

**CABINET**  
**8 MARCH 2022**

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**DARLINGTON CULTURAL STRATEGY 2022-2026**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member –**  
**Councillor Andy Keir, Local Services Portfolio**

**Responsible Director –**  
**Dave Winstanley, Group Director of Services**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of the report is for Cabinet to consider the Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026 and associated action plan for 2022/23.

**Summary**

2. The Darlington Cultural Strategy (2022 to 2026) attached at **Appendix 1** articulates the importance of culture and how it can contribute to the priorities in the council plan. The strategy sets a vision and priorities for cultural activity which is focused on maximising the social and economic benefits which culture can bring to people across Darlington, including residents, visitors, and those working and investing in Darlington.
3. The Cultural Strategy has been informed by research, discussion with Arts Council England and Tees Valley Combined Authority, discussion at the Creative Darlington board meeting in September 2021, with comments received from partners including Darlington for Culture, Darlington Hippodrome, The Forum Music Studios and Theatre Hullabaloo.
4. The strategy includes an annual action plan that will be monitored to track progress and refreshed annually to ensure there is a focus on achieving the vision and priorities set out in the strategy.
5. The strategy and action plan were presented to the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee on 17 February 2022 and the comments received were:
  - (a) *That be Cabinet be advised of this Scrutiny's view that references to diversity and minority groups be strengthened within the strategy.*

**Recommendation**

6. It is recommended that Cabinet approve the Darlington Cultural Strategy for 2022-2026 and the action plan for 2022/23.

## Reasons

7. The recommendation is supported by the following reason; to ensure that Darlington has a Cultural Strategy placing it in a stronger position to attract external funding and opportunities as they arise.

**Dave Winstanley**  
**Group Director of Services**

## Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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S17 Crime and Disorder	Cultural activities can have a positive impact on crime and disorder by engaging individuals in positive activity.
Health and Wellbeing	Culture can have a positive impact on Health and Wellbeing.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	This report will not make a significant Carbon Impact or impact on Climate Change.
Diversity	One of the priorities within Darlington’s Cultural Strategy 2022–2026 is for Darlington to have an accessible, diverse and vibrant culture.
Wards Affected	Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022–2026 recommendations address all wards in Darlington Borough.
Groups Affected	The Cultural Strategy 2022–2026 is focused on the population of Darlington Borough.
Budget and Policy Framework	There is no impact on the budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This report is not a Key Decision.
Urgent Decision	This report is not an Urgent Decision.
Council Plan	The cultural strategy has set out how the Council will deliver its cultural ambitions.
Efficiency	There is no impact on the Council’s efficiency agenda.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

8. Darlington's Cultural Strategy takes note of the vision and drivers of national strategies, including Arts Council England's Let's Create strategy to 2030, the North East Cultural Partnership's Case for Culture strategy to 2030 and the priorities of the Tees Valley Combined Authority.
9. This strategy uses a definition of Culture as set out by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport which covers the following areas:
  - (a) Arts (including visual arts, literature, music, theatre and dance)
  - (b) Architecture
  - (c) Crafts
  - (d) Creative industries
  - (e) Design
  - (f) Heritage
  - (g) Historic environment
  - (h) Museums and galleries
  - (i) Libraries
  - (j) Archives
  - (k) Film
  - (l) Broadcasting and media
10. Agreeing a Cultural Strategy for Darlington from 2022 to 2026 will help in communicating our cultural vision and priorities for cultural investment to members of the public and potential partners and funders, and support decisions around where we focus resources to benefit residents, visitors and potential investors in the Borough of Darlington, alongside the development of the sector.
11. It is proven that a vibrant cultural offer can bring both economic and social benefits to places including Darlington. Within their 'Cultural Strategy in a box' publication the Local Government Association advise culture should be seen as *'not only the commissioning of arts and the production of events, but also as a tool; that builds upon the heritage of the area; that builds a shared vision and identity for the area that is steeped in history and has a wealth of cultural assets; that builds the local economy particularly in the context of tourism and creative industries; that improves the local quality of life and encourages engagement in community activities; and that provides new ways of tackling challenges around health and well-being.'*
12. The 'Contribution of the arts and culture industry to the UK economy' report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research for Arts Council England, May 2020 advised that *'in 2018, the arts and culture industry supported £64bn of turnover, £29bn of GVA, 461,000 FTE jobs and £16bn of employee compensation in the UK economy'*. This research identified direct economic contributions made by the sector alongside the indirect impact through supply-chain purchases and the induced impact through the wider spending of employees. These benefits are felt in Darlington with people employed and working freelance in the cultural and creative sectors and through cultural assets, events and programmes attracting visits to and investment in the borough.

