

COUNCIL
28 NOVEMBER 2024

OVERVIEW OF LOCAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Local Services Portfolio.

Highway Maintenance Programme

2. Highway Maintenance Schemes on site:
 - (a) Unc. Roundhill Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (1.68km)
 - (b) B6280 Yarm Road Hundens Lane junction: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.231km)
3. Highway Maintenance schemes due to start:
 - (a) Unc. West Auckland Road West Back Lane: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.190km)
4. Highway Maintenance Schemes completed:
 - (a) Heighington Footways (Phase 3): Footway Reconstruction (0.319km)
 - (b) Avon Road Estate Footways (Phase 2): Footway Resurfacing (0.404km)
 - (c) C38a Neasham Road (Phase 3): Carriageway Reconstruction (0.214km)
 - (d) A1150 Salters Lane North: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.891km)
 - (e) A68 West Auckland Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.510km)
 - (f) Micro Asphalt / Surface Dressing Contract (4.185km, 27 sites)
 - (g) A67 Piercebridge: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.882km)

Safer Routes to School (SRTS)

5. **Table 1** below shows progress on all our SRTS schemes that are currently being developed. The construction dates are anticipated and will be dependent upon the outcome of consultation and the availability of construction resource at that time.
6. All schemes have an allocated budget from the Darlington Transport Plan (formerly Local Transport Plan, or LTP), with the exception of Mowden Infant and Junior School which has only been approved up to the feasibility stage.

Scheme	Ward Member Briefing	Scheme Consultation	Portfolio Holder sign-off	Traffic Regulation Order Consultation	Potential Cabinet (if we receive objections)	Construction (currently programmed)
Abbey Infants and Junior School 20mph scheme	Complete	Complete	Complete	Nov/Dec 2024	March 2025	Easter 2025 holidays with work carried out for two weeks during term time - four week duration
Stanhope Road North Puffin Crossing	Complete	w/c 4 Nov 2024	Awaiting outcome of consultation	Feb/March 2025	May 2025	June/July 2025
St Augustine's School 20mph scheme	Complete	Consultation ended 23 Oct 2024	Awaiting review of consultation	Feb/March 2025	May 2025	School summer holidays 2025
St Bede's School 20mph scheme	Complete	Complete	Complete	Feb/March 2025	May 2025	School summer holidays 2025
Longfield School Puffin crossing	Complete	w/c 4 Nov 2024	Awaiting outcome of consultation	May 2025	Sept 2025	Oct 2025
Mowden Infant and Junior School 20mph scheme	Jan/Feb 2025	Jan/Feb 2025	Awaiting outcome of consultation and decision on funding	TBD	TBD	TBD

Table 1: Progress of the current programme of SRTS schemes

Bus Services

7. The Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) are in the process of revising the way at-stop bus information is displayed. This includes new branding and making information easier for passengers to access. The redesign also aims to improve the quality of information available.
8. A scheme offering cheaper fares for people aged under 22 is offering a £1 single fare and a £3 day ticket, which will primarily be valid in Tees Valley, but will also allow cross boundary travel into the Transport North East Area is going well. The 'kids travel free' offer during the summer holidays was also available in October half term: for every fare paying adult a child under 11 could travel with them for free.
9. The supported bus services in Darlington (including 3 and 4 (evenings and Sundays), 6/6A, 16, 17 and 18) and the Tees Flex service are all funded by TVCA until March 2025. Funding beyond March 2025 is dependent upon further Department for Transport (DfT) funding through the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) process. We are awaiting further information from the Government following the Autumn Budget to understand services and offers beyond March 2025.

Rail Education Programme

10. The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership recruited a Rail Education Officer in September 2023 to deliver a programme of rail safety and confidence sessions in schools within a 1.5-mile corridor of the Bishop Line, between Bishop Auckland and Darlington. The two-year programme is funded by the rail industry.
 - (a) **Year 1** - Delivery in schools began in November 2023, in the first academic year the Rail Education programme was delivered to 3,791 pupils of which 1,967 are Darlington students.
 - (b) **Year 2** of delivery began in September 2024 and since the start of term we have visited 2 schools engaging with 194 pupils. With 99 being Darlington pupils.
11. The Rail Education Officer is aiming to deliver initial rail safety sessions in secondary schools during this academic year.

Hopetown Darlington

12. The Worshipful the Mayor of Darlington, Councillor Bob Donoghue, officially opened Hopetown Darlington on Friday 27 September, the 199th birthday of the Stockton and Darlington Railway.
13. Hopetown Darlington received 62,854 visitors in the first 14 weeks of operation.
14. 'Spooktown', Hopetown's Halloween programme, took place from Saturday 19 October to Sunday 3 November and featured family-friendly activities, workshops, and entertainment, including a pumpkin trail and ghost train installation.

Darlington Hippodrome

15. A packed-out run of An Inspector Calls signalled record sales for the Hippodrome from Tuesday 1 October to Saturday 5 October. Over 7,000 tickets were sold across eight performances of the National Theatre's landmark production of JB Priestley's classic thriller, with 2,000 secondary school students from across the region and beyond amongst those watching the show. The Theatre's 'A Place For Everyone' Fund has helped meet the cost of over 650 tickets to An Inspector Calls, shared across 17 schools.
16. LGBTQIA+ arts and youth charity, Curious Arts, returned to Darlington Hippodrome to deliver a Curious Takeover on Friday 1 November. Admission to the event was free with visitors invited to drop in on the day and take part in creative, family-friendly activities. The event was supported by Arts Council England and Darlington Hippodrome's 'A Place For Everyone' Fund.
17. Blood Brothers returned to Darlington on Tuesday 12 November to Saturday 16 November. The West End touring production is a strong edition to the autumn programme offering another opportunity for schools to see a curriculum set piece live on stage.
18. Manchester Camerata performed at Darlington Hippodrome on Monday 25 November. The Theatre, in partnership with Orchestras Live and Durham Music Service, planned a

programme of community engagement opportunities with professional musicians. The workshops for adult folk musicians were organised through Darlington Folk Club, and young musicians through youth folk group Cream Tees, Weardalians, Teesdale School and intermediate young musicians, provided the opportunity to build ensemble and performance skills. The workshops culminated with an opportunity to perform on stage at Darlington Hippodrome.

