

COUNCIL
27 MARCH 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's 'Playtown', an immersive indoor playscape designed around discovery, learning and adventure was created using borrowed or donated equipment and materials, making it not only fun for families but sustainable, too. The Exhibition Hall in the historic Carriage Works was transformed into an engaging zone-based playscape using Hoptown's own learning resources, play equipment and structures provided by the events team, Hullabaloo and Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) creating a free playful space for families visiting Hoptown throughout January and February. Over 5,500 people enjoyed 'Playtown' in its first four weeks.
3. Darlington Libraries joined forces with Darlington Cares to offer the first 'World Book Day Costume Swap'. Residents were encouraged to donate their pre-loved World Book Day Costumes for other children to choose and wear for this year's celebrations. In addition to encouraging reusing and recycling, the initiative was designed to be inclusive, providing opportunities for children from lower incomes households to read for fun.
4. The events team have drafted the 2025 events calendar and are currently programming content. All events are all planned to be as sustainable and locally driven as possible, re-using equipment and reducing waste.
5. The approved 2024/25 Integrated Transport Block spend included funding for improved cycle parking to be introduced around the town centre to encourage sustainable modes of transport. A study into the existing and potential additional cycle parking has been undertaken with a number of sites identified. Work to introduce and replace cycle parking has been ordered and will be undertaken and substantially completed during the coming months.

Highway Maintenance Programme

6. Highway Maintenance Schemes completed:
 - (a) Unc. West Auckland Road West Back Lane: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.190km)
7. Highway Maintenance schemes due to start:
 - (a) Patching Contract: Carriageway Patching (six sites)
 - (b) A67 Sadberge Road Roundabout: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.223km)
 - (c) Unc Allington Way: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.832km)
 - (d) Unc. Barnes Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.268km)

Bus Services

8. The Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) scheme offering cheaper fares for people aged under 22 offering a £1 single fare and a £3 day ticket is going well. Tickets are primarily valid in Tees Valley, but also allow cross boundary travel into the North East Combined Authority area. This scheme is funded until June 2025 and its impact monitored throughout. Further funding may mean this scheme can be extended due to the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding that has been allocated to TVCA.
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 were all previously funded by TVCA until March 2025. Funding beyond March 2025 has been announced by the Department for Transport (DfT) funding through the BSIP process. TVCA have confirmed that part of this funding will be used to ensure network stability for a further year and that these services, with the exception of Tees Flex, will continue to be supported until March 2026. A full network review will be undertaken in 2025 to inform how future funding can be allocated.

Safer Routes to School (SRTS)

10. Table 1 below shows progress on all our Safe Routes to School 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	Scheme Consultation	Ward Member Briefing	Portfolio Holder Signoff	Traffic Regulation Order Consultation	Potential Cabinet (if objections received)	Construction (currently programmed)
Hurworth Academy School 20mph Zone	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Partially complete. Remaining road hump programmed to be constructed over the school Easter holidays.
Abbey Infants and Junior School 20mph scheme	Complete	Complete	Complete	TROs advertised January	April 2025	Cleveland Terrace: Easter 2025 holidays with work carried out for two weeks during term time - four-week duration Abbey Road: school summer holidays
Stanhope Road North Puffin crossing	Public consultation March 2025	Complete	Awaiting outcome of consultation	May 2025	June 2025	To be determined
St. Augustine's School 20mph scheme	Complete	Complete	Engagement report being collated	April 2025	June 2025	To be determined

Scheme	Scheme Consultation	Ward Member Briefing	Portfolio Holder Signoff	Traffic Regulation Order Consultation	Potential Cabinet (if objections received)	Construction (currently programmed)
St Bede's School 20mph scheme	Complete	Complete	Complete	TROs advertised January	April 2025	School summer holidays 2025
Longfield School Puffin crossing	March 2025	Complete	Awaiting outcome of consultation	May 2025	Sept 2025	Oct 2025
Mowden Infant and Junior School 20mph scheme	Resident consultation March 2025.	Ward member briefing late January	Awaiting outcome of consultation and decision on funding	To be determined	To be determined	To be determined

