

COUNCIL
30 JANUARY 2025

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.

Climate Change

2. Hoptown Darlington has embedded a range of climate and sustainability measures since opening in July 2024. Waste is kept to a minimum in the Clocktower Café, which stocks locally sourced products wherever possible, and plates provided to customers in the café are 100 percent compostable and biodegradable. Food waste produced is separated and collected by a local company, Bio Capital, an official sponsor of the site.
3. A recent exhibition at Darlington Library, 'Recycled, Reused, Revealed' by artist, Helen Winthorpe-Kendrick, explored themes of repurposing discarded materials and addressed the impact of the textiles industry on the climate. There were 2,242 visits to the exhibition between Saturday 9 November and Friday 6 December. A 'meet the artist' exhibition opening also attracted over 40 people and included a talk exploring exhibition's themes.
4. The infrastructure used by the events team continues to prioritise the use of in-house or locally sourced stock wherever possible. Picket fencing has been re-used for the last 4 years and continues to be useful. Print is kept to a minimum, with social media being a key marketing tool for all events happening in Darlington.

Highway Maintenance Programme

5. Highway Maintenance Schemes on site:
 - (a) Unc. West Auckland Road West Back Lane: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.190 km)
6. Highway Maintenance Schemes completed:
 - (a) Unc. Roundhill Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (1.68 km)
 - (b) B6280 Yarm Road Hundens Lane Crossroads: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.231 km)

Bus Services

7. The Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) have entered into a new contract to provide advertising bus shelters. All advertising shelters will be reviewed and then a programme of renewals and refurbishments will be established based on the results, with the aim of improving the quality of waiting facility infrastructures for passengers.
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. Both schemes are continuing until March 2025 and will be reviewed if funding is available, and the schemes demonstrate value for money.

- 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 has been announced by the Department for Transport (DfT) funding through the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) process. It is anticipated that the funding will be used to continue funding the currently supported services.

Safer Routes to School (SRTS)

- 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.

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	Jan 2025	Commenced w/c 4 Nov 2024 with DAD	Awaiting outcome of consultation; currently collating responses	Feb/March 2025	May 2025	June/July 2025
St Augustine's School 20mph scheme	Complete	Consultation ended 23 Oct 2024	Awaiting review of consultation; currently collating responses	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	Q & A has been added as part of consultation which will now commence	Awaiting outcome of consultation	May 2025	Sept 2025	Oct 2025

		w/c 13 Jan 2025				
Mowden Infant and Junior School 20mph scheme	Jan/Feb 2025	Jan 2025	Awaiting outcome of consultation and decision on funding	TBD	TBD	TBD

Table 1: Progress of the current programme of SRTS schemes

Hopetown Darlington

11. Hopetown Darlington has recently been the recipient of numerous awards and accolades, receiving the ‘VisitEngland Welcome’ accolade in October, which recognises excellence within the visitor attraction sector. This was followed by winning the highly prestigious ‘North East Culture Award for Best Museum or Cultural Venue’ in November, and the ‘Visitor Economy Award’ in December.
12. November marked the opening of ‘Experiment!’ a state-of-the-art railway-themed time travel immersive experience. Comparable to rides in the largest theme parks, ‘Experiment!’ uses large-scale digital screens and motion simulation to take passengers from Darlington across the world, showcasing the story of rail travel from its birth up until the modern day and beyond. Reviews have been exceptionally positive from adults and children alike, making it the perfect addition to any visit.
13. Hopetown Darlington celebrated Christmas with ‘Ho-Ho-Hopetown’, which featured two new quality attractions in the Carriage Works: Santa at Hopetown Darlington and the Enchanted Reindeer Trail. The Exhibition Hall was decorated with pine trees, custom made festive buildings, a magnificent Santa's Grotto and the newly-restored replica Locomotion No. 1. The replica remained on site until mid-January, allowing visitors to see the locomotive in the Carriage Works before it left for testing in preparation for the bicentenary celebrations in September 2025.

Darlington Hippodrome

14. Panto season took place from Friday 6 December to Tuesday 31 December with a production of Sleeping Beauty, starring Su Pollard and Lee Mead. The pantomime stars appeared on ITV's 'This Morning' in early December, where they discussed the show's opening night and celebrated the art of panto. This year's show provided the box office with record sales.
15. The theatre's ‘A Place for Everyone fund’ enabled large numbers of schools and community groups to attend the pantomime, including the residents of Rose Lodge Care Home, who said: “Our residents and staff that came to see Sleeping Beauty yesterday would love to pass along our deepest gratitude and appreciation for the opportunity to come along to watch. We all had the most fantastic time. One of our residents had never been to a pantomime before, so this was great to be able to enable him to attend one, too. Thank you ever so much.”

