

**COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
24 OCTOBER 2024**

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**TOWN CENTRE EVENTS PROGRAMME**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide an overview to members of the Town Centre Events Programme.

**Summary**

2. A Review of 2024 events to demonstrate the variety and quantity of animation delivered by the events team in Darlington throughout the year, and the impact events have on Darlington's businesses and visitors

**Recommendation**

3. It is recommended that
  - (a) Members receive the update on the 2024 events programme and impact on town centre.

**Ian Thompson**  
**Assistant Director – Community Services**

**Background Papers**

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

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Council Plan	The Events and Animation programme has a positive impact on a number of the Council's priorities; in particular, the Economy, Living Well, Communities and Local Environment.
Addressing inequalities	The town centre events programme offers a collection of free and accessible events so all persons can attend and enjoy.
Tackling Climate Change	The events programme works alongside the sustainability team to ensure events are as low carbon as possible with lots of infrastructure in stock to re-use at every event. Local artists and businesses are used where possible to ensure limited travel to events.
Efficient and effective use of resources	Budgets are closely monitored and spend as efficiently as possible to ensure maximum impact and delivery for best possible costs. We strive to produce and deliver our events to be family friendly and not over-priced, using local businesses and artists and programming relevant activity for our audiences.
Health and Wellbeing	Events can have a positive impact on Health and Wellbeing. Events like the 10K, Move More Days, Dance Festival encourage movement. Free music events for well-being and appeal to a variety of socio-economic audiences. Crafts, science and art activities to encourage learning, intergenerational interactions and enjoyment.
S17 Crime and Disorder	Purple Flag Awarded for Safe Evening Economy. Cultural activities can have a positive impact on crime and disorder by engaging individuals in positive activity.
Wards Affected	People from all wards are welcome to all town centre events.
Groups Affected	All people can attend events in Darlington
Budget and Policy Framework	No impact
Key Decision	This report is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This report is not an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	No impact

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

4. Throughout 2024 the events team have programmed and delivered a wide variety of animation and events. The aim of the programme is to welcome visitors to the town centre, supporting visitor footfall and dwell time, community engagement and entertainment. All events are programmed to be accessible and welcoming, to ensure visitors feel comfortable to visit and experience these events in Darlington. The team find that the events have developed a reputation of being family-friendly and attract many visitors.
5. The programme has continued to expand and adapt to requirements, encouraging a longer dwell time and exploration of the town centre, with trails, animation and characters around the town centre. More cultural and music genres have been added in 2024 to produce events aimed at new audiences.

## Impact of events on Darlington for businesses and visitors

6. The impact of bringing this footfall into Darlington showcases the town centre as a safe and welcoming place to visit; positive experiences from attending events results in repeat visits into Darlington, supported by data attached at **Appendix 1**.
7. Darlington has developed a strong reputation for hosting enjoyable events that are free to attend, ensuring that all demographics are able to access these days. The programme aims to offer diverse, cultural and family friendly events. Diwali was programmed for the first time in November 2023 with a fantastic response and thousands of visitors coming to take part and enjoy. The next Diwali event will be held on Saturday 26 October working with the Indian Cultural Society, Navrang Arts, Punjabi Roots and popular local business, Babul's, building on last year's success to develop the event further for 2024. Connections with the local community, schools and town centre businesses allows the team to create events with more impact and success.
8. Darlington by the Sea offers some children their first opportunity to play in the sand. Families who may not otherwise be able to financially support day trips to the seaside are able to give their children memories and opportunities to play and enjoy, which is evident in the visuals attached at **Appendix 2**.
9. Listening to feedback from town centre businesses, the team have developed town centre animation events to encourage visitors to move around the town centre. Events include Dinosaur Day, Legends and Fairytales, Vintage Car Rally and Ice Sculpture Trails. The team continue to build on these events each year, encouraging repeat visitors, with range of activities for children, including costume events and trails to explore, facilitating movement around different parts of the town and finding new shops.
10. As the events programme evolves, an increasing number of businesses are getting involved to their benefit. The team also aim to programme events on non-payday weekends, attracting people into Darlington, which anecdotal feedback from businesses suggests results in an increase in visitors during less profitable weeks, leading to an increase in secondary spend in shops and cafes supporting the high street. The hospitality bars trialled a new Groovefest weekend of disco, soul and Motown themed music, similar format to the Rhythm and Tunes Weekend. This was venue-based and worked well, so will be considered as part of the development of the 2025 programme and may add a further genre of music weekend into the diary.
11. The programme is continually reviewed, with the team assessing what works well, to develop and deliver for the future. The addition of a marquee this summer allowed for more events to be programmed and continue despite periods of inclement weather.
12. During the autumn/winter months, the team try to offer more animation that is located indoors within the shopping centres, Dolphin Centre and Market Hall to ensure the activities are not affected.

13. The team worked hard to attract sponsorship for the event programme in 2023/2024, attracting a total of £40,160 so far in total sponsorship. Sponsors have included: Freeman Johnson Solicitors, Cummins, Rington's, HC One, PFC, Public Health, Arriva, EE, Durham PCC, Hays Travel, Northumbrian Water, Railpen, Student Loans, Sainsbury's, Darlington Building Society, Darlington College, The Cornmill Shopping, Queen Street Shopping, DL1, Arriva, Hinson Security and TFM Radio.
14. The budget is £196,000 which includes the event direct costs, infrastructure and staffing.
15. Inflationary and additional costs associated with running safe events has increased and this will mean the programme for 2025 will need to be reviewed and developed to absorb these costs within the approved events programme budget that will be set by Council.

### **2025 Proposed programme of events in Darlington**

16. The proposed 2025 programme will be developed over the coming months and learn from the 2024 programme. There will be adaptations to reflect the increased costs in delivering events and will need to be delivered within the budget set for events by Council. This will include developing stronger relationships with businesses and working with Council teams to support with their engagement opportunities.
17. 2025 is a special year for Darlington and in addition to the events programme there will a complementary programme of events to mark the Bicentenary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway (S&DR 200). Events will include a Ghost Train Procession on Saturday 20 September 2025 and the recreation of the first passenger railway journey on Saturday 27 September 2025 across the Skerne Bridge at Hopetown.
18. S&DR200 is a 9-month international festival taking place across County Durham and Tees Valley in 2025, to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the first journey on the Stockton and Darlington Railway (S&DR). This 26-mile journey on the S&DR between Shildon and Stockton via Darlington on 27 September 1825 transformed how the world traded, travelled, and communicated. The S&DR200 Festival will present a series of free large-scale outdoor spectacles, events, exhibitions and new art commissions in the public spaces, libraries and world-class museums of County Durham and Tees Valley from March to November 2025.