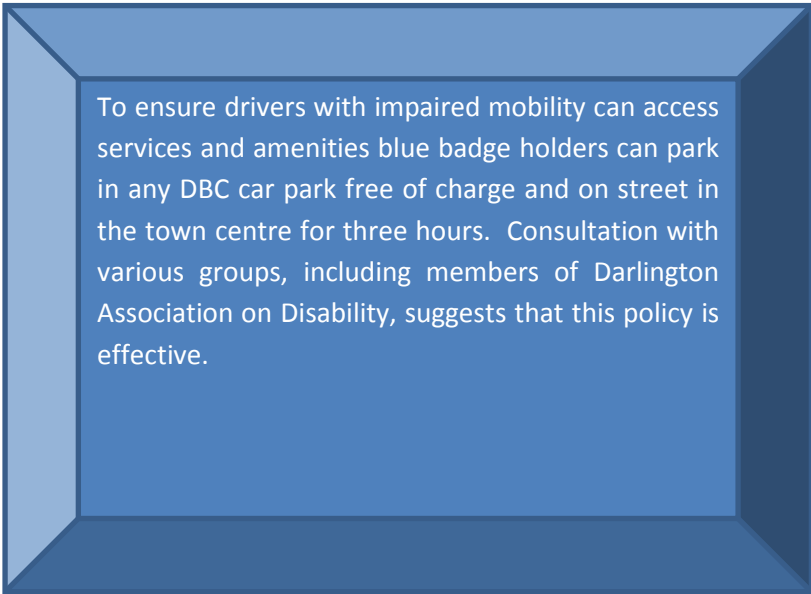
Ambition 3 **Ensure that the Town Centre is easily accessible by all modes of travel, and once in the town centre it is easy for residents and visitors to find their way around.**

Action **Ensure that the provision and management of parking for Blue Badge holders enables disabled drivers and /or passengers to access services and amenities**

Lead **Darlington Borough Council**



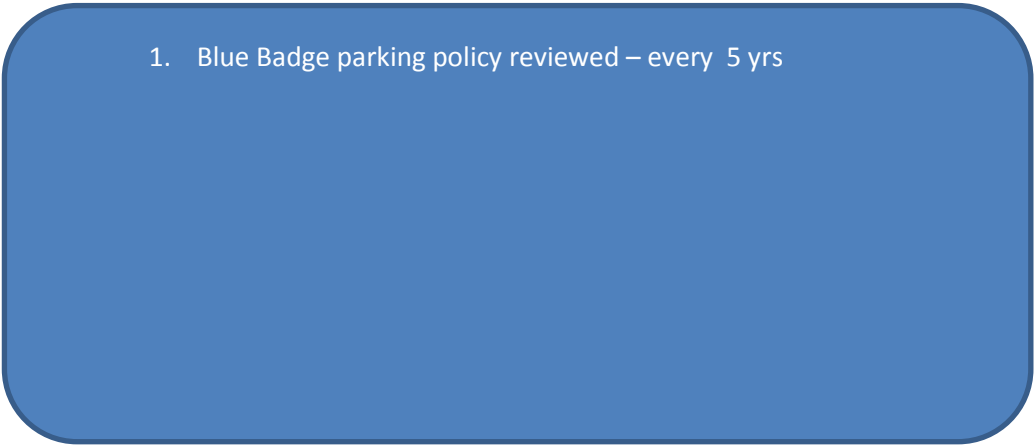
Rationale



To ensure drivers with impaired mobility can access services and amenities blue badge holders can park in any DBC car park free of charge and on street in the town centre for three hours. Consultation with various groups, including members of Darlington Association on Disability, suggests that this policy is effective.



Milestones

- 
- 1. Blue Badge parking policy reviewed – every 5 yrs

Ambition 4 **Ensure there is a strong business support offer to all Darlington Business existing, newly formed and prospective start-up businesses)**

Action **Identify and target support where beneficial to SMEs with high potential for growth & Work with partners to ensure that the business start-up offer is closely aligned to client needs and that it addresses key business planning issues (e.g. financial management and marketing)**

Lead **Darlington Borough Council**

Rationale

Small and Medium Enterprises make up xx % of Darlington's employment base and have a key role in contributing to the future prosperity of the borough and the Town Centre. Independent traders make up 80 % of Town Centre retailers, the vitality of the Town Centre depends upon their continued success and presence in the Town.

