



Darlington Town Centre Transport Plan

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1 Introduction and Context

Darlington is a historic market town, surrounded by open countryside with a number of large and small villages. The town centre provides employment, shops and services for large parts of North Yorkshire and south and west County Durham and the western part of the Tees Valley. The late night economy of the Borough is principally centred around the town centre where a number of entertainment premises including the theatre and cinema, pubs, bars, restaurants and takeaway establishments are situated. Generally Darlington is an economy of small, owner-managed businesses that co-exist with branch factories, offices and shops. It has performed relatively well in recent years, however there has been a closure of several national retail operators in high profile locations.

Darlington has ambitious plans for the town centre as set out in the Town Centre Strategy 2019-2030 and the Towns Fund Investment Plan. Transport underpins these developments, enabling people to travel to, from and through the town centre by all modes of transport. The transport system needs to be planned in a cohesive way to ensure that as each development in the town centre comes forward the appropriate design and function can be achieved for the people living, working or visiting the destination or locality.

1.1 Policy Context

The Vision of the Darlington Town Centre Strategy 2019-2030 is as follows:

By 2030, Darlington Borough Council working together with partners and local communities, will deliver real positive change to our town centre, placing it at the heart of our community for years to come.

Darlington's Town Centre Strategy is seeking to deal with structural changes in the retail industry as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit by redefining the town centre so that it continues to be at the core of the community and economic life, offering a more diverse mix of places to live, meet, interact, do business and access facilities and services. The retail offer will continue to be important to both attract visitors and support town centre living.

The strategy links the town centre to the major developments at Darlington Station via Victoria Road and Parkgate. It also links to the Rail Heritage Quarter tourist attraction (and the existing adjacent North Road Station) which will be completed by 2024 via the emerging Northgate Masterplan.

In addition, the Darlington Transport Plan sets out the following vision and objectives.

Vision -

We want Darlington to have a safe and resilient low carbon transport system which offers choice; promotes health and wellbeing; and supports inclusive economic growth.

Objectives -

1. Reduce transport's impact on the environment and support health and wellbeing;
2. Improve safety for all road users;
3. Connect people with job and training opportunities and link communities;
4. Support a revitalised and transformed Darlington town centre;
5. Maintain and effectively manage a resilient transport system.

The Darlington Town Centre Transport Plan forms the link between these two strategically important policy documents and is also influenced by a number of other local policies and plans as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Relevant Policies and Plans



2 Town Centre Transport Issues and Opportunities

As the town centre uses change it is important that the town centre does not become congested with traffic; instead the benefits of the pedestrianisation, public spaces, the riverside and low traffic areas need to support a vibrant town centre. Meeting the needs of businesses in the town centre must also be balanced with the needs of people living within and visiting it.

The following sections outline a number of issues and opportunities by mode that will need to be addressed as the Darlington Town Centre Strategy is delivered.

2.1 Cycling and Walking

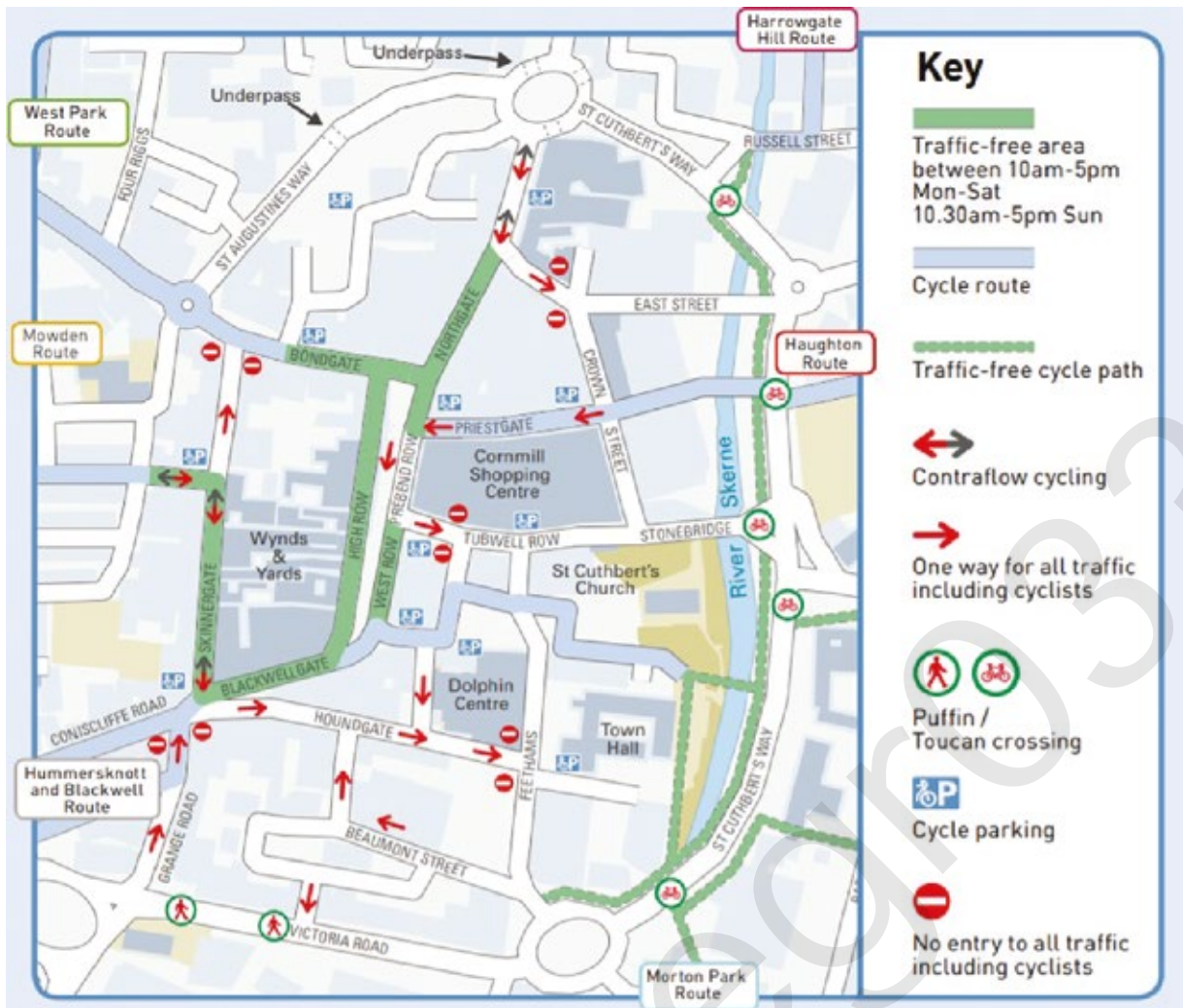
2.1.1 Opportunities

Darlington is relatively flat, making it ideal for the promotion of cycling and walking to replace short / local car journeys. Between 2004 and 2009 Darlington was a Sustainable Travel Demonstration Town and between 2005 and 2011 was a Cycle Demonstration Town. Darlington received funding to start to implement seven radial cycling routes from the edge of Darlington to the town centre. These radial routes are all connected by a circular route. In total there are over 40km of off-road cycle routes in Darlington and 26km of signed routes. These radial routes form the core of the Darlington cycling network.

