

**ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
3 NOVEMBER 2022**

ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGY FOR DARLINGTON – A FRAMEWORK FOR DISCUSSION

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To present an initial scoping document to outline the approach for the refresh of the Darlington Economic Strategy

Summary

2. Darlington’s current Economic Strategy is now more than 10 years old. Whilst much has been achieved in that time, the context in which it sits has changed, with major policy changes and operational opportunities setting a new context. However, with this changing environment, there remains economic and employment challenges for local business and residents. Therefore, the time is now right for a fresh look at Darlington’s economic strategy and to review its purpose and priorities.

Recommendation

3. Please note there are no recommendations for this report, this report is just for information.

**Ian Williams,
Chief Executive**

Background Papers

None

Andrew Perkin : Extension 6308

S17 Crime and Disorder	No impact from the report
Health and Wellbeing	No impact from the report
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	No impact from the report
Diversity	No impact from the report
Wards Affected	All wards are affected equally
Groups Affected	No impact from the report
Budget and Policy Framework	This decision does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.

Key Decision	N/A
Urgent Decision	N/A
Council Plan	This report directly supports the delivery of the Council Plan by setting local economic priorities and actions to support the economic development of the Borough.
Efficiency	No impact from the report
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	No impact from the report

MAIN REPORT

4. It is now more than 10 years since the “Economic Strategy for Darlington 2012-2026” was first published. Much has been achieved since then, and the local economy has continued to evolve and grow. There is no longer a legal requirement to produce a “Local Economic Strategy”, however, a strategy document still plays a key role in setting out local ambitions to support place marketing activities and awareness.
5. The 2012-2026 strategy has delivered on a number of the priority actions, identified a range of interventions for the Council and actions for partnership delivery, and developed and progressed the wider local economy. During this time, Darlington Council has driven forward key regeneration schemes. Recent years have seen the delivery of some important and prestigious projects including:
 - (a) the relocation of Department for Education to Bishopsgate House, seeing 400 DfE staff relocate from their former home in Mowden Hall to the town centre
 - (b) the creation of Central Park, a 74 acre high quality mixed use development including Business Central incubation space,
 - (c) the construction of Feethams House, providing Grade A prime office space in the town centre,
 - (d) facilitating the Feethams leisure complex (DL1), consisting of a multi-screen cinema, Premier Inn hotel and a number of restaurants, and
 - (e) the attraction of the HM Treasury and the Darlington Economic Campus
6. These major developments are a result of the Council's on-going commitment to making economic development a priority and to working in partnership with developers, funders and the local community. But there is still more to be done and new challenges to address.
7. The Council need to provide the strategic lead for Darlington’s sustainable economic growth and to progress the delivery of an economic growth strategy. With significant changes in the current landscape (political, economic, and environmental), a refreshed Economic Growth Strategy will enable continued nurturing of the local economy and ensure that Darlington can respond to current and future challenges and realise new and emerging opportunities.
8. So, the time is right for a fresh look at Darlington’s economic strategy and to review its purpose and priorities.

Emerging Economic Drivers and Challenges - The Evidence Base

9. The development of a refreshed strategy should be underpinned by a robust assessment and analysis of current data and performance metrics to provide the evidence for identifying the priority interventions. It should draw upon and analyse the Borough’s characteristics, performance and trends, and show the nature and extent of the opportunities and challenges that exist.

10. Informed by an updated evidence base, there will be a need to take stock of where Darlington is today and consider the strategic interventions and outcome measures required to ensure continued economic development and growth.

Emerging Economic Drivers and Challenges – The Changing Policy Context

11. Darlington's Economic Strategy was published in 2012, and in policy terms, much has changed since then. Developing a refreshed Economic Growth Strategy for Darlington must take into account the changing political and policy agenda. There are a wide range of key policy drivers that will influence and direct any new economic strategy for Darlington. A new strategy will be shaped by the aims and objectives of a variety of these key policy priorities and economic strategy drivers to ensure that the proposals form a robust part of the refreshed Economic Growth Strategy.
12. Tees Valley Combined Authority are preparing a refresh of the Tees Valley Economic Strategy, so it is timely for Darlington to update the local economic strategy and ensure that Darlington priorities are current and represent the challenges and opportunities the Borough faces.

Economic Growth Strategy: Aims

13. Darlington has significant potential to do more and do it better. The Economic Growth Strategy expands on the vision in the DBC Council Plan of working to deliver more sustainable well-paid jobs, more businesses and more homes in the borough. It must ensure the council adopts a co-ordinated, corporate approach to prioritise and support economic growth. The purpose of this economic growth strategy is to provide the ambitions that will direct the actions Darlington Council will take to achieve increased economic productivity, inclusive growth and a prosperous and resilient economy.
14. The key aims of the Economic Growth Strategy should be:
 - (a) More local jobs and more people in employment
 - (b) Best place to grow a business, with the best connectivity
 - (c) More new businesses and more successful businesses

Economic Growth Strategy: Priorities

15. The new Economic Growth Strategy should be focussed on strategic priorities which combine established objectives with new areas of focus and opportunity. Together, they will create a framework for successful economic growth and support the Council's ambition to achieve the strategy aims. It must also support measures that enable the local economy to adapt to changing economic circumstances. Therefore, the strategy must provide scope for creativity, innovation and flexibility and allow for new ideas to be developed in response to emerging challenges and to make the most of new economic opportunities.
16. Whilst the Council will play a significant enabling role, this is a strategy for the whole of Darlington. The Council will work with the private and public sector partners including Darlington College, Teesside University and other key stakeholders to achieve positive outcomes and increase prosperity. The Council recognises that it does not have control

over all actions and activities that will generate this growth and prosperity. Therefore, success will only be achieved by working collaboratively and in partnership.

17. The strategic priorities should be focussed around:
 - (a) Placing economic growth at the heart of the council
 - (b) Darlington – a better place for business
 - (c) Creating and Growing Competitive Businesses
 - (d) Developing and retaining talent and skills for growth
 - (e) Maximise the impact of housing on economic growth

18. The primary purpose of the Strategy refresh is to produce a plan that promotes and places Darlington as an economic driver. It will highlight the current opportunities and challenges and provide a broad framework for actions built from the strategic priorities. As well as presenting the strategic priorities, the new document will be used to support Darlington's place marketing activities – setting out the local strategy, the direction of travel, and how Darlington is aiming for success.

19. In drafting a new Economic Strategy, the Council will undertake a consultation exercise to engage with both businesses and residents to explore what improvements and developments will grow the local economy and support greater prosperity in the Borough.