

**COUNCIL**  
**15 MAY 2025**

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**OVERVIEW OF LOCAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO**

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

**Climate Change**

2. Darlington Hippodrome has become the newest members of the Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership (DEEP). The network, overseen by Darlington Cares, was launched last year to promote sustainability, share best practices, and encourage collaboration on green initiatives.
3. The Hippodrome are looking forward to sharing ideas on building a greener future and the Theatre has made a 'Pledge to the Planet,' (promoted to our audiences) to commit to sustainability in everything we do. This includes minimising the leaflets and posters we print, using sustainably sourced paper, and opting for digital alternatives wherever possible. The Hippodrome are also reducing their carbon footprint by working with local suppliers, promoting the cycle-to-work scheme, encouraging hybrid working to cut car journeys, and using automated lighting systems. Even the colourful lights that illuminate the theatre's façade are now all LED.

**Highway Maintenance Programme**

4. In December 2024 the government announced a further £500m of funding was to be awarded to local authorities across England for 2025/26. This funding is for Highway maintenance works including roads, footpaths and structures, with discretion on how to spend this locally based on our current condition surveys and areas of greatest need. Darlington's settlement equates to £902,061 however DFT will only release 75 per cent of this initially (£676,546) with the remaining 25 per cent (£225,515) to be released in January 2026 once the Council are able to satisfy the Department for Transport (DFT) they have met the qualifying criteria. DFT have sent all authorities a template which needs to be completed and submitted for review prior to January 2026.
5. Highway Maintenance schemes due to start:
  - (a) Unc. Barnes Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.268km)
6. Highway Maintenance Schemes on site:
  - (a) Patching Contract: Carriageway Patching (six sites)
  - (b) A67 Sadberge Road Roundabout: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.223km)
  - (c) Unc Allington Way: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.832km)

## Bus Services

7. Through S106 funding the service 6 and 6a will see an enhanced service with a daily evening service and an hourly daytime Sunday service being introduced in May 2025. These enhancements will operate for a minimum three-year period. Tees Flex is continuing until August 2025, a decision beyond this period is awaited from the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA).
8. TVCA has been successful in a bid for Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA) funding, which will see electric buses coming to Darlington, with all 'town' services operating with new electric vehicles. There is a significant lead-in period, but it is anticipated these buses will be on the road by the end of the year.
9. The under 22 fares promotion will continue for the financial year 2025/26. There is also a scheme to provide bus passes for care leavers agreed.

## Safer Routes to School

10. **Table 1** below shows progress on all our Safer Routes to School (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)
Hurworth Academy School 20mph Zone	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Works were completed during the 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
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

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

### **Levelling Up Funding 2 (LUF2)**

- TVCA are proposing an active travel scheme adjacent to the River Skerne and St Cuthbert's Way to improve cyclist and pedestrian priority with the Levelling Up Funding received. The scheme is anticipated to be on site later this year and will be delivered by the Council.

### **Resident Parking Zone (RPZ) Review**

- Communities & Local Services Scrutiny Committee requested consider differential charging rates for permits depending on impacts from various vehicles. The scope has been considered and initial findings were presented to the committee in early April. A wider consultation on RPZs is expected in the early Summer.

### **Hopetown Darlington**

- Hopetown Darlington welcomed 625 Rainbows, Brownies, Guides and Rangers and 180 Guide Leaders from Darlington, Durham, Northumberland, Yorkshire and Leeds on Saturday 29 March to celebrate the launch of the Girlguiding North East England Railway Challenge – Celebrating 200 years of railway travel. The groups explored the site as well as taking part in a Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) session before visiting Wagon Woods and 'Experiment!' our immersive experience. The event was also attended by the Deputy Lord Lieutenant Cyndi Hughes with representatives from Rail 200 and Network Rail.
- 'Railway Pioneers - Celebrating the Railway Rockstars of the Past' opened at Hopetown Darlington on Friday 4 April. In celebration of the start of the S&DR200 bicentennial anniversary festival, three iconic locomotives are on show in the historic Grade II listed Carriage Works until 22 June 2025. The locomotives showcase the advancements of rail technology in the early 19th century as well as the engineering innovation which led to the opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway. These early locomotives were critical to future rail success, and Railway Pioneers is a unique opportunity to see them all in one place. The original preserved Locomotion No.1 returns to Darlington for the exhibition. This iconic engine, designed and driven by George Stephenson on the historical first journey in 1825, is an integral part of Darlington's history, included both on the town's coat of arms and the football team's crest. Joining Locomotion No.1 are replicas of two