Since then funding for walking and cycling projects has been secured from various Department for Transport funding streams and the network has been under continual development through an ongoing process to fill gaps in the network, improving existing routes and providing access for all.

As a result, there are strong foundations on which to build:

- Walking and cycling routes as far as the Inner Ring Road have been well developed and there are several signalised crossing points over the Inner Ring Road to help people cycle into the town centre.
- The pedestrianised areas of High Row, Blackwellgate, Northgate and Bondgate provide space for people to walk and cycle. The landscaping along High Row, including the benches and lighting, is of a high quality and shows what can be achieved. The Riverside Park is another good example of high quality public realm enhancing a walking and cycling route.
- The town centre is generally accessible for those using wheelchairs, mobility aids and prams/pushchairs.
- There is sufficient cycle parking although this is not always obvious and the quality can vary.
- There is a concentration of cycle trips made in Darlington, with 9 of the highest cycling flows in the Tees Valley within the borough. The 10 highest cycling flows in Darlington are focussed on the town centre.



2.1.2 Issues

However, there are a number of issues that need addressing, related particularly to cycles and pedestrian accessibility and safety and security.

Cycle and Pedestrian Accessibility:

- Need to create gateways into the town centre so that cyclists and pedestrians know that they are in a different space, more shared, less traffic and cyclists need to slow their speed.
- Need to be able to cycle through or round the town centre as well as into it
- Need easy-to-find cycle parking with nearby seating and maps for navigation
- The market square is used as a means of accessing the town centre by bike but it is sometimes blocked by events such as the fair or market stalls, which encourages cyclists to use the footpath outside the Dolphin Centre
- Outside of the pedestrianised area the town centre feels more disconnected – it doesn't link together or encourage people to explore

Pedestrian and Cyclist Safety

- The cobbles along East Row/Bull Wynd/Horsemarket and Skinnergate are difficult to walk on.
- The underpasses are not designed for use by cyclists and are not the most pleasant/safe environment for pedestrians
- Crossing points on Prebend Row corners are difficult to use by pedestrians due to the buses and taxis (and other vehicles) – feels unsafe; also other locations such as Northgate/Crown Street and Tubwell Row/Church Row
- Cycle parking needs to be secure
- Potential conflict between pedestrians and cyclists needs to be minimised through clear signed cycle routes



2.2 Public Transport

2.2.1 Opportunities

Bus services are a mixture of town services (that run between the town’s residential areas and employment sites, and the town centre) and out of town services that link to North Yorkshire, South Durham and other areas within the Tees Valley to the east. The following image 1 shows the frequency levels within Darlington and surrounding areas. It also shows the demand responsive transport network (DRT) (Teesflex).

Image 1

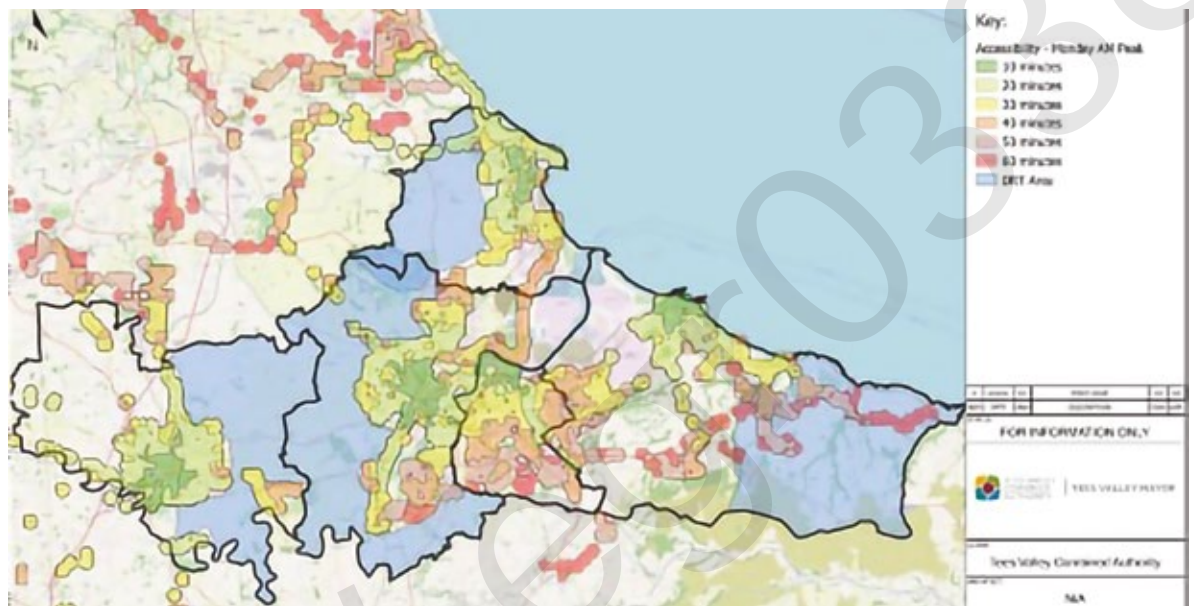


Image 2



Buses are at the heart of the retail/leisure area in Darlington. Existing stops and bus routes are shown in image 2, as well as the coach stop. The route exit points onto the Inner Ring Road are in the right location for onward journeys e.g.:

- Stonebridge (all radial routes); and
- Feethams (Victoria Road, Grange Road).

In addition, all buses that access the town from Northgate roundabout drop off passengers at Northgate and then passengers have the opportunity to be dropped off at a second location further round the ‘bus loop’ (Priestgate/Prebend Row/Tubwell Row). This arrangement meets with historic user requirements, with previous customer feedback identifying that

bus users want to alight in one location, walk/shop through town and board at another location. This requirement should be reviewed with customers as the town centre changes, especially with the loss of major national retailers in the Northgate area.

Within the town centre there is good compliance with 20mph speed limit by buses and there is a good level of infrastructure provision including shelters and real time information displays. Bus timetables at all stops are also up to date. In addition, the layover stand on Feethams provides the main commercial operator with space for a spare vehicle in the town centre so that there is rapid response to any issue involving a vehicle which should be in service e.g. mechanical breakdown, road traffic accidents, ill passenger or driver etc.

There has been investment in the bus fleet with gas buses operating on some routes but there needs to be further investment into zero or low emission buses to reduce the impact of bus services on the air quality and noise pollution in the town centre. There has been investment in technology to support people using buses such as next stop announcements on some buses, real time information displays at town centre bus stops to advise passengers when buses will arrive and the Arriva app which also shows bus operation in real time as well as providing opportunities to buy e-tickets.