13. People are key to Darlington's cultural offer with many creative enterprises, organisations roles contributing alongside audience members, customers, networks, participants and volunteers. Darlington is home to Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisation Theatre Hullabaloo, a pioneering organisation which makes, tours and promotes theatre for young audiences, aged 0–16 years old, and has a particularly strong cultural offer for young people.
14. Darlington for Culture and Darlington Cultural Volunteers also support a diverse cultural offer for adults, through network and voluntary support.
15. Besides social capital, Darlington has a strong selection of building and place-based cultural assets including the Head of Steam railway museum, Theatres, Cinemas, 20 archaeological sites within the Borough registered as Scheduled Monuments, Libraries, The Forum Music Studios, Parks and Green Spaces, Festivals and Events and The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts.
16. Various aspects of Darlington's cultural offer have secured investment over the last decade with significant achievements made. These include the opening of the Vue cinema in Darlington in 2016, the restoration and re-opening of Darlington Hippodrome in 2017, the opening of The Hullabaloo in 2018, Stockton & Darlington Railway declared a Heritage Action Zone in 2018, the Enjoy Darlington events programme and Darlington securing Purple Flag status in 2020 with our nightlife deemed one of the safest in the North-East.
17. Darlington has also secured significant support to establish a Rail Heritage Quarter and invested in refurbishment of Darlington Library, with both programmes expected to be completed during the timescale of this strategy. Darlington secured £22.3 million in 2020 through the Town's Fund to support regeneration including the acquisition of key properties on Northgate, to protect heritage assets.
18. The pandemic presented significant challenges to the creative and cultural sector. Government invested significantly in a programme to support cultural recovery and both Darlington Hippodrome and The Forum Music Studio have received support through Arts Council England's Culture Recovery Fund. Additional enterprises, organisations and individuals have received secured support through other Arts Council England programmes, Tees Valley Combined Authority programmes and Darlington Borough Council to support both sustainable operation and recovery. In 2021 Arts Council England identified Tees Valley Combined Authority as one of 54 priority places in England for investment during the first period of their Let's Create strategy 2020–2030.
19. The Cultural Strategy for 2022–2026 will look to build on momentum gained in the last decade and will be reviewed regularly. The vision and priorities for investment within the 2022–2026 timeframe are informed both by our current cultural assets and strengths, and by recognition of opportunities to further enhance Darlington's cultural offer to benefit people and place.
20. The cultural strategy will support the council in delivering its vision:

*Darlington is a place where people want to live and businesses want to relocate, where the economy continues to grow, where people are happy and proud of the borough and where everyone has the opportunity to maximise their potential.*

21. The Council's Priorities are to:
  - (a) Grow Darlington's economy
  - (b) Maximise the potential of our young people
  - (c) Support the most vulnerable in the Borough
  - (d) Working with communities to maximise their potential
22. The cultural strategy builds on the Council vision and priorities, setting out the actions that ensure the Council is in a position to create a place to be proud of that values its heritage and culture, placing them at the heart of the town's economic growth.
23. The proposed vision for Darlington's Cultural Strategy for 2022–2026 is:

***“Darlington will be a place in 2026 and beyond where culture enriches lives, involves people and is central to identity and prosperity.”***
24. Five priorities are identified within the Draft Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026, with accompanying action plan to address each priority:
  - (a) To creatively celebrate Darlington's contribution to the birth of the modern passenger railway.
  - (b) For Darlington to have an accessible, diverse and vibrant culture, encouraging economic growth.
  - (c) For Darlington to champion engagement with culture, particularly amongst children and young people.
  - (d) For culture to thrive within Darlington borough and attract visitors to the Town Centre.
  - (e) For Darlington to have a thriving theatre offer involving people of all ages.
25. Darlington Borough Council will implement the Cultural Strategy working with other partners where appropriate, such as Tees Valley Combined Authority, North East Culture Partnership, organisations including Arts Council England, National Heritage Lottery Fund, residents and cultural organisations, sharing information on progress through the Creative Darlington Board. Action Plans for each of the priorities have been developed, attached at **Appendix 1** (Section 4), and will be reviewed and updated annually. An annual report on progress will be presented to the Creative Darlington Board

### **Financial Implications**

26. The Cultural Strategy and action plan are anticipated to be achieved using existing resource allocations and will draw down on external funding where appropriate.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

27. The draft Cultural Strategy has been informed by research, discussion with Arts Council England and Tees Valley Combined Authority, discussion at the Creative Darlington Board meeting in September 2021, and been informed by comments received from partner including Darlington for Culture, Darlington Hippodrome, The Forum Music Studios and Theatre Hullabaloo.

### **Feedback from Communities & Local Services Scrutiny Committee**

28. The draft Cultural Strategy was considered by Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee on 17 February 2020 and their comments were as follows:
- (a) *That be Cabinet be advised of this Scrutiny's view that references to diversity and minority groups be strengthened within the strategy.*