
PROPOSALS FOR A DRAFT VISION FOR DARLINGTON

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor John Williams, Leader
Responsible Director – Lorraine O’Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive

Purpose of Report

1. For members to endorse the draft vision, priorities and themes of the draft Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS), and to begin to incorporate this structure into corporate, service and financial planning.

Background

Overview

2. In July 2007 Cabinet agreed the project management arrangements to draft a new vision (the SCS) for Darlington, with a view to a draft strategy being presented to a special LSP Board on 29th November 2007, and Cabinet on 11th December 2007. This report is a key milestone in the development of a new vision for Darlington. Much work has been undertaken, including extensive engagement via six Enquiry Groups and 42 consultation events including Town Centre market stalls, rural focus groups, member and employee focus groups, etc.

Influencing the MTFP and context for other plans and strategies

3. The new vision for Darlington needs to influence the Medium Term Financial Plan, shape the Council’s Corporate Plan, departmental and service plans, as well as forming the basis for the Local Area Agreement. Any delays to the new vision for Darlington will therefore have serious knock-on effects to other key projects. Despite having many strands, the project remains on track.

The Local Area Agreement and performance indicator set

4. The Local Area Agreement will form the delivery plan for the SCS, and as such will be made up of a prioritised set of performance indicators. The draft SCS is therefore the first step to being in a position to developing a Local Area Agreement for Darlington. The Department for Communities and Local Government have released a set of 198 performance indicators that the LSP and its partners need to choose from for the LAA, made up of 35 negotiated indicators and 16 statutory children and young people indicators.

Engagement and prioritisation

5. Consultation has been core to the entire process, with over 2,000 ideas for improvement received through a variety of events and the Enquiry Group process led by partners. Prioritisation events were aimed at different groups, encouraging rich and diverse feedback through a variety of mechanisms including Darlington Assembly and the Citizens’ Panel. A

range of detailed background data has been produced and will be published in a technical annex, including regional, sub-regional and local data, government priorities, performance information, etc.

Information and Analysis

6. The main issues addressed in this report are:
 - (a) How will the new SCS differ from our existing Community Strategy?
 - (b) Vision;
 - (c) Priorities;
 - (d) Themes;
 - (e) Developing our Local Area Agreement.

How will the new SCS differ from our existing Community Strategy?

7. All of the effort, commitment and work carried out by partners and the contribution and ideas submitted from the public will be maximised if the new strategy builds on the foundations of the existing strategy, whilst offering a new and fresh approach. The table below compares and contrasts the new strategy with the strategy that exists now.

	Now	New
Lifespan	5+ years	10+ years
Vision	Expressed as 4 visionary goals that are difficult to remember and not Darlington specific	A short, simple, Darlington specific statement of vision
Priorities	3 themes ranked as higher priority from a list of 8	2 priorities that will help shape decision-making
Themes	8	5 clearly identified from extensive consultation
Priority Groups	Separate consideration of 3 priority groups e.g. separate NRS	Single strategy to include NRS
Delivery	3 year rolling action plan updated annually	Short term (LAA – 3 years) Medium term (MTFP for Council’s contribution – 5 years) Long term – vision (see below)
Feeling	Doing everything at once	Fewer, clearer priorities structured in short, medium & long term plans

Vision

8. This has been the most difficult aspect of the strategy to develop, partly because of the dichotomy that is Darlington: a town proud of its heritage and quality of life and yet at the same time ambitious to improve. Throughout the consultation, there was a strong desire to ‘grow’ in influence, in quality; though not necessarily in numbers. At this stage in drafting, there is not yet a clear statement of this vision, although it encompasses the following:
 - (a) A prosperous and empowered community founded on its rich tradition of enterprise and innovation;
 - (b) The opportunities, ambition and vibrant life of a city;

- (c) The quality of life and history of a friendly market town;
- (d) Successful, innovative and enterprising businesses;
- (e) Easy and sustainable access by road, rail and air for everybody.

9. More work is needed to develop the vision statement further. It will also be possible to consult on the longer description of the vision to give more time to test out options for the summary vision. **Appendix 1** sets out the draft contents page for the SCS, to which the sections on vision and priorities have yet to be added, following consideration of this report.

10. The idea behind the short, medium and long term focus can be illustrated schematically as follows:

Short	Medium	Long
Lingfield Point Commercial Street – The Oval Central Park Faverdale The Academy West Park Eastern Transport Corridor	University town Central Park Linking Education, business development and skills	Mixed use quarter Innovative knowledge based companies Tees Valley Metro Sustainable Transport Exemplar

Priorities

11. There are two main ways to understand what priorities mean in the context of the SCS. The first is to think in terms of time. If we are to achieve our vision, there are things that we need to do in the short, medium and long term. Those that we tackle first could be assumed to be our priorities. More usefully, we can think of priorities as being those things that will guide our decision-making as we seek to deliver the vision. Over the numerous planning and financial cycles that we will undertake over the lifetime of the SCS, what will we use to guide us? From the consultation process, it is suggested that Cabinet adopt two priorities:

- (a) The Darlington Vision, to be developed as appropriate, describing Darlington as a **place** and helping us shape our investment decisions and spatial planning;
- (b) ‘One Darlington’ that describes our approach to **people** and specifically, the need to make sure that people are not disadvantaged by their income, where they live or any other potential type of disadvantage that would risk their missing out on opportunities that realising the vision will offer. Specifically, this means narrowing the gap between the most disadvantaged people and communities and the rest of the borough. In many ways, it reflects the findings of enquiry group six, in particular the need to make sure that all themes of the strategy are driven by community focus and that we work together to build a community of inclusive and caring relationships.