2.2.2 Issues

However, there are a number of issues that need addressing, related particularly to kerbside stopping capacity (the number of bus stops), bus user waiting capacity (the space for people to stand or sit and wait for a bus), stop accessibility issues (walking routes to bus stops) and conflicts with other modes, in particular HGVs and LGVs.

Stopping Capacity and Condition

There is insufficient kerb space (capacity) for the number of buses that operate per hour. This creates congestion and delay to bus services, and will get worse if more services operate more often. There are particular hot spots at:

- Northgate Stops A, B & C;
- Crown Street Stop D; and
- Tubwell Row Stops H, I & J.

The coach stop on Feethams has capacity for 3 coaches at any one time. However this is insufficient at peak times with coaches parking further along Feethams causing confusion for drivers and passengers.

Waiting Capacity

There is also insufficient bus user waiting capacity or pavement space for the number of waiting passengers creating congestion on the footways for both passengers and passing pedestrians, particularly on Prebend Row East Street and Tubwell Row. Furthermore, it is also difficult for users to identify some of the bus stops and some of the shelters and information panels have been vandalised.

Stop Accessibility

It is difficult for pedestrians and bus users to cross in between the existing bus stops, especially at the corners of Northgate/Crown Street, Priestgate/Prebend Row and Prebend Row/Tubwell Row.

Conflict with other modes

There is also some conflict with other modes. In particular, traffic entering Northgate from the roundabout in contravention of the traffic restrictions means that bus priority is being undermined and needs to be addressed. East Street is also now open to two way traffic, which brings additional traffic into the town centre and slows down the passage of buses. There is also a need to manage conflicts between buses and cyclists, particularly where there are contra flow cycle lanes, to ensure the safety of all users. The location and use of the loading bays also creates conflict, particularly on Tubwell Row.



2.3 Taxis

Department for Transport figures show 228 vehicles were licensed to operate in Darlington at the end of March 2021. Of those, 147 were traditional taxis which can be hailed from the street, while 81 were private hire vehicles, such as those available through Uber, which need to be pre-booked.

There are 81 taxi rank spaces around the town centre with ranks located in the locations illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Taxi Rank Locations

Stand	Location	Maximum number of spaces
Beaumont Street West 7:00pm - 7:00am	On the north side from 8 metres west of Beaumont Street westwards for 40 metres	8 vehicles - vehicles to face east
Bondgate - 9:00am - midnight midnight - 7:00am	On the south side from 6 metres west of Skinnergate westwards for 20 metres	4 vehicles - vehicles to face west
Bondgate - 6:00pm - 8:00am	On the south side from 11 metres east of Skinnergate eastwards for 18 metre	4 vehicles - vehicles to face west
East Row - 24 hours per day	In the lay-by lying approximately 4 to 25 metres south of junction with Tubwell Row	3 vehicles - vehicles to face north
East Row - 24 hours per day - feeder Rank	From a point of 32 metres south of its junction with Tubwell Row to a point of 2 metres north of its junction with Horsemarket Not to encroach into the Loading bay as there is a stretch of No Waiting 7am – 11pm.	5 vehicles - vehicles to face north
Gladstone Street - 7:00 pm – 7:00 am	On the south side from 43 metres westwards for 85 metres west of Northgate	17 vehicles - vehicles to face west
Grange Road - 24 hours per day	On the west side from 5 metres south of Coniscliffe Road to 10 metres north of Northumberland Street	4 vehicles - vehicles to face north
Grange Road - 6:00 pm – 8:00am - feeder rank	On the west side from Northumberland Street northwards	2 vehicles - vehicles to face north
Priestgate - 24 hours per day	On the south side from 5 metres east of Prebend Row to 10 metres west of Penny Yard	5 vehicles - vehicles to face west
Tubwell Row - 6:00pm – 8:00am	On the north side in the lay-by from Crown Street westwards for approximately 30 metres excluding pedestrian route across lay-by	6 vehicles - vehicles to face east
Feethams - 24 hours per day	On the east side outside DL1	5 vehicles - vehicles to face south

Recently taxi marshals have been deployed in Darlington town centre to tackle an ongoing issue with queuing and traffic issues. The two marshals operate at Grange Road on Friday and Saturday nights each week.

Durham Police and Crime Commissioner’s Office has recently been awarded £453,813 from the Home Office under the Safer Streets Fund. Some of this funding will be utilised to make improvements in Darlington town centre, including impr

2.2.1 Issues

Whilst recognising the excellent service provided by the taxi trade in Darlington there is a need to take into account the need to reduce harmful emissions from vehicles in the future, for the benefit of everyone. The new taxi policy adopted on 1st January 2021 has therefore included key policies regarding age requirements for licensed vehicles and tougher emissions standards to help improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions but this is something that needs to be kept under review.

2.4 Highways and Parking

Currently the Inner Ring Road carries the majority of the traffic around the outside of Darlington town centre. Traffic restrictions (governed by Traffic Regulation Orders) then manage most of the traffic within the town centre for bus services, taxi services, loading and servicing, cycling and parking.

The quality of the road network will remain a vital part of the town centre transport plan as it is shared by several transport modes, including some more sustainable modes, such as public transport and cycling. It is therefore in the wider interest of sustainable travel to have a road network that continues to function efficiently. The main elements of the town centre highway network are shown on Figure X.

Figure X



2.4.1 Opportunities

Currently vehicle traffic is limited in pedestrianised areas creating a safer environment and there is good compliance with the 20mph speed limit that is in place. However, increased development in the Borough, and particularly the town centre, has the potential to create additional vehicle movements or alter the highway network that will need to be managed.

The Council owns and operates a number of off-street car parks in Darlington (see Figure X) as well as managing on-street parking, disabled parking and coach/HGV parking. In addition there are a number of private car parks. The Council understands that different groups and individuals have different parking needs and expectations, and that parking facilities must be best managed to meet those needs. The quality and operation of car parks is important as part of the town centre offer, in terms of payment options, security and electric vehicle charging points. In addition, as car parking and its management form an important part of a balanced transport strategy, there is the opportunity to utilise it to support economic growth and town centre vitality, manage traffic and encourage the use of more sustainable modes



2.4.2 Issues

Currently traffic is restricted in some locations but there is little enforcement. This results in additional traffic in the town centre which leads to congestion, illegal parking and obstruction and a reduction in perceived and actual safety. This has a direct impact on pedestrians and the operation of bus and taxi services.

The Council needs to ensure that deliveries can be made to businesses through the provision of highway access and loading bays. This needs to be balanced and managed. Through the increase in 'click and collect' services and takeaway food and drink businesses, very short stay drop off/pick up needs to be considered as part of the mix, but this may be provided in car parks rather than on street, where space is very limited. Alternative delivery and collection models provide other opportunities such as the successful cargo bike GreenLink service which already operates in the town centre alongside bike delivery services such as Deliveroo.

