

ANNEX 2

EXPERIENCE DARLINGTON CONSULTATION SUMMARY 2017

In total the Experience Darlington consultation received a total of **209 responses** submitted through a combination of methods, broken down as follows.

1. Influencers / Stakeholders and potential funders

- A series of face to face meetings have been held with **9** key partners* / organisations to discuss the strategy and potential opportunities.

*Partners engaged included;

Network Rail; Northern Rail, Arriva, National Railway Museum, DAD, Natural England, Newcastle and Gateshead Initiative, TVCA, Darlington Cares

2. Local stakeholders – partners / businesses already located in the town

- **38** existing contacts / networks were also directly contacted to circulate information to local stakeholders and to feed their comments back
- In addition to this a series of presentations / discussions were also conducted for local networking / community groups including; NEECC, Friends of Darlington and Stockton Railway, Creative Darlington board, Town Centre Board, Quakers Society, Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership.

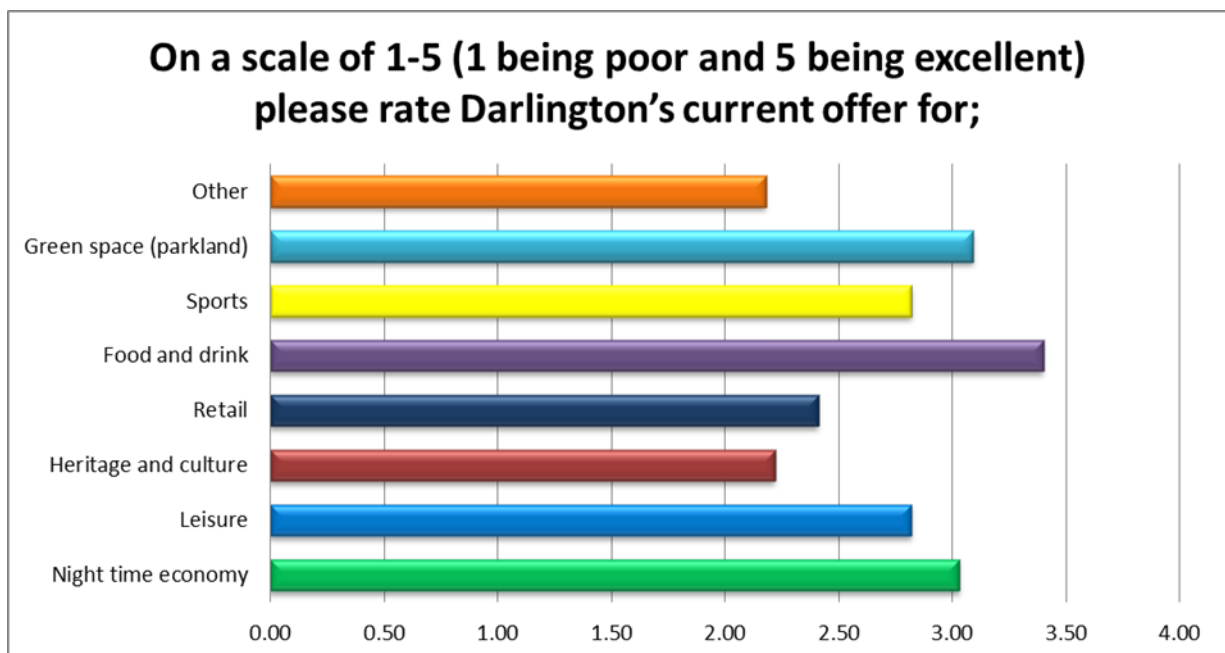
3. General public / residents

- An article linking to the survey monkey was included in the March edition of One Darlington magazine, with a distribution list of **52,000 homes**
 - A series of social media posts were scheduled receiving **42** comments
 - A dedicated website and email address was established linking to the survey monkey but also providing opportunity for more detailed representations – **7** responses
 - A survey monkey for general public / residents received a total of **102** responses
 - A feature in the DBC weekly staff briefing - seen by over **1,000** DBC staff
 - A press release on the strategy was featured in the Northern Echo
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SURVEY MONKEY

- **102** responses in total; **86%** residents; **10%** employees and **4%** identified themselves as visitors