12. The consultation process offers us rich insight into those things that were not prioritised which would benefit from further analysis to understand the choices that were made.

Themes

13. The process that we have gone through so far in developing the SCS led to a natural breakdown of 13 groupings of issues arising from the enquiry groups and consultation. These were then prioritised by a number of different groups including Darlington Assembly, the Citizens’ Panel, residents’ focus groups in rural areas, DAD etc. We would

lose the richness of intelligence of this process if we were to simply group everything together. For example, the considered view of partners as to what would make the biggest difference to Darlington after an enquiry process was expected to be, and is different to a questionnaire completed by the citizens' panel. The views of, for example, disabled people, would be lost if we took a simplistic mathematical view of counting views. The idea is not to make a value judgement of which view prevails, but rather to seek to balance the many perspectives into a series of themes that will make sense for Darlington.

14. More detail on the views gathered is presented in the themes section of the draft strategy presented in **Appendix 2**, which forms the largest part of the strategy. From the consultation process, five themes have been identified:
 - (a) **Prosperous Darlington** – this was the partners' highest priority and forms the most visionary part of the SCS;
 - (b) **Aspiring Darlington** – this was a high priority for many groups and reflects the vital importance for Darlington's future growth potential as well as being a theme that recurred throughout the enquiry groups;
 - (c) **Healthy Darlington** – this was the second highest priority for partners and reflects the enhanced recognition that health and well-being play a vital role for individuals and communities. This is a significant shift from the last strategy;
 - (d) **Sustainable Darlington** – none of the words for themes are fixed here and this one least of all. We are aiming to get a clear sense in as few words as possible about the things we need to do to deliver the strategy, in this case incorporating environmental impacts, accessibility, transport, and our response to climate change. At this point we are using the term 'sustainable', which may need to be rendered into more accessible language before final drafting. Similarly, sustainability as a concept and in particular climate change needs to cut across all themes. The content of the themes has been developed with this in mind albeit with further work to do;
 - (e) **Safer Darlington** – In many ways, it could be argued that a safer Darlington would be a natural by-product of making progress in the other themes. However, such was the public opinion on this theme – it gained highest priority in the Citizens' Panel, with Darlington Association on Disability, and with some residents' focus groups - that it has to be part of the new strategy.
15. In order to incorporate the NRS within the SCS (to ensure, in line with enquiry group 6 that we focus on the communities of greatest need), a section on 'One Darlington' has been included within each theme. These need further work to be fully fit for purpose.

Developing our LAA

16. As explained above, we need to be a position to begin to identify the 35 indicators that will comprise the LAA. In discussions so far we have suggested that a candidate for inclusion would be identified via the following set of filters:
 - (a) That it is a feasible indicator to measure progress on our SCS (since we would end up managing two sets through the LSP if they were different);
 - (b) That we have data on which to set a baseline;
 - (c) That we can significantly improve performance in the LAA period (3 years) – there is little point of trying to improve performance markedly in an area that is already performing well. This includes ruling out indicators that have large fluctuations in small numbers.

17. A first attempt at analysing the national PI set has been presented as **Appendix 3**. This is a rough attempt to group the indicators by theme. It will be necessary to narrow down these sets to a much shorter set, with much of the technical work having to be completed between now and when the final SCS is presented to the LSP Board, Cabinet and Council in March 2008.

Outcome of Consultation

18. Consultation with a range of stakeholders in recent months has informed the production of the draft Sustainable Community Strategy. Additionally, the Enquiry Group process has engaged widely with key stakeholders, with outcomes contributing to the development of the draft strategy. Further engagement and consultation on the draft document is planned for the next two months.

Legal Implications

19. 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

20. 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. The draft Sustainable Community Strategy has been drafted in recognition of those requirements and will be complementary to meeting the general duty. The Strategy will be drafted in consultation with the Safer Communities Co-ordinator and key partners, with relevant actions included as appropriate.

Council Policy Framework

21. The issues contained within the final Sustainable Community Strategy will require approval by Council.

Decision deadline

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

Conclusion

23. Much work has gone into the drafting of the SCS to date, but there is still a long way to go to finalise the document. A clear steer is needed on the proposed vision, priorities and themes so that we can feed this information into the emerging draft, to be further developed along with the associated PIs as the consultation process runs. The next steps are to quality check the draft content and incorporate Cabinet's views on the vision and priorities contained within. Consultation on the draft would then begin with a range of stakeholders from early December and conclude with the Darlington Partnership Assembly on 31st January 2008.

Recommendations

24. It is recommended that Cabinet endorse the draft SCS attached as a basis for further extensive consultation.

Reasons

25. The recommendation is supported as a major delivery organisation of the SCS, that the draft proposals are incorporated in corporate, service and financial planning.

Lorraine O'Donnell
Assistant Chief Executive

Background papers

Developing a Sustainable Community Strategy, Local Area Agreement and refreshing corporate planning (Cabinet 10.7.07)

Lorraine O'Donnell Ext. 2013