Other specific issues that the Darlington Town Centre Transport Plan will need to be mindful of include:

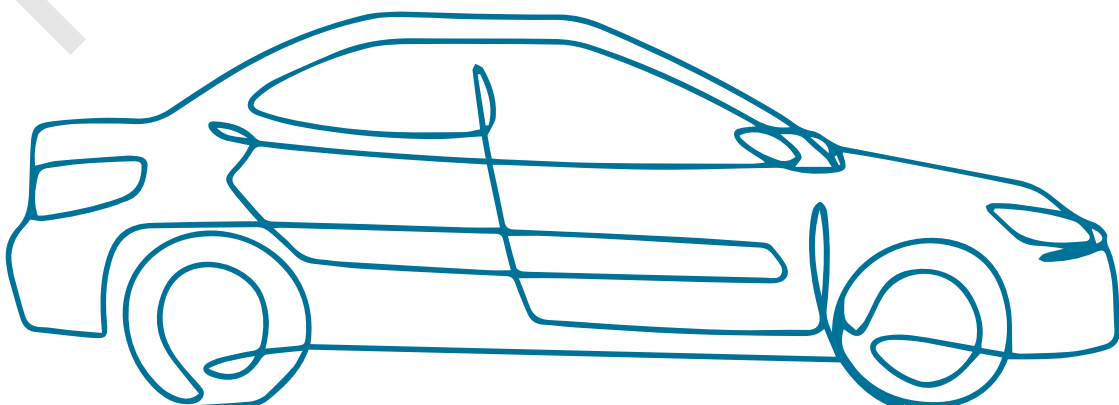
Road space Reallocation

Since the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a reallocation of road space to both highway and non-highway functions. Some of this has been to provide additional space for active modes whilst some has been to provide outside space for socialising e.g. café/drinking areas. Further road space reallocation needs to be carefully considered to ensure it does not have a detrimental impact on our transport objectives and traffic management duties.

Residential Parking

There is a need to consider residential parking standards for town centre developments to take into account different sizes/types of housing and to reflect the potential impacts where buildings are converted and have no available parking.

In addition, as more people are working from home since the COVID-19 pandemic a greater number of cars are parked on street during the day – especially in existing Residential Parking Zones (RPZs) around the town centre. Therefore, there is a need to consider whether additional controls or changes needs to be made to the current system.



2.4 Other

2.5.1 Opportunities

In 2019, Darlington became the first in the region to be awarded Purple Flag status. Purple Flag is an accreditation process similar to the Green Flag award for parks and the Blue Flag for beaches. It leads to Purple Flag status for town and city centres that meet or surpass the standards of excellence in managing the evening and night time economy. Purple Flag assessors look for how safe and welcoming the town feels, how easy it is to move around the town and to get home safely, how good the range of leisure and entertainment venues are in terms of choice, and how the town generally looks and feels.

2.5.2 Issues

Despite Darlington gaining this accreditation there are still a number of other issues that need addressing within the town centre are as follows:

Street Clutter and Identity

The town centre is cluttered and confusing as it has not been planned in a holistic way – the Pedestrian Heart introduced some key street furniture and signs etc but these were not used as a standard for the rest of the town centre – so different styles/designs of cycle parking; 20mph signs added; new planters that don't match added; directional signs not updated etc. Confusing for visitors and feels disjointed.

Space could be allocated so people know where 'to meet' or 'to sit' or to 'wait for the bus or the taxi' – use landscaping/art – currently conflict occurs as people try to use the space for different things – sitting on the ramps reducing access for wheelchair users, blocking access points whilst they wait for a bus.

The Pavements for People policy guide needs to be updated to manage the design and use of the space within the town centre to ensure it better meets the needs of disabled people whilst also ensuring that the town centre economy can operate effectively. A design code for the town centre would also start to provide coherence and identity to the streets and businesses to inform new development and redevelopment as well as transport infrastructure.



2.6 Summary

Mode	Opportunities	Issues
Walking and Cycling	<p>Walking and cycling routes as far as the Inner Ring Road with signalised crossing points</p> <p>Pedestrianised areas of High Row, Blackwellgate, Northgate and Bondgate</p> <p>High quality examples of public realm exist e.g. High Row and Riverside Park</p> <p>Ability to plan improvements so that walking or cycling to the town centre is an option or preference for more people</p>	<p>Vulnerable road users are not always the priority when there are conflicting demands on space</p> <p>Need to create gateways into the town centre for pedestrians and cyclists and ensure different parts link together.</p> <p>Need to be able to cycle through or round the town centre as well as into it</p> <p>Need easy-to-find, secure cycle parking</p> <p>Some crossing points are difficult to use by pedestrians due to the buses and taxis</p>
Bus	<p>Darlington is comparatively well served by bus with around 90% of the population served by a frequent (30 minute) service.</p> <p>Buses are at the heart of the retail/leisure area in Darlington.</p> <p>There has been investment in the bus fleet and technology to support people using buses e.g. next stop announcements, real time information displays.</p>	<p>Limited space to provide higher frequency, punctual bus and coach services and to provide a quality waiting environment for passengers</p> <p>Lack of kerbside stopping capacity (the number of bus stops) and bus user waiting capacity (the space for people to stand or sit and wait for a bus),</p> <p>Stop accessibility issues (walking routes to bus stops)</p> <p>Conflicts with other modes, in particular HGVs and LGVs.</p>
Taxi	<p>72 taxi rank spaces around the town centre</p> <p>Taxi marshals already deployed to manage queuing and traffic</p> <p>Investment in improved lighting at taxi ranks to enhance safety</p>	<p>Suitability of existing taxi rank locations as the town centre evolves</p> <p>Further requirement for tougher emissions standards to help improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions</p>

Mode	Opportunities	Issues
Highways and Parking	Can prioritise which traffic should have access, when or for what purpose, using the hierarchy of road user needs as a starting point	Limited space within the inner Ring Road to accommodate all existing and future transport demands
Other	Darlington is the first in the region to be awarded Purple Flag status.	Town centre is cluttered and confusing as it has not been planned in a holistic way. Pavements for People policy guide needs to be updated to manage the design and use of the space within the town centre.

Objectives

The objectives of the Darlington Town Centre Transport Plan are informed by the policies and plans identified in Chapter 3 as well as the existing and anticipated issues and opportunities set out in Chapter 4.

The objectives of the plan are set out below alongside the objectives of the Town Centre Strategy and Transport Strategy. They reflect the need for a long term, multi-modal, sustainable and equitable transport plan to accommodate the movement of people and goods into and within the town centre.

