

Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022-2026



DARLINGTON
Borough Council



Darlington Cultural Strategy

2022-2026

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Section 1

Darlington, People, Place and Culture

1.1 Introduction

Darlington is known for many things including its railway heritage, connectivity, a fantastic theatre offer and as a distinctive and attractive town with a strong market tradition. It is an ingenious and welcoming place where commercial, industrial, scientific and social innovations have been nurtured and supported.

Darlington is located within County Durham for ceremonial purposes and Darlington Borough Council was established as a unitary authority on 1 April 1997 as the administrative authority. Tees Valley Combined Authority was established in 2016 to further the sustainable and inclusive growth of the economy of the Tees Valley and their remit includes Darlington.

Looking to the future, Darlington Borough Council recognises economic growth as its priority in delivering a long-term vision for the borough and the importance of working alongside Tees Valley Combined Authority to support economic growth. Darlington Borough Council aims to provide the opportunity for everyone to access a good job and a good home and is committed to maximising the potential of young people, working with communities and supporting the most vulnerable in the borough, so people can play their part in Darlington's success.

Darlington is bordered by County Durham to the north and west, Stockton-on-Tees to the east and North Yorkshire to the south, along the line of the River Tees. The borough includes a number of villages and settlements. This Cultural Strategy is informed by dialogue with local people and reflects Darlington Borough Council's recognition of the importance of economic growth within the Delivering Success for Darlington Council Plan to 2023.

Darlington's Cultural Strategy takes note of the vision and drivers of national strategies, including Arts Council England's Let's Create strategy to 2030, the North East Cultural Partnership's Case for Culture strategy to 2030 and the priorities of the Tees Valley Combined Authority, as befits an outward looking place. It recognises the importance of the contributions made by people from the private, public and voluntary sectors to Darlington's current cultural offer and their potential to further develop Darlington as a Creative Place.

Within Let's Create, Arts Council England advise they will *'focus a large part of our development role on ensuring that children and young people are able to fulfil their creative potential, and access the highest-quality cultural experiences where they live, where they go to school and where they spend their free time.'*

Darlington's Cultural Strategy to 2026 is informed by our longstanding engagement with agencies including Durham Music Service and Theatre Hullabaloo, who have secured national recognition for their work with children and young people. We plan to continue to work with these partners and to learn from Darlington Hippodrome's In2 programme to ensure that children, young people, their families and the adults in their lives have opportunities to experience Darlington as a creative place.

Our Cultural Strategy for 2022 to 2026 is focused on maximising the social and economic benefits which culture can bring to people across Darlington Borough, including residents, visitors, those working and investing in Darlington. It considers the fantastic opportunities Darlington has via investment through the Towns Fund, through the expected upgrade of Darlington Station, the Rail Heritage Quarter and celebrations in 2025 of the bicentenary of the birth of the modern passenger railway marking the momentous journey of Locomotion No. 1 on the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825.

1.2 What is culture and why does it matter?

This strategy uses a definition of Culture as set out by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport which covers the following areas:

- arts (including visual arts, literature, music, theatre and dance)
- architecture
- crafts
- creative industries
- design
- heritage
- historic environment
- museums and galleries
- libraries
- archives
- film
- broadcasting and media

We recognise this definition of Culture does not include Sports and Leisure, which are considered in other strategies covering Darlington and will support ongoing dialogue between both sectors.

Recently published national research shows the value of culture to the UK economy, and that while the arts and culture industry receives public funding it makes a significant contribution to the exchequer through VAT, corporation tax, income tax and national insurance and is highly productive. There are direct economic contributions made by the sector alongside the indirect impact (demand supported through supply-chain purchases) and the induced impact (demand supported through the wider spending of employees).

In 2018, the arts and culture industry supported £64bn of turnover, £29bn of GVA, 461,000 FTE jobs and £16bn of employee compensation in the UK economy.

The Contribution of the arts and culture industry to the UK economy report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research for Arts Council England, May 2020

Culture plays an important role in making Darlington a vibrant place, it adds life and energy to the borough, helps define Darlington as place and provides opportunities for people to explore their own potential, enjoy themselves, work together and to explore and enrich the world.

Culture should be seen as not only the commissioning of arts and the production of events, but also as a tool; that builds upon the heritage of the area; that builds a shared vision and identity for the area that is steeped in history and has a wealth of cultural assets; that builds the local economy particularly in the context of tourism and creative industries; that improves the local quality of life and encourages engagement in community activities; and that provides new ways of tackling challenges around health and well-being.

Local Government Association: Cultural Strategy in a box

1.3 Current Assets

Culture harnesses, nurtures and shares the talents of the people involved, bringing economic and social benefits to places. The Forum Music Studios is a major cultural asset in Darlington, which attracts visitors alongside highly acclaimed artists and has launched and supported many musical careers through the facilities and services it provides whilst housing activities that bring people together. As a Community Benefit Society, they have contributed to the growth of the UK Music Industry and create a first-class music experience at a grassroots level that inspires people of all ages and demographics to engage with music through participation in a range of social, education, enterprise or entertainment activities. Since they began trading as a social enterprise in 2010, they advise they have introduced over three million pounds into the local economy, over half a million of which has been grant funding from bodies including National Lottery providers and local funding and donations, whilst generating income through the provision of services, activities and reinvesting into the cultural economy of Darlington.

Darlington for Culture currently promote and support culture through advocacy and initiatives including Darlington Cultural Volunteers, their Small Grants programme and network. They came into being in late 2010 and became established as a co-operative in 2011. Members include representatives from arts and community groups from across the borough, and networks and organisations including Darlington for Culture play a significant part in advocating for culture and making things happen.