Libraries

19. For a second year running, Darlington Libraries have been offering STEAM and Literacy PLUS education packages to Primary and Secondary schools. The STEAM package consists of 10 workshops offered within The Hive, covering topics including coding, robotics, 3D printing, laser design, and virtual reality experiences. The Literacy PLUS package offers author visits, poetry, writing competitions and story stimulation workshops enhanced by our virtual reality headsets.
20. The packages represent good value and schools including Rydal Academy, Corporation Road, Gurney Pease and Longfield have joined the scheme, generating £4,000 of income so far this academic year.
21. Overdue book procedures have been updated to improve stock retention and customer communication. The focus has been on transitioning most customers from phone and letter notifications to cost-efficient email alerts, enabling more timely notifications at no additional cost to the service (customers using the Darlington Libraries app will continue to receive real-time updates). A small number of customers without email access will continue to receive phone calls or letters, however, the size of this group has significantly decreased due to work carried out by the service.
22. Darlington Library has introduced 'Hublets': tablet-like devices available for in-library use, which provide access to eBooks, online newspapers, educational apps, and the internet. Along with existing offers of free Wi-Fi and public-use PCs, Hublets aim to reduce digital exclusion and improve digital skills. The devices have been funded by Arts Council England.
23. A new monthly group for older adults has been introduced at Darlington Library's Reminiscence Room and Art Gallery. Attendees enjoy watercolour activities, games, puzzles, and conversation around the Reminiscence Collection, with hot drinks provided. As a Dementia Friendly Venue, this group is also suitable for individuals with dementia.

Creative Darlington

24. The counter mechanism on the Art Gallery doorway at Darlington Library showed 5,720 visits during the 'Places In Time - The Art of Kenneth Steel' exhibition, which ran from Saturday 17 August to Thursday 26 September. This was the second highest number of visits to an exhibition since the Art Gallery opened in May 2012. The exhibition by Sheffield born artist Kenneth Steel (1906 – 1970) shared images of international, national and regional locations. Of those visitors who filled in comments forms, 100 per cent strongly agreed having art exhibitions in Darlington Library is a good idea, 82 per cent marked strongly agree and 9 per cent marked tend to agree with the statement 'I enjoy the exhibitions programme here', with the remaining 9 per cent making no comment. Positive comments were made in the visitor book, e.g. 'the best exhibition since the gallery's

refurbishment', and some noted they had travelled to Darlington from Devon, Manchester and Somerset specifically to see Steel's work on display.

25. The Roger Birchall Retrospective exhibition at Darlington Library ran from Saturday 28 September to Thursday 7 November, attracting 4,915 visits to the Library. Roger has sold original work alongside prints during his exhibition at Darlington Library and Darlington Borough Council will secure commission on these sales.
26. Darlington born artist, Lizzie Lovejoy, secured and accepted an offer of Arts Council England Project funding for the Circe's Island project, with support from Darlington Borough Council's Heritage and Culture Fund budget. Circe's Island includes creative writing sessions at Darlington Library and workshops commenced in November, following recruitment of project participants.

Town Centre Partnership and Events

27. Darlington was awarded GOLD at the Northumbria in Bloom Awards for the town centre and South Park. The town was also given an extra award of 'Best Entry in Spring'. The award is part of the regional Royal Horticultural Society annual awards programme.
28. October half term saw the return of the bi-annual Restaurant Week across Darlington with many restaurants taking part in promotional activity. This event attracts visitors to taste foods in venues across Darlington and the promotional menu is often extended due to its popularity.
29. Diwali was celebrated in the town centre on Saturday 26 October with a range of activities for visitors to enjoy, including dance workshops, music and a large-scale parade through the town centre led by Dhol Drummers and dancers from Punjabi Roots. This festival of lights attracts a multi-cultural demographic from across Darlington.
30. Halloween was a popular event day in Darlington, with town centre animation and activities programmed alongside safe 'trick or treat' options. Characters were located in places across the town centre for families to meet and greet, encouraging movement around the town centre and exploration of new locations to see what the town centre has to offer.
31. 'Colour Friday', in contrast to Amazon's Black Friday, celebrates and showcases Darlington's local high street to shine a spotlight on the variety of independent businesses in Darlington and attract visitors to the town centre. A weekend of promotions is scheduled for Friday 30 November, programmed alongside colouring activities to lengthen visitor dwell time visits. Tailored packs and promotional artwork have been shared, with enthusiastic engagement from local businesses building upon previous work when, in 2023, Darlington was named 'Best Independent High Street' by Holly Tucker's initiative.
32. On Sunday 17 November, thousands of families flocked to Darlington's Market Square to see the Christmas Lights Switch On and to welcome Santa to the town centre. The event attracts a fantastic audience into the town centre, marking the start of the countdown to Christmas and the gift buying season.

33. The Purple Flag 2024 Interim Report has been completed and submitted, with results anticipated to be announced in early 2025.

Councillor Libby McCollom
Local Services Portfolio