

**ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 JANUARY 2025**

DARLINGTON TOWN FUND

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -
Ian Williams, Chief Executive**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an update on progress and the current position with regard to the Towns Fund programme within Darlington.

Summary

2. Information is provided on Towns Fund projects delivered and acquisitions made.
3. The Project Adjustment Request to government is referenced, which ensures a reduction in risk of delivery.
4. Progress on projects is provided.
5. Preliminary information relating to the Long Term Plan For Towns funding is referenced.

Recommendation

6. Members are asked to note the update information provided in relation to the Town Fund.

Reason

7. The recommendation is to note the details of the improvements achieved within Darlington as a result of the Town Fund.

**Ian Williams
Chief Executive**

Background Papers

No background papers were used in producing this report.

Chris Mains, Town Fund Programme Manager

Council Plan	This report directly supports the delivery of the Council Plan to support the economic development of the Borough.
Addressing inequalities	No impact from the report
Tackling Climate Change	No impact from the report
Efficient and effective use of resources	No impact from the report
Health and Wellbeing	No impact from the report
S17 Crime and Disorder	No impact from the report
Wards Affected	All Wards
Groups Affected	There will be no impact on any particular group of people.
Budget and Policy Framework	No impact
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	No impact from the report

MAIN REPORT

Information

8. The Council has an allocation of £23.3M capital funding from the Government to fund projects to revitalise and improve the town, alongside £446,000 revenue funding to enable programme development.
9. The funding continues to deliver notable successes, including;
 - (a) T-Levels facility - A new extension at Darlington College (£2.65M), delivered on budget and to time, completed in spring 2023. Now called the `Ingenium Centre` the facility is operational.
 - (b) Skinnergate & The Yards – a scheme providing public realm and property frontage improvements along Skinnergate and the Yards, including Clarks, Buckton’s, Post House Wynd, and Mechanics. In excess of 50 properties have been improved to date, improvements made to the public realm, and a gateway improvement scheme is currently being delivered in Coniscliffe Road.
 - (c) Victoria Road – following the success of the public realm improvement scheme, a programme of property frontage improvements are underway. This will be supported by the improvement project outside of Bank Top station at the top of Victoria Road, which is being delivered by TVCA and supported by the Town Fund.

- (d) Contribution of £4.508M to the development of the completed Hopetown visitor attraction in Northgate.
 - (e) The acquisition of properties and land to enable further intervention projects, including the former Northern Echo building; 156 Northgate; land at Garden Street and one of the properties which make up the historic Edward Pease House in Northgate.
10. Alongside the successes there are also projects which have proved to be a higher risk of delivery within the timescale of the Town Fund. Most notably Edward Pease House and Linear Park (Northgate). A project adjustment request was submitted and agreed by government to address the risk and continue to maximise benefits from the Darlington Towns Fund.
 11. The acquisition of the former Northern Echo building, provides the ideal location for the development of a new Adult Skills facility, funded within the Towns Fund.
 12. The announcement of the development of the Darlington Economic Campus (DEC) Treasury relocation to the town has created a demand for high quality office facilities within the town centre. Following the successful Town Fund project adjustment request to government and allocation of funds from TVCA, funding is available to refurbish the former Northern Echo Building and play a crucial role in meeting this demand by converting the upper floors into refurbished commercial space, which will complement and work alongside the Adult Skills facility. Planning approval is in place and the works are progressing onsite.
 13. The brownfield site at Garden Street is being progressed as a community focused urban green space, with art provision.
 14. The project at Edward Pease House, although reduced in scale, has been developed within the property acquired by Darlington Borough Council. Planning and Listed Building approvals are in place and an appropriate contractor is being sought to deliver the project.
 15. Number 156 Northgate has Planning and Listed Building approvals are in place for development as commercial use. Tender returns have been received, which will be reviewed and subject to satisfactory evaluation the intention is to enter into contract for delivery of the project in 2025.
 16. Proposals for the Northgate House/Gladstone Street area continue to be progress. An Outline Planning application has been submitted and is being considered. An independent valuation has been completed and a further offer made to purchase Northgate House.
 17. The Town Board continues to review and manage the Town Fund projects.
 18. As part of the budget statement in March 2024 it was announced that Darlington would be included in the second tranche of places to benefit from funding from the Long-Term Plan for Towns. The fund was aimed at developing interventions which are initiated through 'grass roots' involvement and focussed on projects driven by the community. In short:
 - (a) The £20m allocation is to be spent over a 10-year period

- (b) 25% revenue and 75% capital
 - (c) The fund will be allocated in the Built-Up Area of the town. This is an ONS definition.
 - (d) Allocation will be on a 'light touch' approach, but an investment plan will be required.
19. The allocation of this budget was paused to enable further consideration by Government. Notification has been received that the proposal is to allocate this funding to the Council. Guidance from government in regard to this is awaited. A further report will be presented to members once the arrangements have been agreed.