Darlington Town Centre Transport Plan Objectives	Darlington Town Centre Strategy Objectives	Darlington Transport Plan Objectives
Enable good access for retail, leisure and work by all modes of transport	Making Darlington a great place to live, work and visit	Connect people with job and training opportunities and link communities
Create attractive points of entry and a legible town centre transport network	Enhancing the attractiveness and vitality of our town centre	Maintain and effectively manage a resilient transport system.
Reduce vehicular traffic in the town centre and prioritise access for sustainable and public transport and deliveries/ servicing	Celebrating our heritage	Improve safety for all road users
	Enhancing the attractiveness and vitality of our town centre	Support a revitalised and transformed Darlington town centre
Provide suitable supporting infrastructure for town centre residents to allow the town centre to develop as a place to live with a strong and cohesive community	Improving the health and wellbeing of people	Reduce transport's impact on the environment and support health and wellbeing
	Supporting local economic growth	Maintain and effectively manage a resilient transport system

Darlington Town Centre Transport Plan Objectives	Darlington Town Centre Strategy Objectives	Darlington Transport Plan Objectives
Address the impact of transport on the environment and climate change		
Facilitate residential, commercial, retail and leisure property development		

The objectives have been used to derive a number of interventions that reflect discreet elements of the transport system as follows.

- Walking and Cycling
- Bus and Coach
- Cars and Taxis
- Rail
- Servicing and Deliveries
- Parking

The success of the Town Centre Transport Plan will lie in the delivery of interventions in these areas. Further detail is provided in the following chapters



3 Walking and Cycling

The development of high quality, direct, safe walking and cycling routes is vital in particular for those without access to a private car or who are unable to drive so that they can access employment, leisure, health, retail and other essential services. With further investment, cycling and walking into the town centre could become a practical choice for many more people and more journeys.

The £9.2m Pedestrian Heart project has already transformed the centre of Darlington through the creation of a series of new public spaces, improved streetscapes and public art. This has continued with the developments around Feethams and the creation of the Riverside Park. There is now a need for the Town Centre Transport Plan to build on the positives of these projects, whilst learning the lessons around the use and design of space for everyone, specifically meeting the needs of people with disabilities.

We also need to ensure that with more people cycling, we must consider investment in suitable infrastructure to sustain the increase. Increased levels of walking and cycling contribute to increasing levels of zero or low emission travel, and associated benefits of better air quality, reduced noise pollution and reduced road safety risk.

3.1 Measures

Walking and Cycling Network Improvements

The following improvements will be made to the cycling and walking network within the town centre:

- We will create gateways at the Inner Ring Road to connect with the existing cycle routes to Northgate (North Road Station), Haughton Road, Victoria Road (Station), Feethams, Grange Road, Duke Street and Kendrew Street;
- We will create an outer and an inner cycle route:
 - Outer – Along the south side of St Augustine’s Way between Northgate roundabout and Bondgate, potentially utilizing Commercial Street and replacing the underpass with an at grade crossing for pedestrians and cyclists – improving access to North Lodge Park
 - Outer – along the south or north side of Victoria Road to link into Grange Road (into and out of town)
 - Inner route – 2 way cycling on Skinnergate to link to Duke Street
 - Inner route east/west across the market square and Horsemarket; and
- We will improve crossing points along bus routes for pedestrians e.g. Church Row/Tubwell Row and Northgate bus interchange.



Landscaping and Green Spaces

The Town Centre Strategy will look to implement a programme of landscaping that will link together key sites and green spaces such as Riverside Park, Market Hall and beyond to South Park, North Lodge Park, as well as beyond as part of the Northgate masterplan. The transport plan will ensure that the spaces are linked for those who are walking or cycling.

Cycle Parking Standards

Good quality, secure, convenient cycle parking is required to encourage trips to town by bike. The attractiveness of cycling will be enhanced if at the end of journeys into the town centre, effective and attractive facilities for cycle parking are available.

As stipulated in the Darlington Parking Strategy we will ensure cycle parking meets the requirements of LTN1/20 and is well-designed, high-quality, convenient and well maintained. We will also consider the need to provide for electric cycles (in terms of electricity supply) given their increasing popularity as well as adapted cycles for disabled cyclists. We will also increase the number of covered, secure cycle parking areas.

Legibility

Once of the key issues relating to movement around Darlington town centre is legibility, or the ability for people to easily find their way around. We need to ensure that that signage and waymarking across the town centre makes it easy for people to get to the places they want to be and reinforces the message that it is compact and walkable/cyclable. We will therefore develop an easy to understand plan of the cycle network so cyclists can navigate their way around or through town from each of the access points on the Inner Ring Road. We will also develop and refine our pedestrian and cycle signage across the town centre so that is consistent. However, in doing and though the implementation of other measures we will also consider how we can minimise street clutter.

4 Bus and Coach

Buses are the most efficient use of road space and so measures which provide greater priority will enable bus operators to deliver even better journeys for passengers and make public transport a viable choice for more users. Prioritising road space for buses to ensure a fast and consistent journey time that is competitive with the private car is essential to encourage people to make the switch to more sustainable and environmentally friendly forms of transport. It is also important that buses are able to reach the parts of the town centre that passengers want to travel to, and that the infrastructure provides an accommodating environment for buses and comfortable facilities for passengers.

4.1 Measures

Review Bus Routing and Priority Measures

Bus services should be continually reviewed to ensure the most effective routeing, quality and level of bus services are in place. Bus routes should have minimal conflict with pedestrians and reduce congestion within the town centre. We have reviewed various options for bus services and retaining the existing bus loop is the most effective way to operate.

Bus Services

The Tees Valley Bus Service Improvement Plan identifies some key priorities which will improve bus services in Darlington town centre, subject to the amount of funding available. This could result in new bus shelters, bus priority at traffic signals, improvements to the provision of information at bus stops and zero or low emission buses.

We will also look to further promote Tees Flex, the on-demand bus service currently available in rural parts of Darlington where there are no bus services, and investigate opportunities to expand the service. Nine new, high-quality Mercedes Sprinter buses operated by Stagecoach and funded by the Tees Valley Mayor and Combined Authority are being used, with passengers able to pre-book the bus via a smartphone app, a website or over the telephone. Darlington town centre is one of the destinations.

Real Time Passenger Information and Selective Bus Detection

We will also, where possible utilise the upgraded Urban Traffic Management and Control (UTMC) system (being funded by the Tees Valley Combined Authority) to provide bus priority to assist any late running buses to catch up time and arrive/depart from the town centre on time.

