



What We Offer

Darlington Greener Communities Ltd (DGC) will be a registered and incorporated body, a Co-operative Society for the Benefit of the Community. The members will be groups and individuals with an interest in supporting the aims of the Society, namely, the development and maintenance of a Greener Darlington.

The Co-operative will employ such professional services as are required to support the voluntary work of its members. The Co-operative will create strong working relationships with the Council and its staff in relevant departments. Initially, it is proposed that the Council grant aid the Co-operative for a period of three years to enable it to become established as a competent partner in maintaining Green Spaces and clean streets in Darlington.

The Co-operative will bring together support for both Street Champions and Green Spaces Volunteers.

Street Champions

Our street champions programme empowers local residents with the skills and tools they need to keep their local areas and communities clean. Currently there are over 400+ self-actuating volunteers operating where they live. They communicate with their neighbours and work with them to achieve behavioural change such as not dropping litter, bringing in their wheeled bins after collection, removing graffiti and generally keeping the area around their homes clean.

DGC's role in empowering and enabling this movement of people across Darlington, desperate to achieve things for themselves

1. **Provide Equipment:** When a resident signs up to the street champion programme they are provided with equipment to support them in keeping their local area clean (Litter stick, bags, gloves, bag hoop, stickers, etc.) And information on how to develop their area supported by Darlington Greener Communities.
2. **Provide database of registered street champions:** DGC will maintain a secure database of residents who have signed up to the project which can be analysed by area, ward location, networking, identify where we need to recruit and campaign and dynamically provide information to street champions.
3. **Organise litter pick events/equipment supply:** DGC will provide support and equipment to organised litter events, Big Spring Clean, Keep Britain Tidy Week, Litter Free Durham & Darlington, 'Friends' Groups and Community Groups etc. Such events demand detailed management, such as room bookings, vehicle hire and liaison with several parties, press relations and publicity to be successful.
4. **Liaise with the Council's Street Scene service:** DGC will support Street Champions by providing operational information gleaned though liaison with the Council's Street Scene services on waste collection, litter bin emptying and grass cutting route schedules.

This will allow local communities to best improve their own areas, working in conjunction with Street Scene.

5. **Resource Pack:** DGC will create a resource pack and advice on how best to use it. We will deliver workshops throughout the year to empower and equip residents to work confidently with their neighbours to improve and maintain their local area.

6. **Social Media:** Set up, administer and moderate a connected 'Greener Communities' social media presence (Facebook, Twitter etc.) to allow and ensure up to date news and features are continually inputted into the site and provide a dynamic communication link with street champions across Darlington Borough

7. **Produce a street champion communications plan:** Provide a communication plan aimed at recruiting additional street champions "Friends' group volunteers and expanding the service further. Included in the communication plan is a schools based litter, waste awareness and recycling education programme aimed at increasing the recycling levels in Darlington and reducing waste

8. **Work with other agencies:** Establish links and positive relationships between 'Darlington Greener Communities' and other CVS organisations within Darlington, Neighbourhood Watch, Age UK, Good Friends, D.A.D, 'Hi-Gro' Darlington etc. to further improve local communities, as well as organisations such as Darlington Cares, Darlington Police, Darlington Fire Service, Police & Fire cadets to develop their own networks through the greener communities structures

9. **Other services under consideration.**

- a) An evening collection service for litter picked during the day by volunteers.
- b) Strategically targeted, litter bin emptying by volunteers, especially in places where the use of the bins is sporadic and changeable, e.g. parks where it is very weather dependent.
- c) Environmental enforcement, to support the Council on this important but hard to resource

area by working out effective, volunteer based, evidence gathering techniques.

Green Spaces Volunteer Groups

There are currently 17 green spaces groups across the Borough, each of which, to a greater or lesser extent, is helping to manage a green space in their local neighbourhood. All of these require help and support to function effectively. This may range from gaining permission to carry out the tasks they see fit to perform on their local green space to obtaining skills that they need in order to 'just get on with it'. In addition, there are many hundreds of green spaces where there are at present no local groups and no local input. These green spaces are currently managed by the Council. As the Council faces an ever decreasing resource of its own, DGC has recognised that there is likely to be an increasing demand from people wanting to do something for themselves. To make this possible, we will offer the following support:

1. Seeking and granting landowner's permission.

Through a service level agreement with the Council, DGC will provide landowner's permission to groups or their representatives so they can carry out mutually agreed activities. This will require groups to discuss their latest idea for a project, event or activity, with one of a number of key DGC representatives who will endeavour to provide feedback on the spot or within a short timeframe. Through the agreement that DGC has with the Council, this representative will be able to authorise a wide range of low level activities as well as those activities that have provisionally been agreed through the annual management planning process. (*See below*) If a more complex situation requires an undertaking such as the granting of a landowner's licence, the PESAG process or applying for planning permission, then DGC professional advisers will provide guidance, assistance and support and liaise with the appropriate part of the Council on the group's behalf.

