

# Skinnergate, The Yards and Coniscliffe Road

## CONCEPT DESIGN AND CONSULTATION REPORT



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Commissioned by Darlington Borough Council  
September 2021 - March 2022



Groundwork was commissioned to undertake design work and a consultation exercise with the public and businesses in the Skinnergate, The Yards and Coniscliffe Road areas of Darlington between September 2021 and March 2022.

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**Date of report:** 31/03/2022

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**Disclaimer**

This report has been prepared by Groundwork NE & Cumbria for Darlington Borough Council as part of the Skinnergate, The Yards and Coniscliffe Road Project.

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the information provided verbally and through this document is appropriate and accurate, Groundwork reserve the right to amend their conclusions and recommendations should further or more detailed information become available.

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## Executive Summary

A significant investment has been secured from the Towns Fund to develop Skinnergate and The Yards. Building upon the work that has already been undertaken in the historic yards, the aim of the project is to transform the town centre streets into a vibrant hub for future generations by increasing footfall to businesses, accommodating street cafes, improving greenery and green space, and prioritising pedestrians and cyclists. Proposals and scheme designs look at improving the public realm, capturing uplift for the local economy and aim to better meet the needs of disabled people.

Groundwork were appointed to develop initial concept designs and carry out an extensive consultation process focusing on improvements to the overall public realm in Skinnergate and The Yards and Coniscliffe Road.

Key issues raised by stakeholders were:

- Access for businesses for loading / unloading
- Accessibility for those with visual impairments or physical disabilities
- Contraflow cycle lane needed
- Parking
- Reduce cars, make safer for pedestrians
- Outdoor shelter / canopies for outdoor seating/cafes
- Location of bins
- Better signage
- Vehicles parking on the pavement
- Better lighting

Positive responses demonstrated that people are extremely passionate about the area and want to see investment to improve key areas infrastructure.

In particular, they liked the idea of:

- Development of Café Culture
- Trees, planters and improvement of green spaces
- Pedestrianisation

The final concept designs incorporated the following features:

### Coniscliffe Road:

- Pedestrianisation of the east end of Coniscliffe Road with emergency access only
- Two-way access to Hogarth Court with turning head and loading area
- Redirected bus route made permanent
- Two-way cycling access permitted along full length
- Cycle parking
- Pavement café areas
- Pocket park with trees and seating
- Widened footpaths
- Street trees planted into extended tree pits where possible

- Raised planting containers
- Planters to provide hostile vehicle mitigation
- Suggested materials palette
- Suggested street furniture
- Bollards to prevent vehicles parking on the footways

### Skinnergate and The Yards:

- Extend vehicle restriction hours (10am – 12 midnight)
- No parking allowed on the streets (access to private car parks permitted at designated times)
- Small squares to highlight key architectural buildings
- Pavement café areas
- Performance and meeting areas at junctions of Skinnergate and Duke Street and Post House Wynd
- Art installations to highlight entrances to The Yards
- Street trees in planting pits where possible
- Raised planting containers
- Street furniture
- Widening pavements
- Cycling provision including designated contra-flow lane at west end of Duke Street
- Cycle parking
- Raised tables and table build outs between Bell's Place and Bondgate
- Suggested materials palette
- Suggested street furniture
- Bollards to prevent vehicles parking on the footways

## Introduction

In August 2021, Groundwork North East and Cumbria was awarded the tender to develop concept designs and deliver community planning events and consultation with local stakeholders for the Skinnergate, The Yards and Coniscliffe Road areas of Darlington on behalf of Darlington Borough Council (DBC).

A significant investment has been secured from the Towns Fund to develop Skinnergate and The Yards. Building upon the work that has already been undertaken in the historic yards, the aim of the project is to transform the town centre streets into a vibrant hub for future generations by increasing footfall to businesses, accommodating street cafes, improving greenery and green space, and prioritising pedestrians and cyclists. Any proposals will look at improving the public realm and capturing uplift for the local economy. Scheme designs will also seek to better meet the needs of disabled people.

Groundwork were appointed to develop initial concept designs and carry out a consultation process focusing on the whole length of Skinnergate, Post House Wynd, Buckton's Yard, Clarks Yard, Mechanics Yard, and Coniscliffe Road east of West Street (referred to as 'the area') including reference to the function of adjoining streets and key destinations off the area including Duke Street, Northumberland Street, Grange Road and Houndgate.

The first step of the process was analysis of the existing layout and function of the streets and working closely with the client group to develop concept designs to take to public consultation. The client steering group included DBC's Highway Design Engineers, Transport Policy Officer, Traffic Manager, Towns Fund programme manager, Assistant Director for Economic Growth, Town Centre Reference Group, Public Transport Officer and Town Centre Partnership and Events Manager. This group was able to give context for the design, highlight current issues, outline aspirations for the project and provide professional advice to ensure that the final designs would be deliverable.

Once concept designs were agreed with the client group, the aim of the consultation was to engage with as many people as possible who live, work or visit the area, including local residents and businesses. Key stakeholders were also contacted to provide input; including bus operators, cycle groups and disability groups.

Analysis of the first phase consultation results was used to amend the concept designs. A second phase of consultation followed this.

This report provides an overview of the design development, consultation, processes undertaken and the results of the feedback from residents, businesses and the wider community. It provides detail of the concept designs, the rationale behind the designs and subsequent changes to the designs, feedback from the consultation and finally recommendations for the Council, based on this feedback from people who engaged.

## Project Scope

The study area included the whole length of Skinnergate, Post House Wynd, Buckton's Yard, Clarks Yard, and Mechanics Yard, including reference to the function of adjoining streets. Coniscliffe Road was included within the study area to explore the possibility of retaining some of the benefits of partial closure of the street during the lockdown period.

Desktop research was undertaken in Autumn 2021 to identify the boundaries of the targeted consultation and the businesses and residences in that area. This allowed us to identify and initiate discussions with relevant stakeholders including local residents, businesses and other interested parties, such as cycle and disability groups, to gain greater insight into how stakeholders use the area and to start to identify potential issues and concerns as well as people's suggestions and ideas.

## Stage 1 Concept Designs

Following site visits by the design team in the proposed areas and analysis of the existing opportunities and constraints, initial Streetscape concept design proposals were developed for Skinnergate and The Yards and Coniscliffe Road by Groundwork's Landscape Architects in consultation with Darlington Borough Council highway design engineers and traffic managers.

Opportunities and constraints identified:

- Prioritise pedestrian access and needs of people with disabilities
- Safe unimpeded route for visually impaired people
- Maintain trader access
- Connectivity of cycle routes
- Carriageway space for contraflow cycling and all other functions of the street
- Bus routes – Coniscliffe road
- Traffic restrictions
- Hostile vehicle attack
- Loading bays
- Servicing for waste collection
- Takeaway access
- Residential access
- Extend the improvements to The Yards and strengthen the links with Skinnergate
- Lighting provision
- DfT's Manual for Streets and LTN 1/20 Cycle Infrastructure Design

The preliminary designs attempted to take into account the above issues whilst also reflecting the ambition to revitalise the streets. The designs aimed to accommodate pavement café culture, increase green infrastructure, highlight key buildings, strengthen links to The Yards and support local businesses. They break up the linear nature of Skinnergate by creating small squares that also highlight key historic buildings and create a vehicle free section and pocket park on Coniscliffe Road.

Visualisations were created to illustrate proposals within the concept designs; including Coniscliffe Road pocket park, Coniscliffe Road pavement cafes, Skinnergate Quaker meeting House, Skinnergate Buckton's Yard entrance and Skinnergate Duke Street junction. Designs and visualisations were reviewed and signed off by Darlington Borough Council Prior to consultation with stakeholders.



Mood boards were also created to be used at consultation events to help stakeholders visualise combined cycle, pedestrian and vehicle options for the highway, ideas for pavement cafes; street trees, planters and pocket parks; seating; lighting; and safety.

### Key Design Points: Coniscliffe road:

- Pedestrianisation of the east end of Coniscliffe Road: emergency access only
- Two-way access to Hogarth Court
- Redirected bus route made permanent
- Two-way cycling access permitted
- Pavement café areas
- Pocket park
- Widened footpaths
- Street trees planted into extended tree pits where possible
- Raised planting containers
- Planters providing hostile vehicle mitigation







### Key Design Points: Skinnergate and The Yards:

- Extend vehicle restriction hours (10am – 12 midnight)
- No parking allowed on the streets (access to private car parks permitted at designated times)
- Small squares to highlight key architectural buildings
- Performance meeting space created at the junction of Skinnergate and Duke Street
- Pavement café areas
- Street trees in planting pits where possible
- Raised planting containers
- Street furniture
- Widening pavements
- Cycling provision including contra-flow lane at west end of Duke Street
- Art installations to highlight entrances to The Yards



## Design rationale for road widths and contraflow cycle provision on Duke Street and Skinnergate:

- Space between buildings in town centres is limited. Local priorities will help determine road layout.
- Accommodating pavement café culture, incorporating green infrastructure and enabling cycle connection to the wider cycle network have been identified as objectives for Skinnergate.
- A single width carriageway with wider footways maximises space for pedestrians, pavement cafes and green infrastructure.
- Cycle Infrastructure Design Guidance, LTN 1/20, July 2020, Sections 7.3.4 states: 'Permitting contraflow cycling in one way streets and using point closures to close certain streets to motor vehicle through traffic will generally provide a more direct route for cyclists and should always be considered. On quiet low speed streets, there may be no need for a cycle lane, enabling cyclists to use narrow streets in both directions. Where there is good visibility cyclists and on-coming drivers should be able to negotiate passage safely. Contraflow cycling should be signed in accordance with the advice in the Traffic Signs Manual.'
- Cycle Infrastructure Design Guidance, LTN 1/20, July 2020, Sections 7.3.5 states: 'Where speed is low in urban areas, contraflow cycling without a dedicated cycle lane has been found to be successful even on narrow streets with on-street car parking. The following minimum carriageway widths are recommended: 2.6m with no car parking; 3.9m based on car passing cycle, no car parking; 4.6m with car parking on one side of the road; 6.6m with car parking on both sides of the road.'
- Groundwork proposes for consultation that car parking be removed from Skinnergate and a 3.9m width carriageway be available, based on car passing cycle.
- The area is already a 20mph zone.
- Restricted access hours will further enable safe cycling.
- Groundwork proposes for consultation that all traffic is prohibited between 10am and 12pm, allowing loading and services before 10am.
- Single level paving is proposed with consideration for placing of street furniture at a distance from the carriageway further enabling safe cycling.

### Alternatives:

- Contraflow cycle lane could be introduced on Duke Street with removal of planters/trees on the south of the carriageway.
- Contraflow cycle lane could be introduced on Skinnergate but would impact on space available for pavement cafes and green infrastructure.
- No contraflow cycling allowed on Skinnergate between 12pm and 10am. Hard to enforce and potential for conflict.
- Existing restriction kept and no contraflow cycling allowed. Again, hard to enforce and potential for conflict.

## Design Themes

A themed approach was taken to the design process:

### ✔ **Green Streets:**

Introducing pocket parks, planters and street trees all help create greener streets, allowing us to connect to nature and allowing nature to help us with cleaner air, storm water retention, shade in the summer and increased biodiversity. All helping to reduce our carbon footprint.