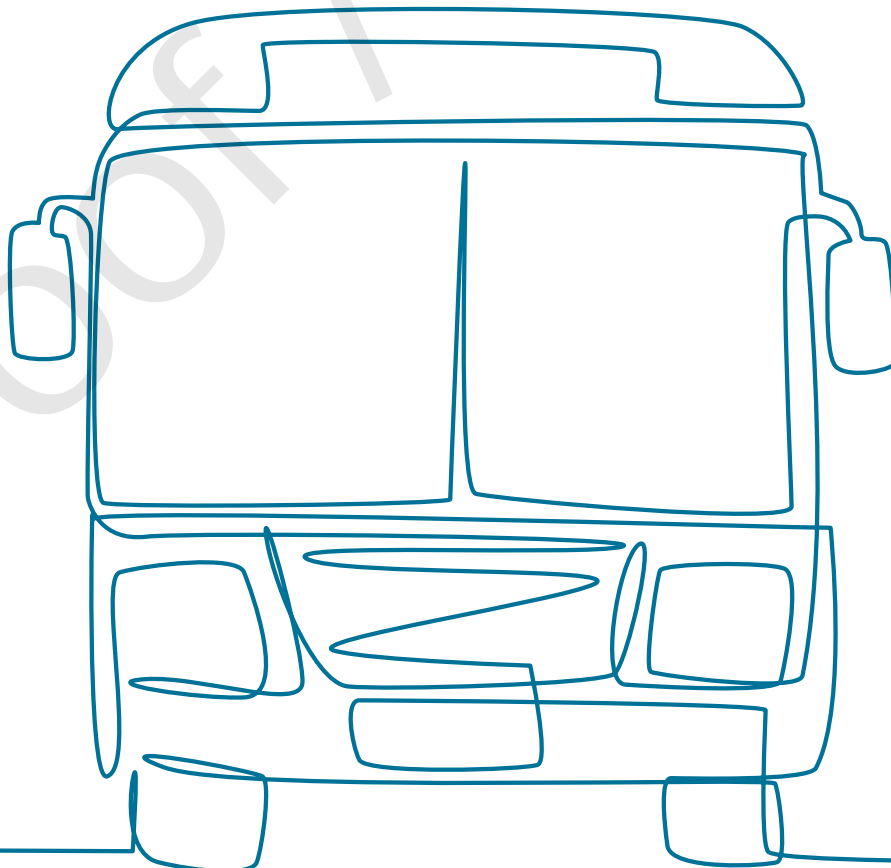
Upgrade Customer Waiting Facilities

We recognise the need to raise the profile of bus travel for current and potential users and ensure that this is combined with high quality bus stops and bus shelters. Over many years, various types of shelters and poles have been installed which do not necessarily reflect local user needs or provide a consistent experience.

To address this issue, we will develop a set of standards for bus stops, bus shelters and information provision. Locations will be identified where more space can be allocated to waiting customers to reduce the conflict with passing pedestrians, in particular on Prebend Row.

Coach

Options to create more coach facilities near Feethams Town Hall bus stop (outside Feethams House) will be considered for holiday tour coaches (National Holidays and others), leaving the existing coach stop for coaches that serve the Dolphin Centre (such as school swimming coach services), National Express Coach services and the existing loading bay. We will keep the need for coach parking spaces under review, in terms of both the number and location, as the Town Centre Strategy and this Transport Plan are delivered to ensure there is adequate provision.



5 Rail

Darlington Station is a key rail hub, not just for the Tees Valley but further afield and a major redevelopment of the station is planned and being taken forward. The scheme will improve the frequency and reliability of services as well as connectivity along the East Coast Main Line and to other regional stations. The £100 million redevelopment will pave the way for a new platform, entrance, station building and upgrades to its transport links. It will be important for the Town Centre Transport Plan to ensure that the links between Darlington station and the town centre are strengthened so that the full benefit of the investment is realised. The Victoria Road scheme, that has recently been completed, is one element of the investment required.

In addition, the Darlington Railway Heritage Quarter (DRHQ) close to North Road Station is to be developed into a new internationally significant major visitor attraction and museum by 2024 so that it can be a central part of the bi-centenary celebrations of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 2025. As well as carrying out essential improvements to a number of historic buildings on the site, there will be a new immersive ride experience, café and shop, themed play area and a new Live Engineering building. Ensuring that links between the town centre and North Road Station are enhanced must be considered as part of the Town Centre Transport Plan and delivered through both the wider transport strategy and Northgate masterplan.

5.1 Measures

Improve Station Connections

We will ensure that as the Darlington Station and Darlington Railway Heritage Quarter projects are delivered that they are implemented in such a way that it is easier to reach both the Darlington and North Road stations from the town centre by bus, on foot or by bike.

Station Facilities

We will work with Network Rail and the Train Operating Companies to ensure that the Darlington Station project will deliver enhanced passenger facilities that meet the needs of users and the Station remains a gateway to the town centre. Initial feasibility work is underway to identify improvements at North Road Station to ensure that this station is accessible to all, with enhanced facilities and is a gateway to both the Rail Heritage Quarter and Darlington town centre via (an improved) Northgate.

Service Improvements

Once the Darlington Station project has been implemented, we will also push for local rail service improvements such as enhanced frequencies and extended operating hours so that commuters/leisure travellers have greater choice and can access earlier and later trains. The Bishop Line has secured a clockface hourly service but is now pushing for a half hourly service; and the Tees Valley Line is seeking to increase the number of services from 2 an hour in both directions to 4 an hour.



6 Servicing and Deliveries

To ensure the economic vitality of the town centre, it is important that servicing and deliveries are considered. The physical layout of the town centre needs to provide adequate access for delivery and servicing as changes in business models (click and collect and takeaway) and residential development (home delivery) projects are brought forward. However, there is also a need to ensure that appropriate day-to-day policies and measures are in place so that deliveries and servicing are managed, and any disruption or environmental impact they may cause is minimised over time.

6.1 Measures

Last mile delivery

Operating a local delivery service can support town centre businesses and reduce carbon emissions and congestion. We will therefore promote the use of last mile delivery through providers such as Green Link. Green-Link is Darlington's first and only zero-emission delivery and distribution company. They use a fleet of state-of-the-art cycles and electric vehicles to offer a highly reliable, professional and cost-effective method for moving documents and goods in and around Darlington.

Timed restrictions on HGVs

Deliveries are currently limited in some locations such as Skinnergate and High Row to before 10am and after 5pm and— this creates a better environment for pedestrians and people wanting to eat outdoors. Other areas such as Tubwell Row are not restricted and this creates issues for other users of the town centre. We will therefore consider whether restrictive times of delivery within town centre (enforced by TROs) should be expanded to other streets. The legal orders are enforced by a combination of the Police (moving traffic) and the Council (loading and parking restrictions). Changes to enforcement legislation may enable more enforcement to be managed using cameras.

Delivery and Servicing Management Plans

As new development comes forward in the town centre in support of the Town Centre Strategy we will ensure that through the planning process Delivery and Servicing Management Plans are required for commercial developments. These documents will need to set out how deliveries and the servicing of the development will be managed to minimise impact on amenity and operation of highways and transport infrastructure; and where possible to be off the highway completely. They will therefore be required to consider items such as:

- the location of loading and unloading;
- the hours of loading and unloading;
- the frequency and size of vehicles;
- routing;
- consolidation of deliveries; and
- Any other control measures.

7 Cars and Taxis

High levels of car use leads to congestion, poor air quality and greenhouse gas emissions. There is a need to move towards a reduced reliance on travel by fossil-fuel burning vehicles whilst also addressing the costly issue of traffic congestion characterised by slower speeds, longer journey times, and increased vehicular queuing.