Table 1: Progress of the current programme of SRTS Schemes

City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Funding (CRSTS)

11. TVCA received a five-year funding settlement from Government (April 2022 to March 2027) to develop a number of schemes to improve active travel and public transport across the Tees Valley. In Darlington, this includes development of active travel along the A68 corridor, between Faverdale and the town centre. To date, Phase 1 has been delivered with cycling infrastructure from the town centre along Duke Street and Woodland Road. Woodland Road Phase 2, (Hollyhurst Road to Deneside Road, via Tennis Dene) is planned to start on site in early Summer of 2025. Further sections of this route are in development, which also aim to improve public transport journey times that are part-funded through developer contributions, including roundabout improvements.
12. Improvements are also under development that will improve public transport journey times at Bondgate, Tornado Way and the A167 at Burtree Lane. It is anticipated that consultation on these proposals will be undertaken in Autumn 2025.

Levelling Up Funding 2 (LUF2)

13. TVCA have received Levelling Up Funding and a scheme developed to improve active travel on the town centre fringe close to St Cuthbert's Way. This scheme improves pedestrian and cyclist priority at the junction of East Street, widening the provision towards the existing light-controlled (toucan) crossing across St Cuthbert's Way at Russell Street.

Resident Parking Zone (RPZ) Review

14. Members requested that a review of Resident Parking Zones be considered by Scrutiny Committee regarding differential charges and the impacts on road conditions, congestion, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions of the size and fuel source of vehicles. A scope of work has been completed, and work is ongoing to consider these issues and their implications along with a review of the current RPZ policy. The first stage findings will be presented to the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee in April.

Hopetown Darlington

15. Hopetown Darlington welcomed 1,865 people to the site for the site's first Comicon event on Saturday 1 February. The event was a resounding success, with visitors arriving in costume and bringing a carnival atmosphere to the site. Highlights included a Dalek, R2-D2, Hacker T Dog from CBBC and actor Christopher Ryan (The Young Ones, Doctor Who etc). The star attraction was the DeLorean DMC car, of the Back to The Future film-series. Following the success of this event, a second Comicon weekend will be held in July.
16. Hopetown was the recipient of two prestigious awards at the Heritage Railway Association (HRA) award ceremony on Saturday 8 February. 'Best Museum Interpretation Award' by Heritage Railway Magazine and the 'HRA Railway 200 Award', created especially for Hopetown, with a unanimous decision by the HRA board following their visits to the site.
17. On Friday 7 February, Hopetown's 'The Stores', housed in the historic grade II listed Carriage Works building, was re-launched, following the return of the remainder of Hopetown railway heritage collection. Visitors enjoyed a guided tour of The Stores before having the opportunity to speak to members of the collection team and look at items from the archive collection. 'Study @ The Stores', the research centre at Hopetown, is now open. Students, researchers and rail enthusiasts can book an appointment to view historic railway archive documents, photo collections, records (including the Ken Hoole collection) and more with the collections team.
18. Visitors enjoyed a fun-packed February half-term programme of activities and events, including science, animal encounters and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) workshops, craft activities and trails.

Libraries

19. The highest recorded number of digital loans since the service began was achieved in January 2025, with 9,986 digital items borrowed. These loans are comprised of digital books, audio books, newspapers and magazines, which can be selected and borrowed for free, without the possibility of incurring fines or charges. Library membership is free, and customers can seamlessly join the BorrowBox service from home via the web site.
20. Darlington Library's restoration and refurbishment has been recognised by Designing Libraries, who showcased the fantastic modernisation in an article, noting the Library was "Restored, Revamped and Reimagined".
21. Darlington Library Service has also been shortlisted for two Digital Culture Award, in the categories of 'Digital Inclusion' and a special recognition for the library's Digital Manager, in the 'Digital Ambassador' category.
22. An extensive programme of free activities, workshops, and events were delivered in March to coincide with World Book Day. BookFest, organised and delivered by Darlington Library, aims to reach a diverse family audience by offering opportunities to engage with authors and illustrators, participate in creative and digital experiences, and engage with books, reading and stories. Darlington Library is also one of a select group of libraries nationally

who gift World Book Day books via the World Book Day voucher scheme. BookFest and World Book Day resources are especially important for supporting low-income families to engage with reading and libraries.