2. **Project Consultation.** Provide a skill base sufficiently qualified in a wide range of subjects to enable a variety of groups to assess their ideas at the earliest possible stage in their development. This will help them to move projects forward more quickly and effectively. DGC will signpost ways of accessing necessary training to carry out the task and identify additional help in obtaining funding. Whether it's a new pond, a new wildflower meadow or a new play feature, whatever the aspiration, if a group is unsure of their latest ideas or plans, DGC will be on hand to discuss and advise as appropriate.
3. **Community Engagement.** Provide advice, guidance and support on community engagement, testing the water with the community, assessing likely impacts and dealing with comments and concerns down the road. Much of this essential ingredient of funding applications plays an important part also in the preparation of a formal planning application. Community consultation can, however, be either very simple or very complicated. Help in organising the right level and the right type of community engagement, a key process in managing sites, is vital.
4. **Management Plans.** Provide a forum for the annual round of monitoring, updating and amendment of site management plans so enabling medium to long term development of sites. Without a long term agreement with the Council, groups will not feel that they are in charge of the site. Having an agreed management in place is the essential ingredient for groups to take more ownership of the facility and identify what is the role of the group and what should still remain the responsibility of the landowner. This annual process, ideally beginning in September as the year's activities are reviewed and culminating early the following year as the new year's activities plan is signed off by both parties, this process gives groups clarity about what their annual tasks are aim to achieve.
5. **Contractor Management.** Provide advice and support on contractor management, assessing method statement, risk assessments and CDM regulations when required. For a group to take on a contractor it may seem simple in principle, 'I know a man who has a digger who can.....' and even if this may still be possible, but as it is public land it is important that some simple but necessary steps are taken. Otherwise, groups and individuals may well find themselves directly responsible and potentially liable.
6. **Direct support for existing Groups.** On numerous occasions throughout the year there will be times when Darlington's existing or new green spaces groups look for hands-on support for events or activities they are intending to hold. While DGC resource may be low in the early stages, it is envisaged that as time progresses, the support that groups can give each other will replace the professional support that is currently available from the Council. Groups will need help when they engage with other parties, such as corporate responsibility teams, community payback teams, schools and colleges and other groups or bodies.
7. **Risk Assessment and Method Statements.** DGC will provide support for all groups on carrying out risk assessments and writing method statements. This will apply to a wide range of activities, but especially where sensitive habitats are concerned or areas very exposed to the public's activities. Having evidence of a well thought through set of safe practices is essential to protect against possible litigation.
8. **Funding.** Provide support in writing funding bids as well as applying for larger borough or catchment wide grant aid aimed at assisting area based initiatives.
9. **Insurance and Liability.** Provide cost effective, group insurance for members and members activities.

10. Training. Identify training needs and organise training and training packages for members.

Volunteer Development

DGC will help new groups develop into self-sustaining organisations dedicated to looking after their own green space and working with others. DGC will:

1. Monitor and Develop Public Spaces.

Darlington has many thousands of public green spaces and DGC will identify opportunities for greater community involvement in managing them. DGC will promote the idea of taking care of neglected spaces to the general public and encourage people to get together and decide what they might like to do. They might decide to set up a new friends group for an existing green space or nature reserve. At present there are no groups looking after Brinkburn Pond, the Black Path or Red Hall Nature Reserve. As groups or individuals, they might wish to create and manage their own local mini woodland, grow vegetables in their own planters on a communal green space, cut their own grass more frequently than the Council does, put a community garden or a memorial garden in the green space at the end of the road, get arty and creative on the triangle of green at the bottom of their street or start up their own wildflower meadow on the strip of grass in front of their houses. DGC will show them how to go about it.

2. Provide initial support to new groups once they come forward. DGC will operate a system whereby new groups are encouraged to build their own capacity up to a minimal level, say, at least 5 names and at least 3 addresses, and once this is achieved we will work with them to help them develop their idea. This initial support will see help provided on a practical level for the first few of their activity days.
3. Provide continuing support thereafter but more in the background, encouraging the group to play a part in the wider co-operative.