other classic locomotives: the Pen-y-Darren, designed by Richard Trevithick in 1804, and 'Steam Elephant', designed by John Buddle and William Chapman in 1815.

15. The working replica of Locomotion No.1 underwent two weeks of testing at Weardale Railway in preparation for the Anniversary Journey event in September. The public will be able to see the replica Locomotion No.1, the replica passenger carriage Experiment and three replica S&DR coal chaldron wagons cross the historic Skerne Bridge on 27 September for the 200th anniversary of the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. Hopetown Darlington will have a programme of bicentenary events throughout September to compliment the SDR200 festival programme.
16. Hopetown Darlington celebrated Easter with a programme of events, including walkaround characters, an egg-rolling tournament, Easter bonnet parade and live music. There was also an exciting programme of spring and animal-themed activities running throughout the school holidays for visitors.
17. On Monday 5 May, a VE Day 80th Anniversary celebration event was held at Hopetown Darlington. Local community groups were invited to a street party in the Goods Yard and general visitors also joined in with the celebrations and party atmosphere, which included street music and dance performances from The Daisies, Kellen Dance ft. FitLab and HC Vocal and Performance Academy. There was also the opportunity to view and handle historical objects related to the railways and join the Stockton & Darlington Railway 26 Miles Heritage Team for reminiscing activities. Many thanks to the Stockton & Darlington Railway 26 Miles Heritage Team for supporting this event.

## Libraries

18. I am delighted to share the news that the library won the prestigious National EDGE Award for Digital Innovation. Judges' comments as follows:

*"The Hive's digital transformation has been extraordinarily successful. Sometimes the word 'digital' can be overused and be so general it loses all meaning, but what Darlington have done is made the digital tangible - they've made digital resources and activities of so many kinds available to groups who really need and appreciate them. In doing so I'm confident they redefined the idea of what a public library is for their local community and have converted scores of youngsters into lifelong library users. I've chosen them as winners partly due to the sheer impact of what they've done - this digital transformation has had a halo effect on all their services. Digital borrowing is up, educational interactions are up, website use is up and the number of people visiting the library is way up. People come for the digital transformation, and they STAY for everything else we have to offer in libraries. Finally, it's hard to imagine better feedback for anything, ever, than this comment from a Year 3 pupil who visited The Hive: "This is the best day of my entire life!" Congratulations to our incredible winners!"*

19. The Library Manager attended the award ceremony and was surrounded by professionals from as far away as the USA. Colleagues from around the UK and world were impressed at what has been achieved in our little library service in Darlington and were looking to learn and see what they could do to improve both their building and their service delivery. Thanks must be offered again to all those involved in the project and delivery of the

service in what they have achieved. Our library services should continue to be a source of great pride for our borough.

20. Our libraries are noting a positive rise in digital borrowing and with the help of the Communications and Marketing Team, have begun a new campaign called 'Books that Bloom'. Attractive postcards have been created using seeded paper, these have been distributed around businesses and venues around the town, and they detail the quick, easy and free way people can access magazines, newspaper books and audiobooks. The postcards are then planted and wildflowers bloom. We expect an increase in library membership and digital issues as well as general awareness of our fantastic free service.
21. The library has recorded the highest number of book loans seen in Darlington for seven years, up 22 percent from last year. A total number of 296,542 items were borrowed from Darlington and Cockerton library during 2024/25.
22. To Celebrate World Book Night and Reading Hour, on the 23 April a big book giveaway was organised of Cathy Bramley's, The Surprise Visitor. These were given to non-library users at venues including the Cornmill Centre to encourage those who wouldn't usually read, to pick up a short story and enjoy it. There was also an author event on the evening with Gervase Phinn.
23. A packed-out programme of events is on offer throughout May for Local History Month aiming to increase awareness of local history, promote history in general to the local community and encourage all members of the community to participate. At Darlington Library we have fascinating talks, displays, art collections and writing workshops available and have linked many to the celebrations of the Stockton to Darlington Railway celebrations.
24. Our libraries are offering special book displays to mark VE Day, as well as a lovely display in the Centre for local Studies which showcases how Darlington celebrated the end of the war in 1945.
25. In the run up to this year's celebrations of the Stockton & Darlington Railway Bicentennial, our library team have been visiting nurseries and pre-schools to tell younger residents the story of the railways and why this year is so special in Darlington. 223 children were gifted a free book pack containing "All Aboard Train" by Seb Braun.