Milestones

1. Delivery of High Street Innovation Fund supporting Town Centre traders and funding improvements to empty units– 2013/14
2. Start up support for small businesses delivered by the Council in partnership with TEDCO - started 2012
3. Opening of Business Central on Central Park, 'one-stop' shop front for business support - April 2015

Ambition 4 **Ensure there is a strong business support offer to all Darlington Business existing, newly formed and prospective start up businesses)**

Action **Work with businesses to identify skills shortages and future skills needs and use this information to influence provision of skills training.**

Lead **Darlington Borough Council**

Rationale

Through support for employers to provide training for staff Town Centre Businesses have the opportunity to develop a more skilled workforce, able to better contribute to the success of their business and to the Town Centres reputation as a place to shop , do business and enjoy leisure time.

Milestones

1. Free training available for small business employees through Tees Valley Workforce Skills programme – 2014/15
2. Programme of training workshops developed in partnership with Distinct Darlington – 2014/15
3. Training in use of Digital Technology
4. Delivery of Foundation for Jobs apprenticeship programme, available to Town Centre businesses .

Ambition 5 **Protect and build upon Darlington’s status as an historic market town, while also achieving new high quality commercial and residential development in and close to the Town centre.**

Action **Safeguard the function of Darlington town centre and capitalise on its shopping, culture, leisure, tourism and employment opportunities so that it continues to develop as a vibrant, attractive, safe, friendly and comfortable historic market town centre**

Lead **Darlington Borough Council**

Rationale

The town centre is one of the Borough’s key economic assets attracting custom for shopping, leisure, entertainment, recreation, personal and professional services, in part due to its distinctive and special character. It is important to safeguard the vitality and viability of the town centre and maintain/improve on the blend of modern centre and historic market town.

Milestones

1. Approval of Local Plan policies aimed at protecting the vitality and viability of the town centre – Cabinet Dec. 2014, Public Exam summer 2015, Adoption winter 2015.

Ambition 5 **Protect and build upon Darlington’s status as an historic market town, while also achieving new high quality commercial and residential development in and close to the Town centre.**

Action **Develop process for encouraging and enabling the reuse of empty properties**

Lead **Darlington Borough Council**

Rationale

Despite the relatively low vacancy levels within the town centre (below the national average), which in part reflect the expected 'churn' of properties within a dynamic market setting, the number and particularly 'clusters' of vacant properties is perceived as a serious problem for the image of the town. Actions are needed to limit the number of vacant properties.

Milestones

1. Develop process for responding to vacant units as they emerge including a suite of actions (engagement strategy; funding opportunities etc) - 2014
2. Develop a suite of actions (both carrot and stick) to engage with owners, agents, and tenants to ensure vacant units don't have a detrimental impact on the town centre – 2014/15
3. Investigate scope for, and implications of, 'meanwhile uses', pop-up shops, and other initiatives as appropriate to limit the impact of vacant units – 2014/15
4. Identify what assistance can be given to new businesses including business support and funding options (alternative to High Street Innovation Fund) – 2015/16

Ambition 5 **Protect and build upon Darlington’s status as an historic market town, while also achieving new high quality commercial and residential development in and close to the Town centre.**

Action **Deliver Feethams Development brief**

Lead **Darlington Borough Council**

Rationale

The Feethams Planning and Development Brief (2008) was prepared in the context of existing planning policies and the Darlington Gateway work to meet the site-specific objectives identified by the Feethams and Markets Working Group and in response to developer interest in the area. The implementation of the brief is key to the delivery of the Central Growth Zone.

Milestones

1. Department for Education Office (400 jobs) – opening January 2015
2. Cinema & leisure complex (500 jobs) – scheduled to open December 2015
3. Multi – Storey car park – scheduled to start on site Jan 2015

Annex 2 - Measuring our progress

| Outcome | What | How | Whom |
|--|---|--|---------------------------|
| Darlington has a reputation as a 'friendly town' to visit shop and do business. | % of visitors and businesses Strongly agreeing / Agreeing to statement Darlington is a friendly town' to visit shop and do business | Survey every 2 yrs. | DBC / Distinct Darlington |
| Number of people coming to the Town Centre to shop, do business and take part in leisure and cultural activities | Town Centre Footfall Count | Automated footfall counts in Town centre | DBC |
| Reduced % of vacant units | % of vacant units | Quarterly survey of vacant units | DBC / Distinct Darlington |
| Increased number of Town Centre based employees | Number of employees based in Town Centre Area (<i>to be defined</i>) | | DBC |
| Increased number of people living in or close to the Town Centre (<10mins walk) | <i>Residents in Central Ward</i> | <i>ONS data</i> | DBC |