### ✔ **Healthy Streets:**

A pedestrian and cycle zone with connectivity to the wider cycling network encourages healthier, active travel and helps reduce pollution.

### ✔ **Vibrant Streets:**

Accommodating the developing pavement cafe culture within an attractive and safe environment. Using single level paving to give a more pedestrian friendly experience.

### ✔ **Safe streets:**

Tactile paving and contrasting stone colour to mark the emergency vehicle and cycle access route. Protection provided with heavy planters and bollards where required. A 20mph limit along with a prohibited access area make the street safer for all.

### ✔ **Working Streets:**

Reinforcing the area as a destination will lead to increased footfall and people staying for longer helping to support local business. Provision of loading space could include small vans delivering to Coniscliffe Road outside of the pedestrian zone.



# Coniscliffe Road



## Green Streets:

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## Healthy Streets:

A pedestrian and cycle zone with connectivity to the wider cycling network encourages healthier, active travel and helps reduce pollution.

## Vibrant Streets:

Accommodating the developing pavement cafe culture within an attractive and safe environment. Using single level paving to give a more pedestrian friendly experience.

## Safe streets:

Tactile paving and contrasting stone colour to mark the emergency vehicle and cycle access route. Protection provided with heavy planters and bollards where required. A 20mph limit along with a prohibited access area make the street safer for all.

## Working Streets:

Reinforcing the area as a destination will lead to increased footfall and people staying for longer helping to support local business. Provision of loading space could include small vans delivering to Coniscliffe Road outside of the pedestrian zone and larger vans to Grange Road.



# Skinnergate & The Yards



### Green streets:

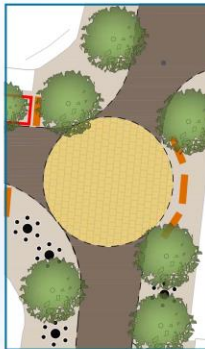
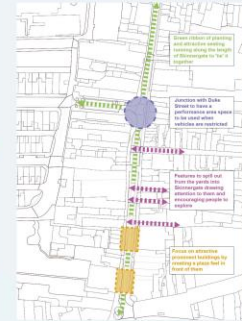
Street trees and planters along the length of Skinnergate create a green ribbon that is both attractive and helps to make the town centre more environmentally friendly.

### Healthy and Safe Streets:

Pedestrian and cycle friendly with restricted traffic access and a permitted cycle contraflow connecting to the wider cycle network. Quality surfacing on a single level with tactile and contrasting road edging allow safe access for all.

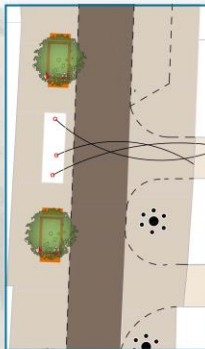
### Working Streets:

Loading space where required with time allocated for deliveries for local businesses. These spaces could be used for outdoor seating in times traffic is restricted from the area.



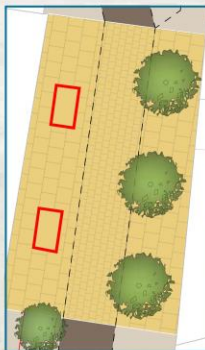
### Vibrant street culture:

Junction with Duke Street to have an informal performance area to be used when vehicles are restricted. Benches and street trees will create an attractive place to meet and spend some time.



### Highlighting the yards:

Striking artistic installations to highlight the entrances to the yards, each one to have a distinct character to encourage people to explore.



### Small squares:

Small squares to highlight prominent buildings like the Quaker House and Mechanics Institute. Paving on one level with a tonal change from the road either side. Street trees and large benches will complete the picture and with restricted traffic access at times will create a 'plaza' type feel to these spaces.



## Video Production

Two videos were commissioned to bring the project to life and give residents and businesses a flavour of the project and the rationale behind the proposed changes. These included walkthroughs of the streets integrating photomontages at key points to reimagine a transformed street. Commentary from interviews with designers and Town Centre manager explained some of the objectives and ambitions of the project

Skinnergate and The Yards film:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0KX1dMzufe>

Coniscliffe Road film

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olnrhw0m9xE>

## Video Screenshot



The videos were uploaded to YouTube on November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2021. From upload to the end of March 2022, between them, the videos had an amazing **1391** views, with a breakdown of **635** views for the Skinnergate video and **756** views for the Coniscliffe Road Video.

## Traffic and Movement Surveys

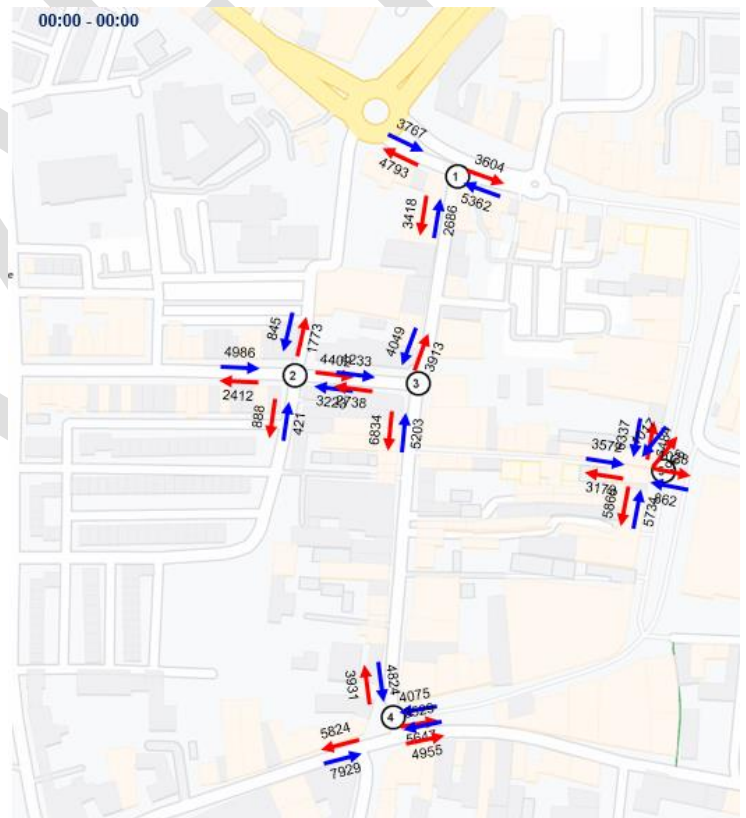
Provided by Tracsis, two movement surveys were carried out to gain a greater understanding of the amounts and types of traffic on Skinnergate, The Yards and Coniscliffe Road. The surveys counted vehicles, cycles and pedestrians. Surveys took place for 24 hours on:

- Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> September 2021
- Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021

The following 5 sites were used for the traffic and movement surveys

- Site 1 Bondgate / Skinnergate
- Site 2 Raby Terrace / Duke Street / Raby Terrace / Duke Street
- Site 3 Skinnergate / Duke Street
- Site 4 Skinnergate / Blackwellgate
- Site 5 High Row / Post House

Full data from Traffic and Movement surveys is available in Appendix 1



The data shows that in all 5 survey sites on both days, pedestrians dominate the traffic particularly between 12:00 and 15:00. In vehicle counts, cars dominate the vehicle type.

As might be expected Site 1 shows the greatest percentages of vehicles on both days, while site 5 is pedestrian-dominated. There is a trend for slightly more vehicles on the weekday.

LGVs were more prevalent on the weekday and the highest percentage were seen on sites 1 and 2. Cycle numbers were low in all areas on both days and averaged out at approximately 1% of traffic. Vehicles of the category OGV2 and Bus/Coach were the least prevalent on both days.

Site 5 shows the highest number of pedestrians on both days with almost identical figures of 98.71% of traffic on the Saturday and 98.70% on the Thursday.

Looking at site 3, the junction of Skinnergate and Duke Street:

Firstly, not surprisingly, there is a direct correlation with the number of vehicles and the restricted access times. The number of vehicles falls to below 5 per interval (15 minutes) between 10am and 5pm. The reverse is true of pedestrian numbers, with the largest footfall occurring between these hours.

On Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> the overall number of pedestrians is larger and the curve a more even spread between 10am and 4pm, between around 200 and 400 people per interval (ppi), dropping to a steady 100 to 150 ppi between 4pm and 11pm.

On Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> however, we see fewer pedestrians, between 100 and 300 ppi on the whole between 10am and 4pm, but with a significant peak of over 600 ppi at lunchtime around 1pm. In the evening numbers fall below 100 ppi after 5pm and generally below 50 ppi after 8pm.

It is clear though, that this is a busy intersection for pedestrians and supports the view that something more could be made of this area as a potential destination as a meeting place or informal performance area.

Vehicle traffic on the evenings is worth noting as the proposals include restrictions on vehicles in the evenings. On Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> between 5pm and 10pm shows a steady flow of 20 to 30 vehicles per interval (vpi). On Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> a similar flow between 5pm and 7.30pm, then dropping to between 5 and 15 vpi until midnight.

On Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> we see the busiest time for goods vehicles between 7am and 10am (no more than 4 per vpi) and a steady low number throughout the evening between 5pm and 2pm, then sporadically through the night. Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> morning between 6am and 10am is busier, with four intervals of 10 vpi. However Thursday evening is quieter.

Restrictions to delivery vehicles has been a concern of some consultees, as has vehicles for evening trade such as take-aways and taxis. Consideration will need to be given to exemptions to the restrictions and balanced against the increased trade from visitors due to a traffic free environment.



## Stage 1 Consultation

### Consultation Activities

During Stage 1 of the consultation process, Groundwork completed a varied range of consultation methods in order to reach a wide cross-section of the public that would be impacted by or have an interest in the proposed changes.

This included:

- ✔ Door knocking / Face-to-face visits focused on businesses in the proposed area to find out any issues they may currently have and gain feedback on the proposed plans
- ✔ Information posted to all businesses in the proposed area that were unavailable at face-to-face visits
- ✔ Outdoor face-to-face consultation events
- ✔ Virtual consultation events
- ✔ Walkarounds in the area
- ✔ Consultation with key stakeholders, e.g. Cycle group, transport, disability group
- ✔ Online survey/questionnaire
- ✔ Facebook and online promotion

### Consultation Meetings

Meetings with Darlington Borough Council steering group were held regularly during the design period and issues around access restrictions, carriageway widths, materials, cycle use, loading arrangements and impacts on bus routes were considered in developing the design.