However, in limiting private cars it should be noted that taxis play an important and valuable role within the town's transport system and provide for a wide range of journeys. For example, in the daytime taxis accommodate those that travel in to town by foot or by bus, but then do their shopping and require a door to door service to get home. In the evening the taxi trade is focused around hospitality and culture and needs to be located near these venues and away from residential areas. A successful taxi system is therefore central to supporting the town centre and the Council recognises and welcomes the contribution that the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage trade make to the transport and tourism industry in the area.

7.1 Measures

Limit Cars

As indicated by the measures set out above roads in the town centre need to be prioritised for public transport and business servicing/deliveries with dedicated facilities for active modes. Private cars should only require access to parking with through routes restricted. The Pedestrian Heart project has already limited access for private vehicles by reorganising and redesigning the traffic system and as any changes to bus routing and bus priority are implemented we will ensure that the same principles regarding access for private vehicles are adhered to. We will also consider the needs to address traffic management issues in specific locations such as the options for changes to traffic management in the Skinnergate and Duke Street areas.



Improve Taxi Rank Provision

As well as helping to manage the supply of taxis at busy locations, ranks also help reduce congestion and vehicle emissions by limiting the time drivers spend on the road while waiting to be hired.

As the Town Centre Strategy and this Transport Plan are delivered we will review Darlington's taxi rank network, to identify where improvements are required and where new ranks are needed. We will work with the taxi trade to identify priority locations, especially where there are opportunities to better integrate with other modes. As part of any review, we will also consider the impacts on existing ranks caused by new development projects and where possible seek to replace rank spaces at suitable alternative locations.

Furthermore, we will work with taxi and private hire operators to install rapid electric charging points in suitable locations and then use our local authority taxi licensing function to incentivise the uptake of ultra-low emission taxis and private hire vehicles, for example by designating ULEV taxi ranks in high demand areas.

Taxi Licencing Review

The Council is aware that the public should have reasonable access to safe and comfortable hackney carriages and private hire vehicles because of the role they play in local transport provision. Local authorities are responsible for the licensing, administration and enforcement of taxi (hackney carriage) and private hire vehicles in their areas. In July 2020 the Department for Transport (DfT) published 'Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards' and it expects these recommendations to be implemented unless there is a compelling local reason not to and therefore Darlington Borough Council published a revised policy effective from 1 January 2021.

The DfT guidance asks licensing authorities to consider how far their vehicle licensing policies can and should support any local environmental policies that they may have adopted and suggests that authorities may, for example, wish to consider setting vehicle emissions standards, perhaps by promoting cleaner fuels.

In its updated policy, Darlington Borough Council has included a 25% reduction in licensing fees for certain fuel efficient vehicles including electric, petrol electric hybrid, liquid petroleum gas and compressed natural gas. The policy also outlines that tougher emissions standards will be introduced for all licensed vehicles. These standards will be phased, with strict retirement dates for vehicles that fail to meet the latest standards.

A full review of the Policy will be conducted every five years and as part of this review process we will consider additional options for enhancing environmental sustainability such as:

- Free licence renewal for a set period in return for upgrading to an eligible low emission vehicle;
- Requirement for all licenced vehicles to be ultra-low emission by a certain date (aligned with the proposed expansion of the electric vehicle charge point network);
- Taxi Vehicle Age Limits - a new upper age requirement for vehicles, potentially reducing overtime for certain vehicle types;
- No longer granting first-time taxi vehicle licences to diesel taxis.

Education and Enforcement Activities (moving traffic offences)

Targeted enforcement will be undertaken to address issues associated with taxi/private hire driver behaviour, including over ranking, violation of traffic orders and illegal parking. In addition to this, we will compile transparent complaints data and aim for a reduction in the number of complaints received. The data compiled will also allow us to better plan enforcement action alongside the Police, until such time as the Council takes over these powers.

We will also conduct education and training sessions with taxi /private hire drivers and operators illustrate the benefits of making their operations more environmentally friendly. This may include:

- A no idling campaign (an education and behaviour change initiative that tasks all drivers to switch off their engine when parked up, wherever possible) - engine idling (leaving your vehicle engine running while stationary) is a significant source of local air pollution and contributes to poor air quality, which in turn damages people's health;
- Demonstrating the potential fuel savings and financial benefits from operating ULEV taxis and private hire vehicles; and
- Opportunities to trial electric vehicles.

Car Club

Car clubs are privately operated 'pool cars'. Members pay a small annual or monthly membership fee then have access to vehicles that can be booked and used at short notice. The cars are parked so that they are easily accessible to members and are generally cheaper than conventional car hire, with bookings made over the internet or phone. The benefit of car clubs is that they encourage people to forego private car ownership and are also attractive to people that make very limited use of a car. While not having the expense of buying, insuring and maintaining their own vehicle, members have access to a car that is parked conveniently in dedicated parking spaces.

Car clubs have the best chance of success in areas where parking for private cars is limited or non-existent. Car clubs therefore have a central part to play in addressing reduced parking provision in new town centre developments and encouraging existing residents to use the car less when travelling. They can bridge the gap between lack of car parking (on site and on street), use of public transport, cycling and walking and the need for occasional access to a car. They can also result in a boost to local trade as car club members tend to use more local services rather than drive to out-of-town shopping centres.

We will seek to attract a car club operator to Darlington town centre either on a commercial basis or through the planning process and designate priority parking spaces either in a car park or on-street as the car club grows . This will be funded initially through contract parking revenue and developer contributions, until it becomes commercially viable.

8 Parking

Parking facilities are an important element of the transport system and issues relating to their effectiveness are therefore relevant to this town centre transport plan. The Darlington Parking Strategy highlights that there are 18 public car parks within the town centre and 310 on-street pay and display spaces. The Council provides designated disabled spaces within 90% of its car parks as well as dedicated spaces for motorcyclists. There are 16 Resident Permit Zones within the Borough of Darlington, with many surrounding the town centre. Chesnut Street car park is the only car park in Darlington that offers HGV and coach parking, providing 6 spaces in total, though there is capacity to increase this.

8.1 Measures

Implement Darlington Parking Strategy

We will implement the parking strategy to achieve its objectives of being:

- **Balanced:** To increase use of more sustainable and healthy forms of travel and achieve a more effective and efficient transport system, whilst taking into account:
 - The economic vitality of Darlington and the town centre in particular;
 - Environmental objectives including carbon emissions, air quality and noise.
 - Social objectives including social inclusion and health and wellbeing;
 - **Fair and Well Managed:** Ensure we apply and enforce a consistent and easy to understand approach to parking management, that is transparent and financially sustainable.
 - **Safe and Convenient:** Deliver facilities that are safe, secure and convenient for a variety of users;
 - **Modern:** Embrace opportunities created by new technology to manage car parking.

This will mean parking within the heart of the town centre will predominantly remain as short stay to encourage people to visit for 2 or 3 hours and maximise the use of the spaces. Longer stay commuter parking will remain in car parks outside of the Inner Ring Road.