Habitat Management

- 1 DGC will provide volunteer based practical management of a range of green spaces, important for wildlife and people but presently

without any Council based programme or with any local group with sufficient capacity, to fully support the reserve. This includes places like Redhall nature reserve, the whinnies LNR, Black path and Brinkburn, the SNCI at West Park, Brankin Road and Geneva Woods. The team will include one part time volunteer leader who will lead several volunteer rangers.

- 2 Provide a call on service for the wider DGC activities where transport and available human resources will help fulfil the wider aims of the organisation. This to include the collection of street champion derived litter. This will see the van that is used to attend the nature reserves during the day, doing a regular three to five day per week round in the evenings, picking up volunteer collected litter.

Allotments

Darlington's 16 allotments sites will all convert to self-management by 2020. Currently only 7 of the 16 sites are self-managed but there is a rapidly building movement for this to accelerate to all 16 as rents rise and the Council's ability to subsidise the service is put under increasing pressure. In order to ease this process, DGC will continue to service the remaining 9 sites that rely on the Council to let and re-let plots and collect the rents for the next three years but during this time, will help the remaining sites, develop the capacity to move into self-management. This is a well understood process and falls nicely into the experience and expertise of the wider DGC skills set.

Promotion and Liaison

DGC will lead on publicity, promotion and networking for green space groups around the Borough as well as providing a forum for the groups to liaise with other initiative such as RTR, Bright Water, and Tees Valley Wild etc.

1. Promote the aims and objectives of all partners who are operating in the field towards mutual aims through appropriate sign posting of activities using available media outlets, and especially through social media.

2. Coordination of new and existing initiatives. The increase in the number of especially Lottery funded initiatives who's focus is on environmental improvements has increased greatly in recent years and having a flourishing set of well organised, vibrant community based environmentally focuses groups gives these organisations a rich and fertile ground upon which to develop and deliver their programs. DGC's role is to make sure that when these existing and new initiatives hit the borough, the individual and joint needs of these groups are addressed when developing their programs of work.

Development & Planning Advice

DGC will act as a principal body for advising the Council and other local bodies on key green spaces issues affecting the public realm. In turn, promote a wider understanding of a range of environmental issues as they apply locally to members of the co-op and through a variety of media, to the public at large. The use of urban and urban fringe green space and the development of the boroughs villages are all matters that concern the members of the DGC. The ability to use the co-ops wide ranging expertise in ensuring that this process is delivered in a well thought out, joined up manner with regards to the many associated policies and strategies for the green environment that currently help guide this process, will help make Darlington a better place in which to live in the years to come. DGC will accomplish this by,

1. Reviewing the Darlington Green Infrastructure Strategy on an annual and ongoing basis. This review to be conducted at the end of the year with a short report that outlines the main achievements of the previous year and identifies the key targets for the coming year.
2. Attending strategy meetings where GI issues are under scrutiny and provide guidance on both opportunities and threats.
3. Attending preplanning meetings where new developments effect significant areas of GI and provide guidance on how good design and

attention to existing and the potential for new natural capital can be incorporated into future developments.

4. Develop new and innovative ways of managing new and existing green spaces through the involvement of the community, whether it is through developing income streams from the facilities themselves or through working with developers and charitable bodies with the aim of creating new and fully sustainable ways of managing new green spaces. (This latter point is crucial if new developments are to contain quality green spaces within them as well as contribute through sec 106 contributions to high quality green spaces that connect these new parts of the town to the existing urban area via quality green routes and corridors. Only if new and imaginative ways of paying for their maintenance are found and agreed, will these spaces, vital for the future of the town, be created.)

Waste Awareness & Recycling Education

DGC will work with residents, community groups & schools to promote the councils kerbside recycling service and increase household recycling rates across Darlington.

To develop new and interesting ways to engage with schools, to work alongside the Council to further reduce the levels of household waste going to landfill, work with organisations and charities to promote re-use, recycling awareness and waste minimisation.

Next Steps

We will recall the Conference held on 10 March to test this proposal and, if endorsed by a significant majority of current volunteers and groups, proceed with registration of the Co-operative Society. We will conclude a funding agreement with DBC

We will create a contract with NEEN to provide professional services.

Contact: **Paul Harman, Conference Convenor**