Examples of feedback from the transport team include:

#### **Coniscliffe Road Feedback:**

“We suggest keeping the west end of the street open to two-way traffic so that residents can retain access to Hogarth Court. This will create a significant traffic free area but there needs to be some thought as to how loading/servicing can be achieved for those premises that effectively become ‘land locked’ away from the highway”

#### **Skinnergate Feedback:**

“This narrow street has to function as adopted highway with loading/servicing, access, emergency access, parking as well as pedestrian and cycling facilities”

#### **Meeting with Darlington cycle groups on 06.12.21**

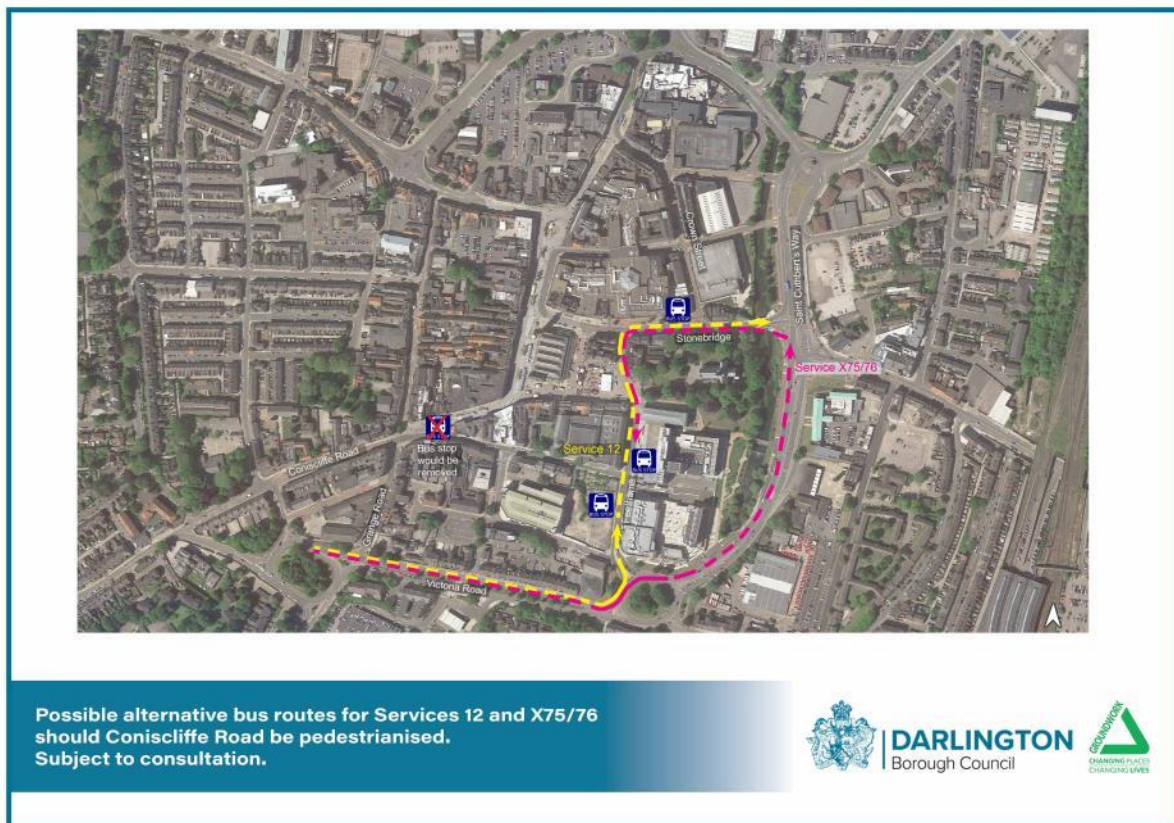
Feedback was positive with support for the idea of restricted traffic, contraflow cycling and removal of parking. Concerns were raised around the transition at the junctions either end of Coniscliffe Road and at the junction between Duke street and Raby Terrace. Also this highlighted the need to include cycle parking.

### Meeting with Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) on 16.11.21

Some issues were raised around areas within the plans that would cause issues for people with disabilities including highlighted problems with narrow pavements and lack of crossing points at north end of Skinnergate, uneven surfacing, access for disabled residents during restricted hours and difficulties crossing at junction of Skinnergate, Grange Road and Houndgate.

### Meeting with Arriva 29.11.21

Meeting with Arriva to discuss possibility of permanently re-routing buses from Coniscliffe Road. Arriva were happy with the idea and agreement was reached for alternative routes for Services 12 and X75/76 via Victoria road.



## Public Consultation Methods

An online survey was created using Microsoft Forms to provide a quick and simple virtual tool to obtain stakeholder's feedback and for the information submitted to be analysed. A QR code and clickable link were made available for easy access. (See Appendix 2 for full survey).

The survey was promoted in the videos and through social media as well as hard copies distributed to businesses.

Groundwork's Community Team visited all businesses within the target area to discuss the proposals and gain feedback on specific locations or issues they felt were important within the proposals.

### Skinnergate

There are both occupied and vacant properties on Skinnergate. There are a wide range of businesses and traders including services such as a dental practice, dry cleaning, hairdresser/barbers, care services; retailers including butchers, chemists and charity shops; entertainment including bingo and betting shops; and food retailers such as pubs, restaurants, takeaways, sandwich shops, etc. The Groundwork team visited the businesses on approximately 3 occasions to make sure that everyone had been spoken to and had an opportunity to have their say on the proposals. Where we were unable to make contact with the organisation, we left information.

Approximately **65** businesses reached.

### Coniscliffe Road

The section of Coniscliffe Road within our target area is a mix of largely business properties with a few residential properties/flats. There are a wide range of businesses including accountants, property management and financial planning; shops/retailers such as a hairdressers, stove & fireplace centre and newsagents; and food retailers such as bars, pubs and restaurants. The Groundwork team visited the businesses to make sure that everyone had been spoken to and had an opportunity to have their say on the proposals. Where we were unable to make contact with the resident or organisation, we posted information.

Approximately **44** businesses reached.

Feedback from businesses received was generally very positive and in support of the proposals with some general queries and some ideas on improvements for the area.

Comments included:

“Lighting on the front of the Quakers house would lighten up the whole street”

“Who will maintain the flower beds”?

“Where would the emergency access route be if we pedestrianised the place”?

“It would be nice if both ends of the street (Skinnergate) get the same support, as developments and activities often take place at the end that leads on to Grange Road

## Public Consultation Activities:

### Friday 5<sup>th</sup> November

Walkaround on Skinnergate and The Yards to discuss the changes people would like to see.  
Attended by 2 people including MP and business owner

### Thursday 11 November, 5-7pm

Virtual consultation for stakeholders to review streetscape design inspirations and provide feedback  
Attended by 8 local business owners

### Friday 12 November

Walkaround on Skinnergate and The Yards with a landscape architect to discuss the changes people would like to see.  
Attended by 2 local business owners

### Tuesday 9 November, 12-2pm

Walkaround on Skinnergate and The Yards with a landscape architect to discuss the changes you'd like to see  
Attended by 1 local resident

### Saturday 13 November, 10am-2pm

Drop-in session outside Quaker meeting House for stakeholders to review mood boards, design inspirations and give feedback.  
45 people stopped to have their opinion on mood boards with all feedback recorded

### Saturday 20 November, 10am-2pm

Consultation in Market Square, outside the Dolphin Centre for people to discuss the changes they'd like to see.  
20 people stopped to have their opinion on mood boards with all feedback recorded



## Streetscape Questionnaires

Using Microsoft Forms, two Streetscape questionnaires were produced. One targeted Skinnergate and The Yards and the other Coniscliffe Road.

Similar themes came out in the feedback for both surveys and a brief overview for the key issues identified through both surveys is detailed below:

### Key Issues Identified

#### Areas for concern or that need to be addressed

- Access for businesses for loading / unloading and emergency services
- Accessibility for those with visual impairments or physical disabilities
- Contraflow cycle lane needed
- Residents parking
- Reduce cars, make safer for pedestrians
- Outdoor shelter / canopies for outdoor seating/cafes
- Location of bins
- Better signage
- Vehicles parking on the pavement
- Better lighting

#### Key Positives from initial plans

- Development of Café Culture
- Trees, planters and improvement of green spaces

## Facebook

Information regarding the project, consultation events, the video and concept designs were shared regularly throughout the life of the project from November 2021 until March 2022 on Groundwork North East and Cumbria's Facebook Page. Groundwork NE & Cumbria have **3458** people who like the Facebook page and **4113** followers.

### Impact of the posts:

According to Facebook, **reach** is the number of unique users who had any content from a Facebook Page or about a page enter their screen. Posts about this project reached **36, 267** people.

Facebook **engagement** is any action someone takes on a Facebook Page or a post. The most common examples are reactions (including likes), comments and shares, but it can also include saves, viewing a video or clicking on a link. Posts about this project engaged **2807** people.

There were **99** comments made. Comments largely tended to be around Darlington in general, or the specific area in question as opposed to about the concept designs, and included:

*"More independents. Love the Market Hall revamp"*

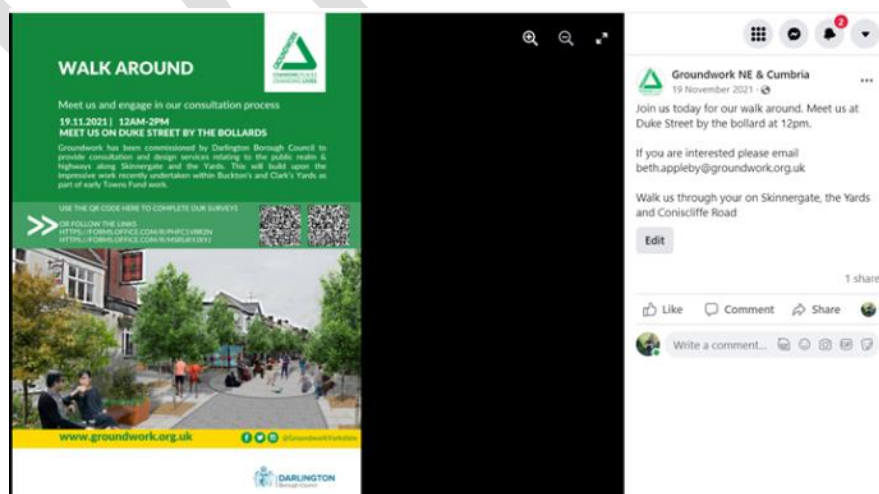
*"Get the buses/cars/taxis out of the centre"*

*"Why pay to park in Darlington when you can go to Teeside park to get all the same high street names. If you want independents, you can go to Richmond. Darlington has become a town of nail bars, betting, fast food and charity shops"*

Posts were shared to a number of local organisations Facebook pages and groups, including Darlington Borough Council, Darlington Libraries, Harrogate Conservatives, Neighbourhood Watch and various local residents' groups such as North Lodge Park.

There were **74** reactions to posts with only around **5 (7%)** of those being negative.

### Example Facebook post:



(Data correct to 25.03.22)

## Streetscape Questionnaires

### Skinnergate and The Yards Streetscape Consultation

#### Headline Statistics

##### Total Responses = 159

93 respondents (60%) answered **DL3** for the first half of their postcode

94 people (60%) identified as **women**, 56 (36%) identified as **men**,  
and 6 people answered that they'd **prefer not to say**

18 people (12%) defined themselves as having a disability

The majority of people visit the area for recreation or social purposes with 126 people visiting for shopping, 108 passing through, 99 social and 52 for nightlife. Only 14 people stated they were visiting for work.