Enhance Car Park Accessibility

The location of disabled parking bays may change as land is redeveloped and uses of buildings or sites change. We will therefore give careful consideration to the overall numbers, location and usage as the Town Centre Strategy is delivered.

In addition, we will investigate how the UTMC project being delivered by TVCA can assist in better managing off street car parking and reducing circulating vehicles searching for available spaces.

Increase Public Electric Vehicle Charging

A number of Electric Vehicle Charging Points will be installed in town centre car parks in 2022 as part of a Tees Valley wide project funded by TVCA. Their use will be monitored and if more capacity is required we will seek further funding from TVCA or other funding opportunities. In addition, we will ensure that town centre residential developments include EV charging within their plans and install charging points in support of car club promoters.

Contract parking

Contract parking is provided in three car parks in the town centre (within the inner ring road). This is for businesses that implement a Travel Plan and who have a requirement for operational rather than commuter parking. The spaces are paid for on an annual basis. If more spaces were allocated to contract parking it removes capacity for visitor parking to support town centre businesses. As set out in the Darlington Parking Strategy we will update the current policy and adopt a protocol for deciding upon future allocations that considers how to encourage greater use of sustainable modes where appropriate. Revenue from the contract parking should support the development of a Car Club for use by businesses/employees.

Adequate Parking Provision for New Residential Developments

The town centre is a sustainable location as there is good access to bus, rail, coach and taxi services and many services are within walking or cycling distance, therefore zero or low parking numbers are appropriate. If parking is to be provided it should be within the development red line boundary and on street parking will remain strictly limited. Parking for visitors is available in short stay car parks in the town centre or long stay car parks outside of the Inner Ring Road.

Options to provide residential parking on a similar basis as business contract parking will, as stipulated in the Darlington Parking Strategy, be subject to a policy for contract parking in the town centre for residential properties. The Council will adopt a protocol for deciding upon future allocations that considers how best this can be managed and how to encourage greater use of sustainable modes where appropriate. Revenue from the contract parking should support the development of a Car Club for use by residents.

9 Summary

The table overleaf summarises the proposed measures contained within this Town Centre Transport Plan and demonstrates how they align with the proposals set out in the Darlington Town Centre Strategy. The following table summarises the town centre transport policies and how these align with the objectives of the Town Centre Transport Plan.

Whilst not transport related, it should be noted that in delivering the Darlington Town Centre Strategy it will be important to take the opportunity to make the town centre brand more powerful and instantly recognisable through the consistent design and provision of signage, information panels, maps, visitor information and art installations. These elements together can communicate the town brand consistently and effectively to visitors and residents.

As the town centre changes, a focal point for the provision of help and information would be a benefit for businesses and residents. Whilst a lot of information is available online it is not in one place and not everyone has access. 'Big data players' such as Trip Advisor dominate searches meaning people miss out on hidden gems, events and activities and these sites don't work as a signposting service to local businesses and services.



Town Centre Transport Measures

Walking and Cycling	Walking and Cycling Network Improvements	A town to be proud of (Page 17): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the lighting strategy and develop proposals for improvement Skinnergate and the Yards (Page 21) Improving shop fronts and the public realm including in the Yards and Wynds. Lighting and access will also be improved making the area more attractive.
	Landscaping and Green Spaces	A town to be proud of (Page 17) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce more trees, shrubs and plants Extend the Riverside Park to incorporate land north of Stonebridge
	Cycle Parking Standards	Other interventions (Page 24) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cross cutting infrastructure investment such as public realm, highway, landscaping and other works will be delivered within the town centre boundary to complement other plans and strategies.
	Legibility	A town to visit (Page 14): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the presentation of our heritage assets through various initiatives including events, festivals, public art, enhanced lighting, effective signage and public realm improvements.
Bus and Coach	Review bus routing and priority	Other interventions (Page 24) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cross cutting infrastructure investment such as public realm, highway, landscaping and other works will be delivered within the town centre boundary to complement other plans and strategies
	Bus Services	
	RTPI and Selective Bus Detection	
	Upgrade shelters and information	
	Coach	
Rail	Station Connections	Other interventions (Page 24) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cross cutting infrastructure investment such as public realm, highway, landscaping and other works will be delivered within the town centre boundary to complement other plans and strategies.
	Station Facilities	
	Service Improvements	
Servicing and Deliveries	Last mile delivery	A town to do business in (Page 16)
	Timed restrictions on HGVs	Other interventions (Page 24) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cross cutting infrastructure investment such as public realm, highway, landscaping and other works will be delivered within the town centre boundary to complement other plans and strategies.
	Service and delivery management plans	

Cars and Taxis	Limit cars	A town to visit (page 14): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine the options for changes to traffic management in the Skinnergate and Duke Street areas
	Education and Enforcement Activities (moving traffic offences)	Other interventions (Page 24) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cross cutting infrastructure investment such as public realm, highway, landscaping and other works will be delivered within the town centre boundary to complement other plans and strategies.
	Improve Taxi Rank Provision	
	Taxi Licencing Review	
	Car Club	
Parking	Implement Darlington Parking Strategy	A town to visit (page 14): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve traffic management by providing variable message signage and improved parking signage Review the condition and contribution of council owned car parks
	Enhance car park accessibility	
	Increase public Electric Vehicle Charging	
	Adequate parking provision for new residential developments	Northgate (Page 22) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the contribution Commercial Street car park can play.

Town Centre Transport Measures

Town Centre Policies	Darlington Town Centre Transport Plan Objectives
<p>The hierarchy of road users will be used to inform changes to the public realm, highway and transport services within the town centre</p>	<p>Reduce vehicular traffic in the town centre and prioritise access for sustainable and public transport and deliveries/servicing</p>
<p>Cycle routes and cycle parking will be planned and constructed so cyclists can cycle to and from the town centre, with alternative routes for cyclists that wish to avoid the town centre</p>	<p>Create attractive points of entry and a legible town centre transport network</p>
<p>Clear bus priority routes within the town centre will be identified and measures put in place so buses are punctual</p>	<p>Enable good access for retail, leisure and work by all modes of transport</p>
<p>Sufficient space will be allocated to bus passenger waiting environments; and facilities will be improved to include bus shelters with green roofs, additional seating, clear signs and up to date easy to understand information</p>	
<p>Safety must be considered in all developments including road safety, personal safety, vehicle security and reducing road user conflict wherever possible</p>	
<p>Town centre traffic management plans will ensure the efficient use of the highway in line with the Traffic Management Act</p>	
<p>Support the transition to zero and low emission transport through prioritising walking and cycling, creating infrastructure and programmes to move to electric and hydrogen vehicles, cargo bike deliveries and a Car Club</p>	<p>Address the impact of transport on the environment and climate change</p>
<p>Town centre developments, including residential, must have clear strategies for parking, servicing and deliveries</p>	<p>Provide suitable supporting infrastructure for town centre residents to allow the town centre to develop as a place to live with a strong and cohesive community</p> <p>Facilitate residential, commercial, retail and leisure property development</p>

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