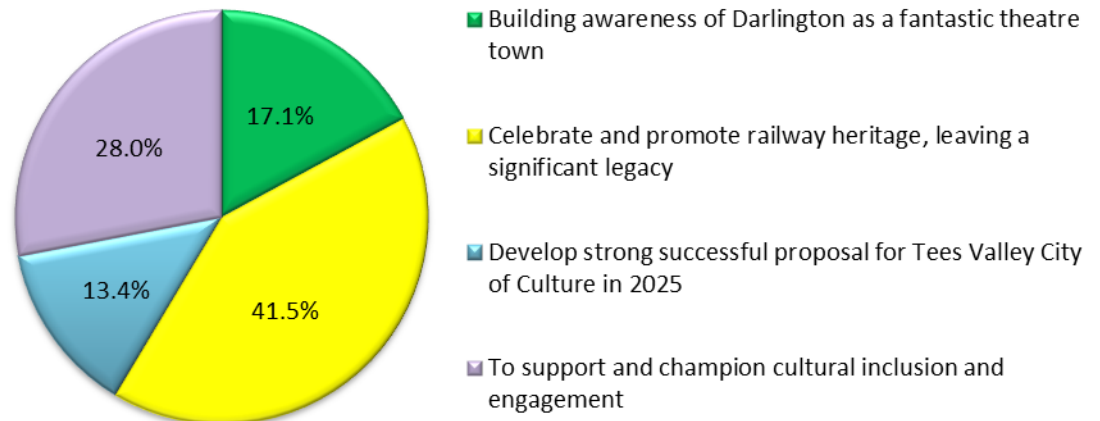
- **86%** agreed we need a visitor / tourism strategy for the town however only **39%** of these stated they supported the Experience Darlington strategy, 47% were unsure
- **87%** also believe Darlington needs a dedicated cultural strategy to sit underneath this, however **62%** felt we do not currently have a distinctive, excellent and accessible cultural offer
- **58%** of respondents felt improvements need to be made for visitors to be able to see what there is to do in Darlington
- **77%** believe we need to focus on promoting Darlington in relation to wider attractions
- **53%** see benefits for Darlington if Tees Valley were to be awarded City Of Culture 2025
- **74%** believe there is a need for a dedicated programme and projects to promote inclusion in culture
- **87%** believe Darlington needs a dedicated cultural strategy



Three emerging priorities

- **82%** feel railway heritage can help encourage visitors to Darlington but a huge **75%** said we don't promote this enough
- Almost half (**45%**) felt Darlington's theatre offer helps encourage visitors to the town yet only **23%** felt we promote that offer well enough, a massive **43%** felt we don't currently promote the theatre offer enough

What do you think is the priority amongst the ambitions shown?



- An overwhelming **87%** of respondents believe public events are important to the economy of the town in terms of promoting Darlington as a place and encouraging visitors.
- **44%** of respondents said they would recommend visiting the town to friends however 28% were unsure and concerningly 27% said they would not
- **53%** said they would recommend specifically town centre events and festivals to friends, 28% were unsure and 19% said they would not

General comments / recommendations

- Review parking charges – free parking or first 1 or 2 hours free
- Cheaper bus services for family tickets
- Improvements to signage around town to attractions
- Improvements to pedestrian and cycle ways in town centre
- Pedestrianise whole town centre not dangerous half and half as is now
- Better connection with wider areas including Wear Valley (Bishop Auckland)
- Town centre toilets
- Use market square for markets
- Offer reductions at Darlington Head of steam for Darlington residents and schemes to encourage repeat visits
- Have well-advertised tourist information point
- Improve south park facilities such as Preston Park, Hardwick Park etc
- More town centre and cultural events
- The strategy omits the legacy left to Darlington by the Society of Friends

- Strategy should be more explicit about the rich tapestry of Quaker history
- Place 2025 City Culture bid in context of Quarter business context
- Strengthen and integrate historical buildings and architects
- Need to develop strong partnerships
- Include the Crown Street Library, significant is the Quaker heritage to the strategy
- Need to be clearer on messaging and branding
- Crown Street Library should be retained as a visitor attraction
- Use Crown Street Library for local studies
- Re work the Heritage Trail

Comment on representations received

Whilst it is acknowledged that the Quaker heritage and legacy is an important ingredient in the Experience Darlington Strategy it is not necessary to be so prescriptive within the high level strategy as suggested by representations. This is not to undermine the built and social heritage legacy of the Quakers and indeed the positive utilisation of these assets will undoubtedly be captured as more detailed projects emerge from all partners.