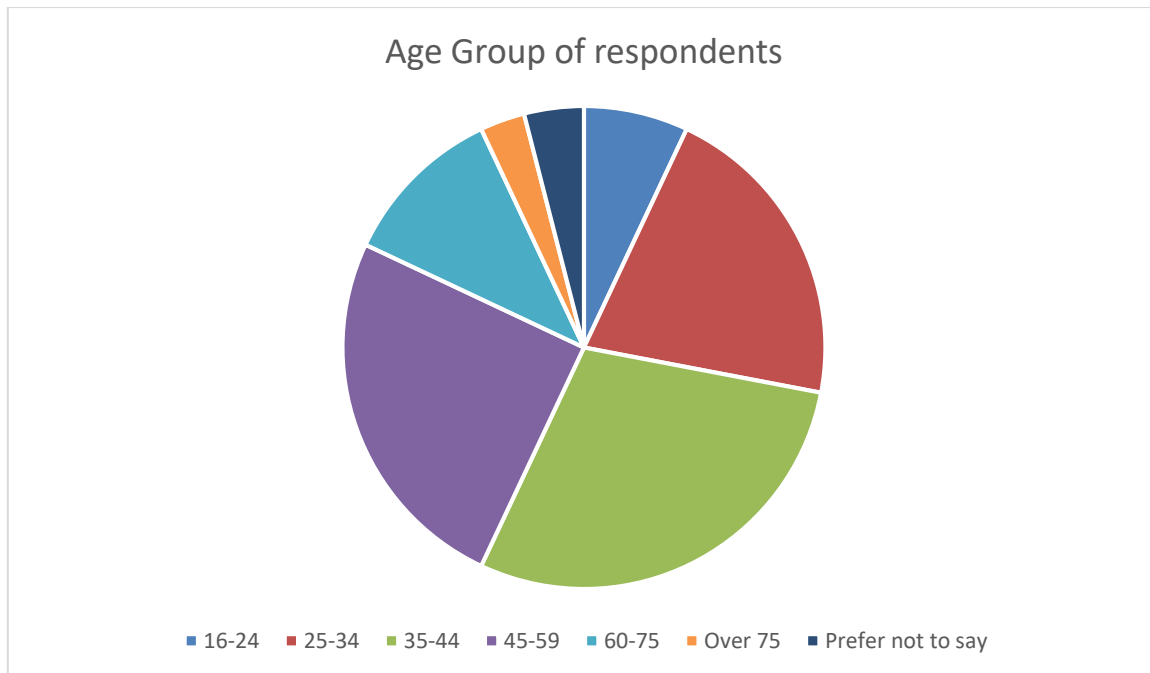
When asked about what changes they would like to see to Skinnergate and The Yards, the majority of respondents (actual percentage listed) stated they would like to see an **increase** in the following areas:

- Pedestrian access **67%**
- Street cafes **76%**
- Pocket parks **80%**
- Planting and street trees **88%**
- Seating areas **84%**
- Performance Spaces **62%**
- Sheltered Spaces **76%**
- Creative Spaces and artwork **78%**
- Recycling facilities **68%**
- Improved lighting **80%**
- Accessible surfacing **62%**
- Vehicle restrictions **64%**
- Wi-Fi **70%**
- CCTV **74%**

The only area where respondents had a higher percentage of responses to **stay the same** was the following:

- Safer cycling **47%**

There were no areas where the majority vote was to decrease changes.



**Do you have any comments of the overall appearance of Skinnergate and The Yards?**

- Clarks yard has seen a great revival with independent shops that are a destination to visit. The new plants and colourful seating have really made it look inviting and unique
- The recent improvements to The Yards have been really good. Lifting the mood in the area. It's not consistent though so a great start but a cohesive approach is required
- Skinnergate is looking very tatty with insufficient seating and greenery
- It was much better when the pavement cafes were there - should be a permanent feature- would make the area nicer with a cafe/bar culture
- The work that has been done on some yards (eg Clark's Yard) - looks great - continuing this in the other yards would encourage use. It would be good to have more trees/other planting in Skinnergate. And limit traffic as much as possible - once business loading/unloading has been done at the beginning of the day

**Are there areas specifically you would like to comment on?**

- The parking. It needs sorting for both customers and businesses
- Lighting and safety at night. The Yards can be very dark and there's little protection
- Would be a great street for more street cafe outdoor eating & drinking
- Too much area devoted to cars. The area needs to be pedestrianised with facilities for cycling, for example cycle lanes and cycle parking. Walking around the area is dangerous as there are not enough provisions for pedestrians. Cars are treated as king and everyone else needs to cope. The focus needs to totally switch and cars kept completely out of the centre of Darlington
- Removal of all parking along Skinnergate would be a bad move. High row is already pedestrianised. Bus routes have moved. People's routes have been significantly limited if they rely on others or have reduced capabilities themselves
- The road surface is very difficult to cycle along. Contraflow cycling at times vehicles are allowed feels dangerous



## What you would/would not like to see with regards to the Streetscape?

- It should be easy to navigate so it is inclusive for those with mobility issues and the visually impaired
- Pedestrianised streets and street cafes/bars would be great
- Be bold. Darlington needs to be bold and provide less car infrastructure and massively increase public transport and pedestrianisation and cycling infrastructure across the town centre area and routes into the town centre
- There is a lot of tree planting proposed, can we ensure these trees will not grow too large and cause issue down the line? Where will deliveries to the premises park / load? If one is blocking the street do they just have to queue? This will be problematic. I have mentioned, removal of parking would reduce my use of the area
- The plans look fantastic! Would improve the whole area and make it more pleasurable to walk and use
- I would like to see access and facilities for cyclists and pedestrians improved. Also provision of more cycle parking, located close to shops / cafes

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## Coniscliffe Road Streetscape Consultation

### Headline Statistics

#### Total 112 Responses

71 respondents (64%) answered **DL3** for the first half of their postcode

60 people (54%) identified as women, 41 (37%) identified as men, 2 (2%) people identified as non-binary and 1 person (1%) answered prefer not to say

9 people (8%) defined themselves as having a disability

The majority of people visit the area for recreation purposes with 85 people stating they visited for social reasons, 73 for nightlife, 61 passing through and 48 people visiting for shopping. Only 14 people stated they were visiting for work.

When asked about what changes they would like to see to Skinnergate and The Yards, the majority of respondents (actual percentage listed) stated they would like to see an **increase** in the following areas:

- Pedestrian access **81%**
- Safe Cycling **63%**
- Street cafes **89%**
- Pocket parks **96%**
- Planting and street trees **91%**
- Seating areas **94%**
- Performance Spaces **67%**
- Sheltered Spaces **68%**
- Creative Spaces and artwork **75%**
- Recycling facilities **62%**
- Improved lighting **73%**
- Accessible surfacing **75%**
- Vehicle restrictions **68%**
- Wi-Fi **70%**
- CCTV **73%**

There were no areas where the majority response was to **stay the same** or to **decrease** changes.

## What are the barriers / issues for people using Coniscliffe Road?

- The one way road is a bit useless and it's just a bit of a waste of space so I welcome any improvements, all I would say is to be respectful to the homeowners in the street so they don't end up with large groups of teens out the front of their homes
- Better if there was no access for vehicles
- As a business owner I am very keen on a permanent solution for a pavement café. Not just for the positive aspect for the business but for our community of customers who have loved being able to sit outside. All of the businesses have been lobbying for this for many years and the support we received from the council arranging the pavement cafes the past two years has been such a help. The street is a very pleasant road into town but could be so much better. The initial artistic impressions shows how much better it could be
- I live nearby and Coniscliffe Rd is my main walking route into town. I love the idea of a pocket park, trees and greenery. I also like the idea of permanent pedestrianisation with the cafes, bars and restaurants offering all year round outdoor seating
- CARS!!! They are pollutants, obviously the road works as a mode of transport for them, but why should cars have right of way in a town centre??? They come round the corners fast sometimes too

## Do you have any comments of the overall appearance of Coniscliffe Road?

- It could be so much nicer and build on the cafe culture aspects, with some greenery
- It would be lovely to see more greenery and a more relaxed pedestrian feel. The growing street cafe vibe is a real attraction
- The road colour need lightening similar to the artists impressions is look light vibrant and cleaner. I believe that there needs to be more flowers, more lighting making the street look very pretty and inviting and I think extending the pathways and adding outdoor dining sections are a great idea
- It's a lost road that has potential to build revenue if it was accessible and inviting. The road prevents this

## Are there areas specifically you would like to comment on?

- The bars, cafes, restaurants should be allowed all year facilities to be set up outside. The trade for them was much higher with passing people. Would be fantastic to do all year more euro town centre style with centres less shopping focussed
- The streets need to be turned over to people NOT people in their cars and their cars
- I would like to see the whole of Coniscliffe Rd, Grange Rd and Skinnergate pedestrianised. With lots of greenery, trees and flowers, however the most important thing for me is that the changes are in keeping with the character and history of the town and are, and NOT a repeat of the hideous monstrosity that is now High Row
- Yes I would oppose changing the current lay out of the road as it is vitally important that my business is able to take deliveries and have access outside of the showroom for my teams of engineers. My suppliers deliver to me every single day at any time
- Junction Grange Rd / Houndgate & Skinnergate can be confusing for drivers & cyclists. Also off putting to pedestrians

## Stage 2 Consultation

### Review of Stage 1

Following consultation with local stakeholders and having gained preliminary feedback regarding the initial concept designs, the Project Team and the Landscape Design team collated the information from the initial consultation stage and surveys to highlight key issues. The issues and potential solutions were discussed with Darlington client group and a number of revisions proposed.

Revised concept designs were created following review of the first phase of consultation and these were used for Phase 2 of consultation.

On the request of Darlington Borough Council, Phase 2 of the consultation was focused around engaging with any businesses within the target area that had not been reached in Phase 1 and those businesses upon which the proposed changes would impact on most to identify any concerns and overcome any issues identified with amendments to plans where feasible.

### Concept Design Amendments

Concept designs were amended following the first phase of consultation.

- ✔ Towards the northern end of Skinnergate, the street is very narrow with no scope to widen the footpaths. Instead, raised tables were added alongside the build-outs and at junctions to make easier pedestrian crossing and to help reduce traffic speed
- ✔ The area on Skinnergate at the end of Post House Wynd was highlighted and a performance/ meeting area created to strengthen the link between the two streets
- ✔ Pavement widened at junction of Skinnergate, Houndgate and Grange Road and a raised table introduced for the whole junction area to reduce the vehicle carriageway, slow traffic and make pedestrian crossing easier
- ✔ A designated cycle lane was introduced towards the junction of Duke Street and Raby Terrace to filter cyclists joining the proposed cycle lane on the rest of Duke Street
- ✔ On the western end of Coniscliffe Road the entrance has been reduced in width and angled more centrally than the previous version to better facilitate cycles continuing west along Coniscliffe Road or turning into Larchfield Street. There would also be a central island on this junction, to be finalised in the drawing up of detailed designs
- ✔ Cycle parking was now also shown on both streets
- ✔ A turning head was added to Coniscliffe Road at the entrance of Hogarth Court to allow for vehicle access (including refuse lorries) and loading space for businesses

# Skinnergate & The Yards



## Green streets:

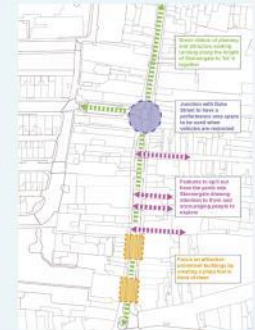
Street trees and planters along the length of Skinnergate create a green ribbon that is both attractive and helps to make the town centre more environmentally friendly.