23. Darlington Library continues to welcome school groups in The Hive for digital experiences, the Centre for Local Studies for history experiences, and The Children's Library for reading experiences. 22 individual classes visited Darlington Library during March 2025, in addition to local schools who visited the branch in Cockerton to routinely borrow books.

Creative Darlington

24. 'People and Perspectives', a photography exhibition by Alan Clements, was on display in the Art Gallery at Darlington Library from Saturday 22 February to Thursday 13 March 2025. The exhibition included aerial photography, images from Whitby's Goth Weekend, Venice and America to enjoy. A 'Meet the Artist' event also took place on Saturday 8 March 2025.
25. Michael Connell's exhibition, 'Observed Surroundings', sharing original work inspired by Newton Aycliffe, opened at the Art Gallery in Darlington Library on Saturday 15 March and will run through to Thursday 10 April.
26. Pink-collar Gallery held a well-attended drop-in tea party in the Art Gallery at Darlington Library, on Saturday 1 February 2025 as part of their National Heritage Lottery Funded 'Working Lass' project, which aimed to find, highlight and elevate the role of North East women in the liberation movement (from the 1960s to the 1990s). The contributions of a selection of women will be memorialised in specially designed museum panels, as well as being archived in an online exhibition.
27. Creative Darlington budget support has been offered to the Arthur Wharton Foundation for their commission of a mural artist to create a rail heritage themed work to the exterior of their Darlington base in 2025.

Town Centre Partnership and Events

28. Following rigorous assessment, Darlington has been re-accredited for Purple Flag status. The interim report noted: "This submission highlights an impressive range of offerings. The opening of Hopetown is a standout achievement, providing a fantastic opportunity to celebrate Darlington's rich engineering heritage. Groovefest also deserves recognition for its engaging approach, successfully involving venues and sparking enthusiasm for future events."
29. Over 20 restaurants took part in the bi-annual Restaurant Week, held from Monday 24 February to Sunday 2 March. Restaurant Week enables visitors to sample promotional menus, with many businesses seeing an increased footfall and new customers. As a result, many participating restaurants have extended offers beyond the promotional week.

Darlington Hippodrome

30. The January to March 2025 period was highly successful for the Theatre's touring comedy offer. Highlights included Jason Manford, who performed to a sold-out audience on 30 January 2025, Jasper Carrott and Alistair McGowen who also performed to a sold-out audience on Wednesday 5 March, and Jimmy Carr, who performed two shows on Thursday 20 March, in response to high demand.
31. The Hippodrome once again hosted the Primary School Dance Festival on Monday 17 March. The annual event consisted of workshops, rehearsals and a performance with the aim of raising aspirations by providing the opportunity to perform at a prestigious theatre and working with a range of artists. The event engages new and target groups of young people, tackling inequalities to build social skills and connections, to promote a sense of belonging.
32. 'The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment' (OAE) brought their 'Baroquebusters' event to the theatre. Carmel school participants worked with James Redwood and three OAE musicians to create a new piece of music, which they performed as the opening piece to OAE's concert. Participants explored Baroque musical techniques used by Purcell and his contemporaries, including ground bass and dance forms, as well as the instruments used in this period. Darlo Creates (a partnership between The Hippodrome, Durham Music Service and Orchestras Live) delivered the project, which took inspiration from the music of Purcell.

Environmental Services

33. From 31 March 2025, businesses with ten or more employees will be required to recycle any waste materials they produce, separating food waste, paper and card, tins and plastics and general waste. To assist our customers in this transition, staff from Environmental Services have written and telephoned all customers. A QR code has been applied to all bins to provide instant access to the relevant information, and officers have also visited the premises of those affected organisations to provide guidance about complying with the new regulations. The Council will also be compliant with the new rules.

Councillor Libby McCollom
Local Services Portfolio