## **Hippodrome**

26. March and April saw great occupancy levels with family audiences attending Horrible Histories and adult audiences attending the popular 'Rocky Horror Show'. High occupancy across the period has resulted in great food and beverage income supporting the theatre's business plan.
27. In April and May, the Hippodrome programme has a great mix of drama, family shows, dance, musicals and music including 'Dracula', The Easter Panto, 'Milkshake!' Live, Steve Steinman and Ballet Lorent.
28. Darlington Operatic Society present hit show 'Everybody's Talking About Jamie' 30 April – 10 May which marks the end of the celebrations for Darlington OS and

Darlington Hippodrome's centenary year.

### **Creative Darlington**

29. Mike Connell's 'Observed Surroundings' exhibition was displayed in the Art Gallery at Darlington Library from Saturday 15 March 2025 to Thursday 10 April 2025 securing 2,442 visits to the Art Gallery. Darlington Association of Photographers' 'Where in the North?' exhibition runs between Saturday 12 April 2025 and Thursday 8 May 2025 invites visitors to guess where their untitled photographs were taken in the North of England.
30. North East Culture Award's Visual Artist of the Year 2024, Lizzie Lovejoy, devised and led the Circe's Island project in Darlington supported by Creative Darlington budget and Arts Council England Project funding attracting 179 audience members across five workshops, a performance day, an exhibition, and digitally.

### **Town Centre Partnership and Events**

31. Following an Innovation Challenge TVCA project, the events team created a mobile Easter Trail. Over 20 businesses joined in with prizes, offers and competitions to encourage visitors to explore Darlington through the Easter holidays. The team are looking to utilise this app for further trails working with the businesses in the town centre.
32. The MAM Markets Team programmed their annual Food Festival with specialist food traders setting up and welcoming thousands of visitors to the town centre for the May Bank Holiday
33. Echo 3 hosted their Star Wars Day, a great independent raising money for a local, chosen charities each year. Their chosen charities for 2025 are Mac My Day, MediCinema, CHUF, and Spaniel Aid.
34. Dance schools from across the town performed their annual mass dance to thousands of spectators with a railway-themed mix of songs at the beginning of May. The weekend of 16 to 18 May sees the return of the Groovefest weekend programmed alongside many of the town centre hospitality venues with the aim to attract new visitors to Darlington.
35. The horticulture and town centre teams welcomed our judges for the annual Northumbria in Bloom competition with a further visit in the summer as well as national Britain in Bloom judges coming to Darlington.

### **Environmental Services**

36. Garden waste collections are underway for the current growing season. Collections commenced on Monday 17 March 2025 and will run through to Friday 5 December 2025.
37. The Environment Act 2021 brought into place new legislation around recycling. One of the new requirements is that all businesses with 10 or more employees must separate dry mixed recyclables and food waste from general waste by 31 March 2025 (businesses with fewer than 10 employees will commence on 31 March 2027). Staff from Environmental Services have liaised directly with all DBC trade waste customers, providing advice and

guidance on their obligations and signposting to the support available.

38. Grass cutting operations commenced towards the end of March. All wildflower areas have received the relevant attention with displays becoming visible over the next few months.

**Councillor Libby McCollom**

**Local Services Portfolio**