## Healthy and Safe Streets:

Pedestrian and cycle friendly with restricted traffic access and a permitted cycle contraflow connecting to the wider cycle network. Quality surfacing on a single level with tactile and contrasting road edging allow safe access for all.

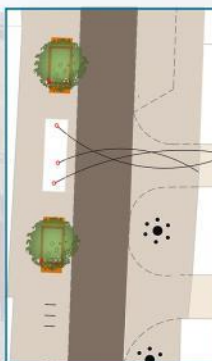
## Working Streets:

Loading space where required with time allocated for deliveries for local businesses. These spaces could be used for outdoor seating in times traffic is restricted from the area.



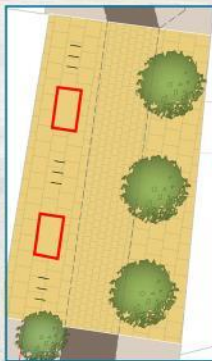
## Vibrant street culture:

Junction with Duke Street to have an informal performance area to be used when vehicles are restricted. Benches and street trees will create an attractive place to meet and spend some time.



## Highlighting the yards:

Striking artistic installations to highlight the entrances to the yards, each one to have a distinct character to encourage people to explore.



## Small squares:

Small squares to highlight prominent buildings like the Quaker House and Mechanics Institute. Paving on one level with a tonal change from the road either side. Street trees and large benches will complete the picture and with restricted traffic access at times will create a 'plaza' type feel to these spaces.

# Coniscliffe Road



## Green Streets:

Introducing pocket parks, planters and street trees all help create greener streets, allowing us to connect to nature and allowing nature to help us with cleaner air, storm water retention, shade in the summer and increased biodiversity. All helping to reduce our carbon footprint.

## Healthy Streets:

A pedestrian and cycle zone with connectivity to the wider cycling network encourages healthier, active travel and helps reduce pollution.

## Vibrant Streets:

Accommodating the developing pavement cafe culture within an attractive and safe environment. Using single level paving to give a more pedestrian friendly experience.

## Safe streets:

Tactile paving and contrasting stone colour to mark the emergency vehicle and cycle access route. Protection provided with heavy planters and bollards where required. A 20mph limit along with a prohibited access area make the street safer for all.

## Working Streets:

Reinforcing the area as a destination will lead to increased footfall and people staying for longer helping to support local business. Provision of loading space could include small vans delivering to Coniscliffe Road outside of the pedestrian zone.



The following engagement took place:

## Window Display

To ensure that the Phase 2 designs reached as many people as possible in the area, vinyl posters were displayed in a prominent position in the window of an empty property on Skinnergate next door to the Quaker Meeting House.

Displayed on the information was the QR code, details of the link to the online survey and dates for walkabouts with the Groundwork Project team.



# Skinnergate, The Yards & Coniscliffe Road Public Realm and Highway Overview

Darlington Borough Council have exciting plans to regenerate and improve the experience of living in, working in, or visiting our town centre. Improvements to Skinnergate and Coniscliffe Road, funded from the Towns Fund, are part of this vision and will complement the recently undertaken and on-going improvements to the Yards.

Darlington Borough Council and Groundwork have been asking you, the people of Darlington, for your thoughts. These concept designs have been developed to reflect your views.

The vision is for a vibrant, healthy and green town centre that works for all businesses, residents and visitors. Making space for pavement cafes, introducing more trees, plants and seating will help make these streets more attractive for people to visit and to linger once here.

Restricting access to vehicles will make for a safer, pedestrian-friendly environment. Parking will be removed from Skinnergate to allow for wider pavements and small squares.

These aspirational designs, incorporating quality materials, will give the streets an uplift and highlight some of the valuable existing architectural heritage, within this conservation area.

Strengthening the links between Skinnergate and all the Yards is an important aim to create a whole area community for people to enjoy.

Pedestrianisation of the western end of Coniscliffe Road will allow café culture to thrive. This will mean a permanent change for the bus routes as illustrated below

## Benefits

### Safer

by limiting vehicular access and removing parking



### More Social

by expanding seating and outdoor cafe spaces



### Greener

to transform the feel of the street and help combat climate change



### More Vibrant

further enhancing the town centre's appeal and future prosperity



## Proposed bus routes:



## Main changes

- No parking in Skinnergate
- Vehicle access restrictions extended
- Pedestrianise east end of Coniscliffe Road
- Pocket park at west end of Coniscliffe Road
- Permanent changes to bus route
- Small social spaces along Skinnergate
- Permanent spaces for outdoor cafes
- Trees, planters and seating

We really welcome your feedback. Let us know your thoughts by completing our survey:

Go to:

[forms.office.com/r/aEDFtpizYM](https://forms.office.com/r/aEDFtpizYM)

or

Scan me using your smart device



Survey closes **Monday 15th February**

Want to speak in person? Come meet us outside the Quaker House on:

Wednesday 26th January 11am - 1pm  
Saturday 29th January 11am - 1pm  
Thursday 3rd February 12pm - 2pm

For more information please contact Natalie Whitworth

Phone: 07577 344 731

Email: [natalie.whitworth@groundwork.org.uk](mailto:natalie.whitworth@groundwork.org.uk)





## Virtual, online and Social Media networks

The concept designs and questionnaire were shared widely on social media platforms and virtually including;

- ✔ Groundwork North East's Facebook page
- ✔ Relevant Darlington Facebook pages and networks. e.g. River Tees Rediscovered, Darlington South Park Foundation, Darlovelo, etc.
- ✔ Emailed out via professional networks such as Tees Valley Rural Action
- ✔ Shared on LinkedIn.

On 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2022, a progress update was emailed to the client group with amended designs.

## Face-to-face Engagement with residents and businesses

Initially, three walkaround sessions were organised to engage with the public and businesses to discuss the designs. However, to reach more people, it was felt that it was necessary to organise more sessions and the activity was increased to 6 walkarounds in total.

Groundwork's team visited all addresses in the target area to discuss the plans with a focus on targeting those businesses that we hadn't already reached during phase one and also those who the plans would impact on most, to ensure they had the opportunity to have their voices heard and raise any concerns. People were encouraged to view the large plans on the window display

If residents or businesses were not available, information was posted.

## Meetings held by Groundwork Team

10<sup>th</sup> January 2022 – virtual meeting with portfolio holders, Councillors' Keir and Marshall, to discuss the designs in detail and obtain feedback on the proposed plans.

27<sup>th</sup> January 2022 - face-to-face meeting with the Town Centre Reference Group to present the plans, discuss feedback from Phase one and obtain any additional feedback from group members including Darlington Borough Council employees, councillors and business owners.

25<sup>th</sup> January 2022 - meeting with Darlington Association on Disability to discuss the Phase 2 designs.

29<sup>th</sup> March 2022 – meeting to discuss considerations around creating safer streets and how to consider both the risk and the fear of violence against women.

Informal meetings took place with local businesses including H Taylor & Sons (butcher), and discussions were logged on the Microsoft Forms survey and included within the survey results.

## Summary of Phase 2 feedback

### Darlington Association on Disability

#### Bells Place

Concern that the raised table at end of Bells Place would be off the desire line. Currently drop kerbs and levels allow crossing in line with pavement. Suggested it would be better if whole of that junction area was a raised table.

#### Skinnergate Junction

- Open areas can be disorientating for partially sighted people - no building line and no kerb line to follow
- Needs to be made physically impossible to prevent parking/ deliveries in this area
- Could the pavement be extended further in front of Bar One across junction to make it difficult for traffic to turn into this area?
- Crossing points need some thought to fit with desire lines and tactile paving would be needed

#### Coniscliffe:

- Concern that vehicles will park/ deliver/ pick up or drop off on the pavement on the north side
- Suggested moving the pocket park north and the carriageway south keeping the existing bollards on the south pavement
- Parking in Hogarth Court and St Augustine's court is an issue, with pedestrian access to Coniscliffe Road from both

**Victoria Road** was given as an example of an area where widened pavements have become a problem with vehicles pulling on to the pavement for deliveries requiring retrofitting of bollards to resolve.

### Town Centre Reference Group

#### Coniscliffe Road

- At Bar 1 there is no seating areas. To be addressed /reviewed

#### Skinnergate

- Query raised kerb near Taylors the Butchers
- Construction in c1993 was a concrete base. Will this be dealt with through the proposals as it has a knock on effect with electrics & power cuts. This would be an issue if not resolved and future work is needed
- Query of the benefits of the cost for improvements and impact of construction on businesses on Skinnergate as it isn't currently too bad. However, Coniscliffe Road would be transformed

## Meeting regarding Safer Streets and how to consider both the risk and the fear of violence against women

- Ensure lighting is as bright as possible and above minimum recommended ratings
- Avoid tall trees that can provide a lot of dark areas
- Ensure that trees are trimmed back, so that there are no dark spots where CCTV can't see
- Minimise placing trees on a corner where it can prevent people from seeing others
- Removal of taxi rank would be a key area for concern for the safety of women as women would have to walk out of a visible well lit area into one that is much quieter and could feel less safe

## Email received from Graham Wakeman (Counter Terrorism Security Advisor for Durham & Darlington)

Graham stresses the importance of Hostile Vehicle Mitigation (HVM) measures at both Coniscliffe Road and Skinnergate and states that “Mitigation requires serious consideration when protecting the public in public spaces and the forthcoming Protect Duty (Also known as Martyn’s Law) will require a range of owners, primarily Local Authorities, of Publicly Accessible Locations (PAL’s) deemed to be in scope, to consider the risk of a terrorist attack and take proportionate and reasonable measures to prepare for and protect the public from such an attack”. These comments will need to be taken into consideration during the detailed design stage.

## Skinnergate and The Yards & Coniscliffe Road Streetscape Consultation Questionnaire

The Stage 2 questionnaire was much shorter with only a total of 7 questions. 4 of the questions were targeted specifically at the changes proposed in the concept designs and responses are detailed below.