Libraries

16. Members of the team from Darlington Libraries attended the first regional Libraries Connected Northeast Conference at Newcastle Library, which provided the opportunity to hear from inspirational keynote speakers, including Dr Darren Chetty and author, Joseph Coelho.
17. Over the Christmas period, Darlington Library hosted a Santa's Grotto experience, utilising the Reminiscence Room, which was turned into a magical grotto where Santa met with individual children and parents, before gifting presents and (animal friendly) 'reindeer food' to take home. These events were a huge success, providing families with babies and pre-school children with a high quality, well-priced experience in a magical venue.
18. During the Christmas period, the libraries also held Christmas Rhymetime parties, parties with The Grinch and Cindy-Lou, and Elsa and Olaf, as well as Christmas crafts, movie nights and live festive music for a range of audiences.
19. Special festive themed Musical Memories events at both Darlington and Cockerton Library were held during December. The events for older people and those with dementia saw around 55 people enjoy a range of performed songs from the past, including some Christmas numbers. Tea, coffee, mince pies and biscuits were provided. A quiz and talk about the past and days gone by ensured that everyone could join in.
20. During the period of September to December 2024, 20 classes visited 'The Hive' at Darlington Library, to take part in coding, animation, 3D design and print and virtual reality workshops, engaging children with STEAM activities and learning.

Creative Darlington

21. Darlington Society of Arts held a group exhibition in the Art Gallery at Darlington Library from Saturday 21 December 2024 to Thursday 20 February 2025; the seventh there since it opened in May 2012. The group, who share a love of art, hold fortnightly meetings at Holy Trinity Youth and Community Centre and receive frequent input from guest speakers and other artists/demonstrators.
22. In 2024/25, Heritage and Culture fund budget was allocated to support Broken Scar Productions postproduction and screening of a short film about Arthur Wharton titled 'A Light That Never Fades', which was screened at the Forum Music Studios in Darlington on 22 January 2025. The film's cast includes Derek Griffiths in the role of Arthur Wharton. Broken Scar Productions and the Arthur Wharton Foundation attended a Trailblazers awards night hosted by the Black Footballers Partnership at the Houses of Parliament in October 2024 to introduce the film, which runs for approximately 20 minutes in length (sitting within the short film category of many film festivals). The film was commissioned by the Arthur Wharton Foundation, with support from the National Heritage Lottery Fund, and is expected to feature in their ongoing work with young people of secondary school age and above.

Town Centre Partnership and Events

23. Businesses attended a presentation by the Like Us team, demonstrating the grants and training available as part of the Digital Transformation Programme. Many Darlington businesses have already signed up to this programme which offers free videography, website building and marketing support mentors.
24. We have been working with the Innovation Challenge team to create a specific project linked to improving perceptions of the town centre, examining opportunities to increase footfall. There are currently four businesses developing project ideas for this challenge to see if their ideas can develop into projects with the TVCA Innovation Challenge programme.
25. The town centre team programmed a drop-in day for businesses to learn about 2025 events and how they can get involved. These sessions aim to encourage more engagement and support from local businesses with opportunities for them to benefit from increased customers and footfall in their business and the town centre.
26. Ice Sculptures appeared across the town centre in December, attracting increased footfall and movement around the town centre. This annual event is popular with all ages, with visitors following maps to location the icy creations. Although it was postponed due to weather conditions, the event was held on Saturday 14 December and attracted thousands of visitors to Darlington.
27. Chinese New Year was celebrated in Darlington town centre on 25 January. This popular cultural celebration brings colour and animation into the town centre, with spectacular lion dance performances from the Chinese community.

Environmental Services

28. The garden waste subscription service ceased in mid-December, with the total tonnage received recorded as 2,841 tonnes on 5 December 2024. This is up from 2,800 last year.
29. On 7 January 2025, Cabinet considered a report on the Environment Act 2021, specifically about implementing weekly food waste and simpler recycling collections. After considering the options presented, Cabinet agreed to implement Option 4, summarised as follows:
 - (a) Continuation of fortnightly collections of residual waste, using the same bins.
 - (b) Dry recycling and food waste will be weekly in a similar vehicle to the existing recycling vehicle. Food waste will be collected in the front pod of the vehicle. In the split body back of the vehicle, paper and card will be collected in one side and then co-mingled glass, tins and plastic in the other side.
 - (c) Each household will be issued with a 5-7 litre internal caddie to store food waste in the kitchen and a 23 litre external bin that to be placed at kerbside weekly.
 - (d) Residents will also be issued initially with a roll of 52 compostable bags to use in the internal caddie.
 - (e) It is intended for the new service to commence in March 2026.

Local Services Portfolio