### Headline Statistics

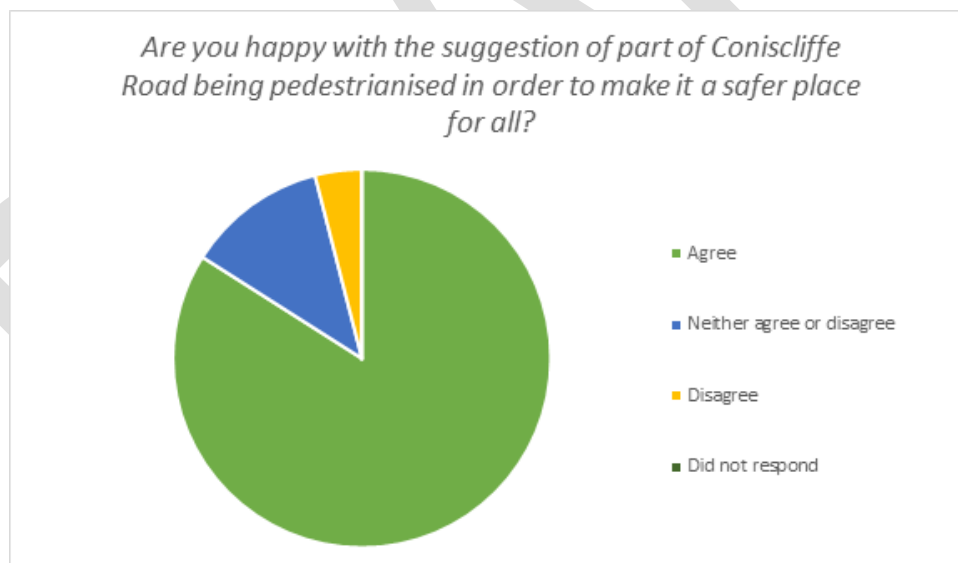
69 questionnaires completed

40 respondents (60%) answered DL3 as the first three digits of their postcode

16 people (26%) identified themselves as local businesses

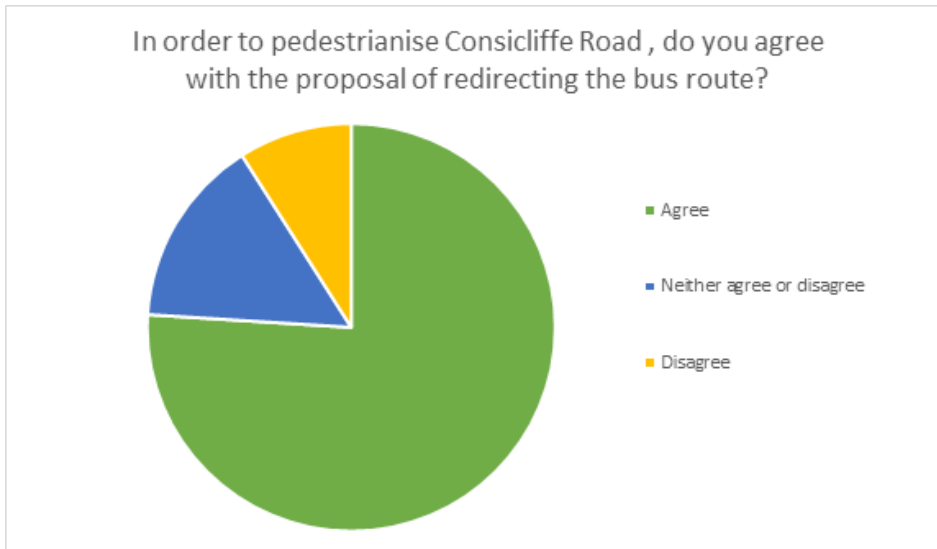
**In response to the question: “Are you happy with the suggestion of part of Coniscliffe Road being pedestrianised in order to make it a safer place for all?” (emergency vehicles exemption) an overwhelming 84% of people agreed.**

56 people (84%) Agreed  
8 people (12%) Neither agreed nor disagreed  
3 people (4%) Disagreed



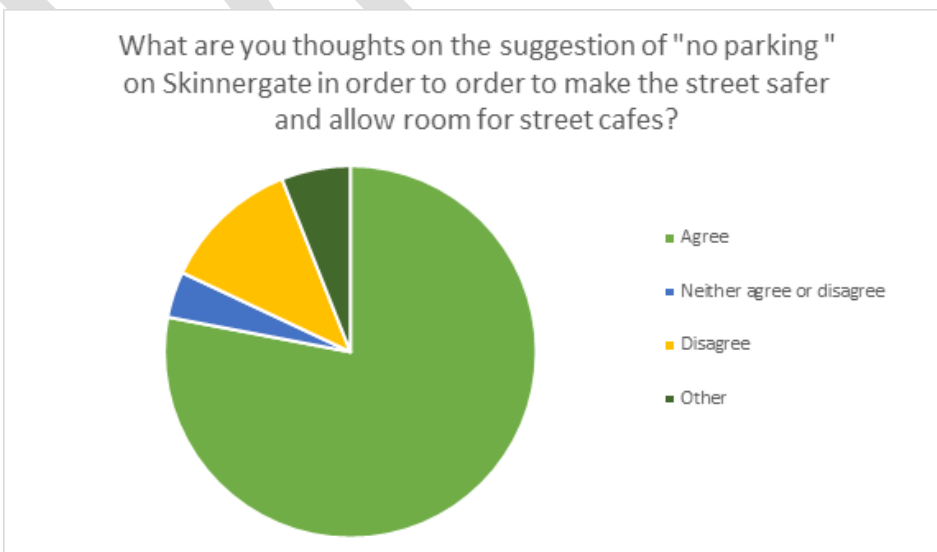
In response to the question *“In order to pedestrianise Coniscliffe Road , do you agree with the proposal of redirecting the bus route on Coniscliffe Road”?* 76% of people agreed to the proposal.

51 people (76%) Agreed  
 10 people (15%) Neither agreed nor disagreed  
 6 people (9%) Disagreed



In response to the question *“What are your thoughts on the suggestion of "no parking" on Skinnergate in order to make the street safer and allow room for street cafes”*, again there was a majority of 78% in favour.

53 people (78%) Agreed  
 3 people (4%) Neither agreed nor disagreed  
 8 people (12%) Disagreed  
 4 people (6%) Other



Other Comments:

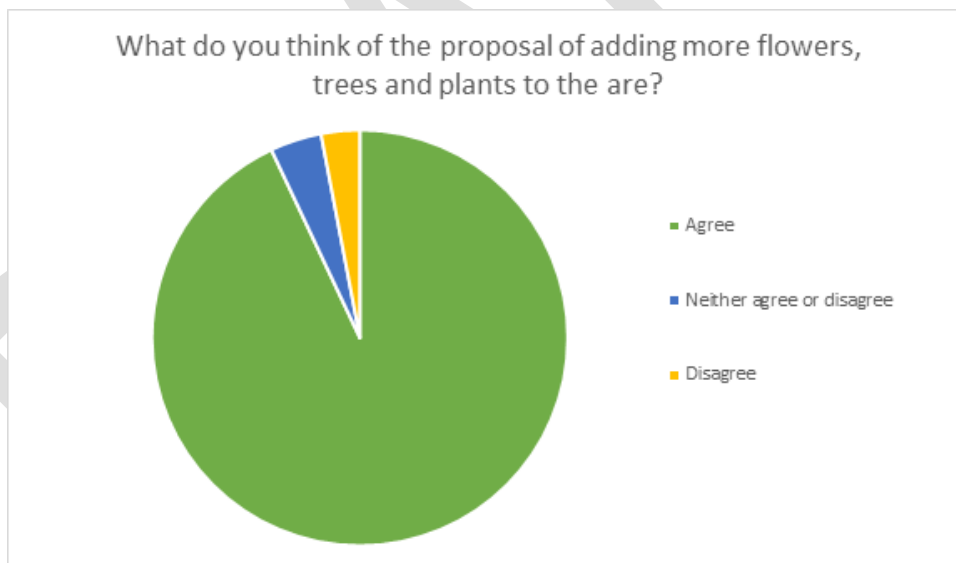
“No parking is fine.... this allows us to put seating our without having to contend with parked cars. However for those businesses who use services like Just eat, it will make it harder for drivers to get to the shops to pick up orders. Having the barrier up from 10am, seems to affect some businesses more than others ( e.g. we tell companies they cant get down after 10....then they cant promise delivery....yet we see delivery vans go down all day everyday...some vans even getting out and moving pavement cafe furniture to get past, without putting the furniture back in place.”

“General no parking except businesses”

“Needs to have business access”

In response to the question **“What do you think of the proposal of adding more flowers, trees and plants to the area”?**, an overwhelming 93% agreed.

63 people (93%)	Agreed
3 people (4%)	Neither agreed nor disagreed
2 people (3%)	Disagreed



Comments

Feedback comments were varied and ranged from people in full agreement with the changes, to some concerns over the impact of changes, to some additional questions or suggestions.

Key comments are listed below:

### Positive Feedback

- Positive direction in making the area more attractive and useable
- I believe that the proposed innovation will help Darlington flourish and business thrive from the benefits. Darlington is becoming the place that people want to live
- The plans look fantastic and will make this area of town more welcoming and appealing to visit
- Really like the plans pleased cyclists have been taken into consideration cars should not be allowed
- The more greenery and permanent pavement cafes the better
- At the moment this part of Darlington is a pedestrianised area dominated by car drivers with extensively rutted and broken paving. It is failing. Less room and priority for cars in our Town is a clear trend, practised by top brand cities and towns and it is critical that our small northern town follows this trend in an attempt to boost revenues for local businesses (yes really!!) and reduce the social economic and health costs imposed by car domination
- I am all in favour of greening our streets and handing them over to people not cars!
- Really like the outside seating and feel it could become a great meeting place for friends

### Concerns

- Access of vehicles for business owners
- It is the maintenance of these flowers and plants which need to be agreed
- There needs to be a drop off place near Uno Momento for disabled access as Darlington is not very flat
- We need to allow more parking and less restrictive access to Skinnergate to promote footfall
- Happy with the plans in general. The key issue is unloading as there is no rear entrance for deliveries ... happy if loading bay would sit close to door used for delivery. Wouldn't want changes to affect trade by impacting on the ability for people to pull up outside and pop into the shop to purchase items
- Agree with the plans to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists but need to ensure clear lanes can be enforced if vehicles are allowed down

### Additional Suggestions

- Building frontages on Skinnergate need some attention, as the whole street looks tired and unappealing. This will help to attract more customers
- This proposal should be open to more detailed discussion. There are other areas and issues in the town that should be high priority than tarting up this area to keep the "blow ins" from London happy. "Levelling up" should be about more than important things
- A lot of businesses would brighten up the front of their shop fronts if given grants to cover costs of paint etc., or even if the council painted them. Whatever gets done, I think each business should get consulted as to what's going to be happening outside their property. Also that the work that goes ahead doesn't affect trade

- Add an enclosed dog park to town and Darlington would be well on its way to being a better town
- More info required on Coniscliffe pedestrian scheme to comment
- Mechanics Yard seems to be the odd one out; needs a total refurb and House of Fraser should contribute towards this
- Would we be getting some plants up to the bollard on the little part of duke street that joins Skinnergate
- Public Electric bike hire/ or scooters like other towns and cities
- Need to consider infrastructure i.e. underground power and make sure it is designed in such a way that future proofs Skinnergate

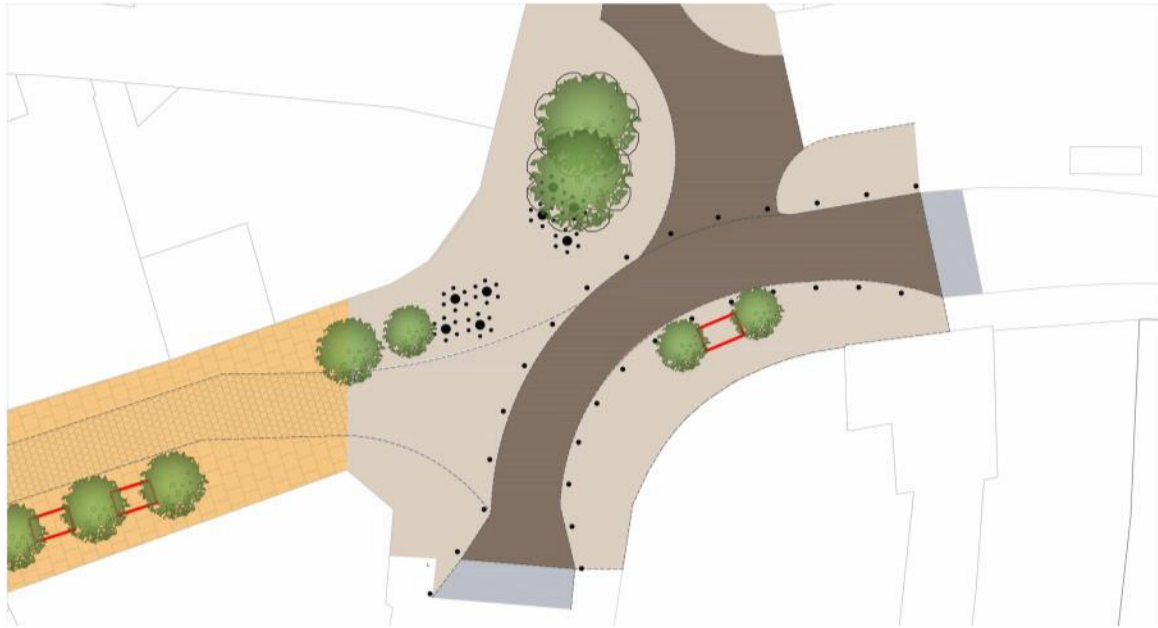
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## Stage 2 Design Amendments

Following the Phase 2 consultation further amendments were made to the designs.

The junction of Skinnergate, Grange Road and Houndgate has been redrawn with a much narrower running carriageway. This should give room for seating outside Bar One and keep access routes clear in all directions. Bollards have been added to prevent this area becoming an 'informal' drop off/delivery area. George Pybus (D.A.D.) made a suggestion that the disused bus stop on Houndgate could be a good loading bay.



On Coniscliffe, allowance has been made for seating space outside Dr Inks on the south side opposite Hash after consultation response. We'll need to work with DBC highways engineers on the exact layout here that balances the needs of both Hash and Dr Inks best.

The pavement on the south side of the pedestrian area isn't wide enough for the trees, benches and cycle parking so these have been removed or relocated.

Again, more bollards have been added to protect pavement areas.

There is also an alternative plan with the pocket park relocated to the north side of Coniscliffe Road. The park on the north would have the advantage of being on the sunny side of the road.

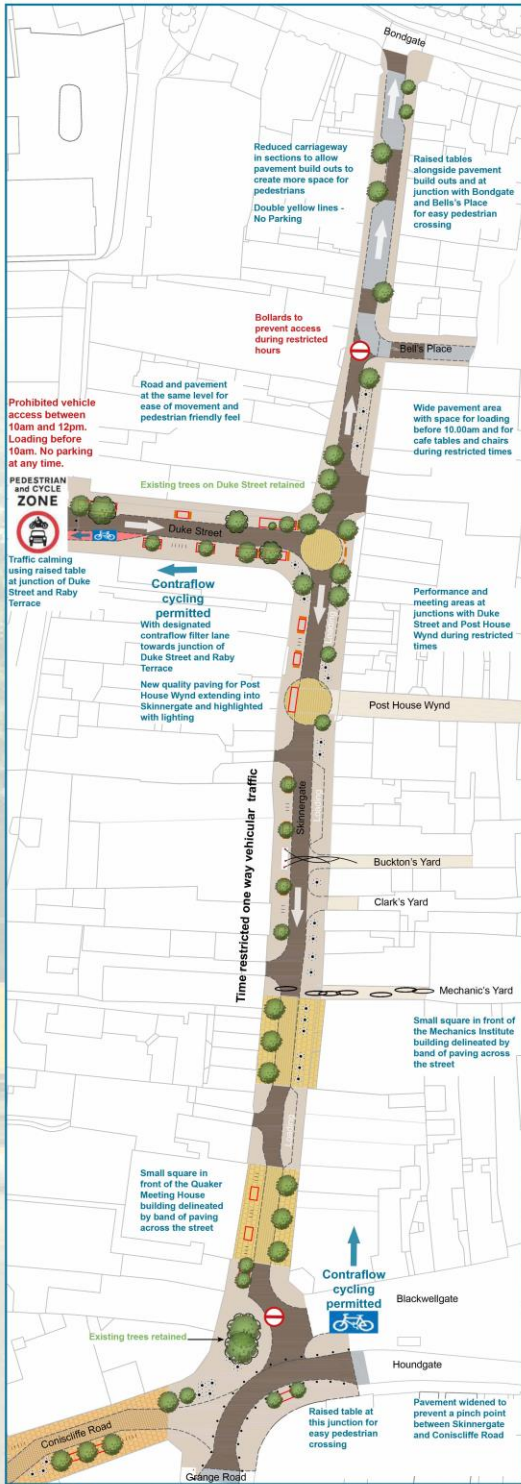


In addition, paving materials palette and street furniture suggestions have been suggested.

The Streetlife furniture gives a good range of products including benches, planters and combinations of the two. The timber tops fit with those used in High Row. We could pick up on some of the colours of painted benches in The Yards by powder coating the metal sections of the planters in some places. Perhaps just on the areas where we are creating small squares.

With regard to paving materials, we have been looking at the possibility of retaining areas of yorkstone and some of the carriageway on Skinnergate. If we extend the pavement with more yorkstone to create the wide pedestrian areas we want, we could consider leaving or re-using the carriageway blocks. In the areas where we want to create small squares we could take the carriageway blocks and replace with yorkstone. A grey granite tactile strip could be used to delineate the running carriageway.

# Skinnergate & The Yards



### Green streets:

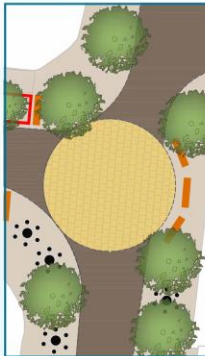
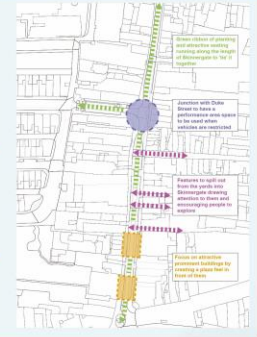
Street trees and planters along the length of Skinnergate create a green ribbon that is both attractive and helps to make the town centre more environmentally friendly.

### Healthy and Safe Streets:

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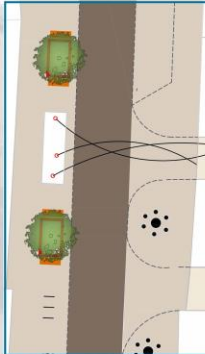
### Working Streets:

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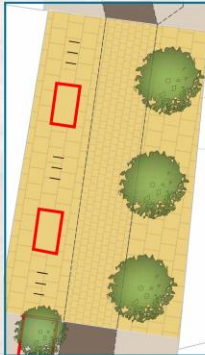
### Vibrant street culture:

Junction with Duke Street to have an informal performance area to be used when vehicles are restricted. Benches and street trees will create an attractive place to meet and spend some time.



### Highlighting the yards:

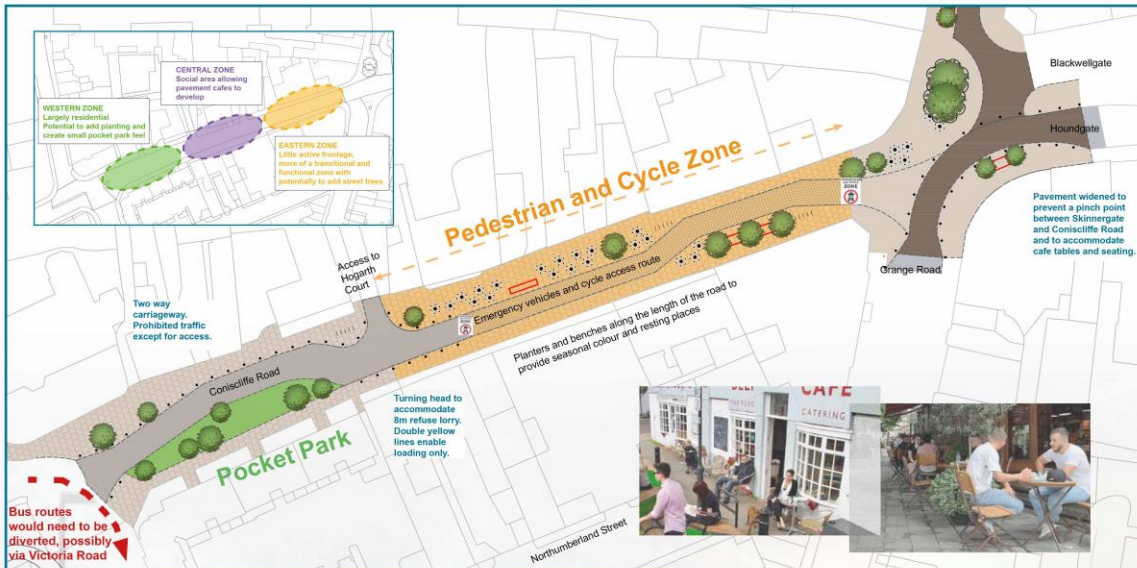
Striking artistic installations to highlight the entrances to the yards, each one to have a distinct character to encourage people to explore.



### Small squares:

Small squares to highlight prominent buildings like the Quaker House and Mechanics Institute. Paving on one level with a tonal change from the road either side. Street trees and large benches will complete the picture and with restricted traffic access at times will create a 'plaza' type feel to these spaces.

# Coniscliffe Road



## Green Streets:

Introducing pocket parks, planters and street trees all help create greener streets, allowing us to connect to nature and allowing nature to help us with cleaner air, storm water retention, shade in the summer and increased biodiversity. All helping to reduce our carbon footprint.

## Healthy Streets:

A pedestrian and cycle zone with connectivity to the wider cycling network encourages healthier, active travel and helps reduce pollution.

## Vibrant Streets:

Accommodating the developing pavement cafe culture within an attractive and safe environment. Using single level paving to give a more pedestrian friendly experience.

## Safe streets:

Traffic restrictions along with quality surfacing on a single level, with tactile and contrasting road edging, allow safe movement for all.

## Working Streets:

Reinforcing the area as a destination will lead to increased footfall and people staying for longer, helping to support local businesses. Provision of a turning head at Hogarth Court allows access for refuse lorries and loading space to enable small vans to deliver outside of the pedestrian zone.



## Economic Impact Assessment

Skinnergate and The Yards are at the historic heart of town and in the past were prominent retail thoroughfares. More recently the area has suffered from several years of persistent voids and a high turnover of retail units. The emerging Local Plan identifies the area as being within the primary shopping zone. However, given current patterns and downward trends of retail use in town centres it is likely that the amount of retail frontage currently available may reduce. Yet as echoed in the recent Levelling Up White Paper, this highlights need and provides opportunity to find a new vision and purpose for town centres; which are rapidly becoming community meeting places rather than only retail hubs and an opportunity to use refreshed design, culture and the arts as a driver for cultivating a sense of place.

The Yards and Wynds adjacent to Skinnergate reflect the town's medieval street pattern with several prominent burgage plots. They are a hidden gem and are greatly underplayed. There is an opportunity through careful investment and working with local traders to improve the floor space of these routes, improve the lighting and shop frontages as a driver to promote an improved offer, increasing footfall.

An improved public realm along Skinnergate, will complement enhanced shopfronts through the area, and a strategy which looks to draw in residential to the centre, creating a vibrant social space, to encourage and retain footfall in the town centre.

An Economic Impact Assessment examines the effects of a project or proposed policy change on the economy. Economic Impact Assessments can provide evidence of how economic activity of an area could be enhanced through town centre renewal, enticing increased footfall and business opportunities.

### What economic impact assessment is and why it is valuable

As stated by the International Association for Impact Assessment; the effects of investment projects/ townscape renewal on the economy and population of an area are important for local decision makers. Impact assessment categorises these effects, or socioeconomic impacts, as economic impacts (boosting income, employment, business activity, earnings) and fiscal impacts (changes in revenues/costs of local government jurisdictions).

A full economic impact assessment can estimate the changes in employment, income, and levels of business activity (typically measured by gross value added (GVA)) or the return of investment (ROI) that may result from a project/investment. Socio-economic impact assessments (SEIA) can also be undertaken to help understand potential impacts of a proposed change, and likely responses of those impacted if the change occurs. This understanding can be used to minimise negative and maximise positive impacts of any change, such as public realm enhancements, changing traffic flows, changing access as is proposed here. A wide range of methods are used in SEIA, with their selection and application tailored to meet particular requirements (Socio Economic Impact Assessment Toolkit 2005).

As stated in 'Economic Benefits: Metrics and Methods for Landscape Performance Assessment' economic impact or 'benefits' are defined through their intimate connections with nature, justice, and time. This definition demonstrates how economic benefits exist within environmental and social conditions, but they also must be lasting and sustainable. As one of the three pillars of sustainable development (environmental, social, and economic), economic benefits have been examined by a number of studies within landscape architecture. For instance, an urban forest provides multi-faceted environmental benefits (e.g., improved air quality, reduced urban heat island effect, better urban habitat) and these ecosystem services generate economic benefits. Other economic outcomes would also benefit local businesses, who may see more customers as a result of their business' proximity to an 'urban oasis'; and may attract qualified workers who appreciate

higher concentrations of green infrastructure; and may find that their property value has increased (Wang, Yang, Li & Binder 2016).

Placing monetary and social values on the landscape and its characteristics is challenging due to the complexity of components to take into account when analysing landscapes. One needs to consider landscape ecology principles and non-market valuation methodologies along with landscape types, their attributes and the public's preferences for these landscapes to quantify their attributes (Economic valuation of landscapes: combining landscape ecology and environmental economics methodologies, Abstract for Agricultural Economics Society Annual Conference, Dublin, March 2009).

The data/resource is not available to undertake such a detailed economic/ socio-economic impact assessment on the granular level required to estimate potential improvements in GVA and a value for ROI for Skinnergate and The Yards at this stage. However, evidence from extensive research give an indication of the economic and social gain that landscaping investments in the public realm can have.

### **The value of landscaping in the UK**

Oxford Economics found that ornamental horticulture and landscaping in the UK made an estimated £24.2 billion contribution to national GDP in 2017 including its 'multiplier effects' and £5.4 billion tax revenues were generated. This was driven by spend in the industry, its supply chain and, importantly relevant to proposed enhancements to Skinnergate, increased retail and tourism activity (The economic impact of ornamental horticulture in the UK 2018). Additional social ROI (SROI) from investment in landscape enhancements were found to include profound benefits for mental, physical and social health and wellbeing, stimulating more physical activity and cultural engagement, easing stress and anxiety disorders, promoting social cohesion and reducing crime. Reviews of evidence in this area demonstrate the economic value of these health and social benefits are worth many billions of pounds.

Introducing more green infrastructure (trees, planters etc) into urban environments can also provide a broad range of crucial 'ecosystem services' benefits. These can include

- absorbing carbon dioxide
- absorbing air and noise pollution
- alleviating storm surges and flood risks
- reducing urban heat islands
- mitigating extremes of temperature
- sustaining wildlife and biodiversity through the provision of essential nature 'steppingstones' in urban environments

The presence and proximity of natural features adds an estimated £131 billion to the value of the UK's housing stock, according to ONS. This figure captures some of the value that we place on access to green infrastructure in urban environments.

### **Analysis: Landscape Design in Town Centre Renewal: Skinnergate and The Yards**

It is clear from the research and consultation findings that by making an environment, or the public realm, more attractive and pleasant to be in, more people will naturally want to go there and stay for longer and spend more money. This increase in 'dwell' and 'spend' times act as a catalyst for economic growth. If renewal schemes reflect local and market needs, town centre renewal can lead to town centre economic growth and recovery following impacts of the Covid pandemic and increased working from home on some town centres.

It is implicit from the desk based research and consultation results that enhancing the urban public realms as proposed in the Landscape designs will increase the quality, enjoyment and attraction of the area. This in turn will have various social benefits and SROI, increasing dwell time, and spend in the local area leading to an ROI with increased GVA in both the retail and tourism/café culture sectors. A greener, more attractive environment should, in theory, increase footfall and business opportunities to expand current operations and attract new ones to any voids.

## Groundwork's proposals and Darlington's vision for the Towns Fund and Town Centre Strategy

### Darlington Towns Fund Vision is:

“Through targeted capital investment and by taking advantage of our unique passenger railway heritage and our growth potential we will ensure Darlington has a strong economic and sustainable future which builds on its sense of place and offers opportunities for all”

### Outcomes:

- Enhanced townscape and regeneration
- Development of historic yards/wynds at the heart of town
- Public realm and signage improvements
- Shop front and premises enhancements
- Focused transformation of the area to provide a mixed and vibrant people space

The plans fit perfectly with the wider vision for of the Towns Fund and Town Centre Strategy as the overall aim of the concept designs for Skinnergate, The Yards and Coniscliffe Road is to act as a catalyst for economic growth and town centre recovery, creating a vibrant social space, to encourage and retain footfall in the town centre.

The majority of people that visit the area already do so for shopping, social reasons and the night life. Key design elements that will retain and attract more people to the study area to increase the time and money spent there (dwell time) include:

- Reducing cars, make it safer for pedestrians
- Pavement cafes and bars to encourage 'cafe culture'
- Improved lighting and signage, leading to 'safer streets'
- Trees, planters and improvement of green spaces

Such enhancements would not only contribute to the development of a Café Culture, moving away from the declining, traditional retail space, and enhance the feeling of safety, wellbeing and ownership of the space. As evidenced, this in turn encourages more people to visit and spend their leisure time and money in the area's cafes/ shops, in turn benefitting the local economy by supporting businesses, jobs, tax revenues, etc.



## Conclusion

### Consultation Summary

Extensive consultation was carried out by Groundwork to gather feedback on concept designs for investment in improvements to the overall public realm in Skinnergate and The Yards and Coniscliffe Road.

We have had good engagement with the businesses and community throughout this consultation. On our walkarounds, the response from businesses was in the most part very positive. There were some negative responses or queries that we were able to answer or use to inform amendments to our designs.

Meetings with groups such as Darlington Associated on Disability (DAD) and Darlo Velo were really useful in gathering important information.

We had a good response to the three questionnaires with a total of **340** completed. The public consultations were less well attended which could have been affected by an increase in Covid cases meaning we largely had to run sessions outside which were at the mercy of the weather. The Stage 2 window display proved to be a really positive tool in raising the profile of the work and obtaining feedback through a quick scan of the QR code.

The concept plans have given stakeholders an opportunity to give detailed comments and enabled them to influence final designs. People want to see the town centre streets to become a vibrant hub for future generations by increasing footfall to businesses, accommodating street cafes, improving greenery and green space, and prioritising pedestrians and cyclists.

The element of the concept plans that gave rise to the most queries or negative comments was the idea of pedestrianising the streets and no parking being made available. However, this was also a change favoured by many respondents.

To conclude, the key issues raised by stakeholders were:

- Access for businesses for loading / unloading
- Accessibility for those with visual impairments or physical disabilities
- Contraflow cycle lane needed
- Parking
- Reduce cars, make safer for pedestrians
- Outdoor shelter / canopies for outdoor seating/cafes
- Location of bins
- Better signage
- Vehicles parking on the pavement
- Better lighting

People are extremely passionate about the area and want to see investment to improve key areas infrastructure. In particular, they liked the idea of;

- Development of Café Culture
- Trees, planters and improvement of green spaces
- Pedestrianisation

## Design Summary

The designs for this project aim to meet a range of aspirations: accommodating pavement café culture, strengthening green infrastructure, promoting active travel – cycling and walking, supporting local businesses and creating a safe, attractive and working streetscape for the future. While there is inevitably restricted street space in the medieval core of Darlington's town centre and sometimes conflicting interests, the design team have tried to incorporate these aspirations within this space as effectively as possible. There are still detailed design work and construction specifications to consider but the final concept design has enabled meaningful consultation and forms a good basis for the next design phase.

The concept plans were amended after the first stage consultation and again after the second stage in response to feedback from businesses, residents and stakeholder groups. Vehicle access to business and residential properties during restricted periods remains a challenging issue, which will rely, to a large degree, on town centre management. Consideration of the needs of people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups will continue through into the detailed design stage: positioning of lighting, cameras, street trees and demarcation of safe pedestrian zones through paving materials.

The final designs have incorporated the following features:

### Coniscliffe Road:

- Pedestrianisation of the east end of Coniscliffe Road with emergency access only
- Two-way access to Hogarth Court with turning head and loading area
- Redirected bus route made permanent
- Two-way cycling access permitted along full length
- Cycle parking
- Pavement café areas
- Pocket park with trees and seating
- Widened footpaths
- Street trees planted into extended tree pits where possible
- Raised planting containers
- Planters to provide hostile vehicle mitigation

### Skinnergate and The Yards:

- Extend vehicle restriction hours (10am – 12 midnight)
- No parking allowed on the streets (access to private car parks permitted at designated times)
- Small squares to highlight key architectural buildings
- Pavement café areas
- Performance and meeting areas at junctions of Skinneragte and Duke Street and Post House Wynd
- Art installations to highlight entrances to The Yards
- Street trees in planting pits where possible
- Raised planting containers
- Street furniture
- Widening pavements
- Cycling provision including designated contra-flow lane at west end of Duke Street
- Cycle parking
- Raised tables and table build outs between Bell's Place and Bondgate

Groundwork will present the findings of the consultation to Darlington Borough Council in April 2022. These findings will then be shared publicly by Darlington Borough Council. This concludes the concept design and consultation project delivered by Groundwork.

Darlington Borough Council will use this report and the feedback included in it to plan the next stage. The information in this document will be used to support any future funding applications.

## Technical Appendices

- Appendix 1 Traffic and Movement Survey
- Appendix 2 Copies of surveys and consultation materials
- Appendix 3 Copies of marketing materials, press coverage
- Appendix 4 Copy of survey data (anonymized)

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