‘Darlington for Culture has become an important organisation through its ability to provide a network through which the arts can be promoted, supporting Creative Darlington.’

On With the Show, Supporting Local Arts & Culture, Dr Claire Mansfield, New Local Government Network

Going forward to 2025 and beyond we recognise the importance of bringing together voluntary, public and private sector parties, including Darlington for Culture, to make Darlington Borough the best creative place it can be.

Many people, organisations and enterprises animate our cultural offer. Those involved include actors, architects, archivists, artists, broadcasters, crafts people, ceramicists, choreographers, comedians, creatives, curators, dancers, designers, directors, filmmakers, librarians, musicians, performers, poets, photographers, producers, readers, singers, technicians, writers, not forgetting audience members, participants and volunteers, the list goes on. A selection of Darlington's current cultural assets in terms of buildings, resources and events is shown below.

Museums and Galleries

- The Head of Steam railway museum
- Crown Street Art Gallery in Darlington Library

Theatres

- Darlington Hippodrome
- The Hullabaloo
- The Majestic

Cinemas

- Odeon Luxe
- Vue Cinema

Heritage

- Darlington Rail Heritage Quarter
- Darlington Market
- A section of the Stockton & Darlington Railway Heritage Action Zone
- Tees Cottage Pumping Station
- There are 20 archaeological sites within the borough registered as Scheduled Monuments

Libraries

- Darlington Library
- Cockerton Library

Music Venues

- The Forum Music Studios

Parks and Green Spaces

- 16 parks (including South Park)
- 10 nature reserves

Festivals and Events

- (In 2025) the bicentenary of the 1825 passenger journey on the Stockton & Darlington Railway
- Darlington Arts Festival
- Darlington Community Carnival
- Darlington Food Festival
- Darlington Pride
- Darlington R 'n' B Festival
- Last Train Home and Mish Mash music festivals

Visual Arts

- The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts
- Gallerina

1.4 Cultural highlights from 2016 to 2021



There have been many highlights in Darlington's cultural offer in recent years including:

- The opening of the Vue cinema in Darlington in 2016
- The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts secured charitable status, focusing on the connections between art and health (particularly mental health)
- The restoration and reopening of Darlington Hippodrome in 2017
- The opening of The Hullabaloo, home of Theatre Hullabaloo, in 2018
- Stockton & Darlington Railway declared a Heritage Action Zone in 2018
- The Enjoy Darlington campaign launched, and a cohesive Town Centre events programme promoted
- Commercial concerts promoted successfully at The Darlington Arena
- Refurbishment of the Odeon Luxe cinema in Darlington
- Darlington Borough Council allocating capital to refurbish Darlington Library

- Darlington securing Purple Flag status in 2020 and the Town's nightlife deemed one of the safest in the North-East
- Tees Valley Combined Authority allocating budget to create a Rail Heritage Quarter in Darlington which is expected to become a significant visitor attraction in Tees Valley by 2025
- Darlington securing £22.3 million in 2020 through the Town's Fund to support regeneration schemes in Darlington including the acquisition of key properties on Northgate, to protect heritage assets within the Rail Heritage Quarter, including supporting the creation of a 26-mile walking and cycling route along the track-bed of the original Stockton and Darlington Railway
- The re-opening of Cockerton Library following a refurbishment programme and Darlington Library refurbishment underway in 2021/22
- Support secured for sector recovery and adaptation during the Covid 19 pandemic



Darlington secured Purple Flag status in 2020



Cockerton Library reopened in 2021



Restoration of Darlington Library underway in 2022

1.5 Impact of the pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has inevitably impacted on Darlington's culture and the lives of those providing services or employed in the cultural sector. The pandemic necessitated temporary closure of cultural venues and facilities and either cancellation or postponement of cultural programme. Government announced the largest ever one-off investment in UK Culture of £1.57 billion. Several Darlington residents secured support through Arts Council England's Emergency Funds and The Forum Music Centre and Darlington Hippodrome secured support from Arts Council England's Culture Recovery Programme.

North East Culture Partnership commissioned research to assess the regional impact of the pandemic on the sector, which has helped to identify prevailing issues. Tees Valley Mayor, Ben Houchen announced the establishment of a new, independent and sector-led Task Force to advise on the development and delivery of a £1million Recovery Programme for the Visitor Economy and Cultural Industries sectors through Tees Valley Combined Authority in June 2020, and a number of programmes have been delivered and are in development. Darlington Borough Council led programmes to support resilience and recovery during the pandemic. It is expected that national, regional, sub regional and local bodies will continue to monitor recovery and that further research will inform measures taken to encourage recovery.

Section 2

Vision, priorities, opportunities and how this strategy will impact on Darlington's culture

The Cultural Strategy for 2022 – 2026 will look to build on momentum gained in the last decade and will be reviewed regularly. The vision and priorities for investment within the 2022 – 2026 timeframe are shown below.

2.1 Vision:

Darlington will be a place in 2026 and beyond where culture enriches lives, involves people and is central to identity and prosperity.

2.2 Priorities

- 1 To creatively celebrate Darlington's contribution to the birth of the modern passenger railway.
- 2 For Darlington to have an accessible, diverse and vibrant culture, encouraging economic growth.
- 3 For Darlington to champion engagement with culture, particularly amongst children and young people.
- 4 For culture to thrive within Darlington Borough and attract visitors to the Town Centre.
- 5 For Darlington to have a thriving theatre offer involving people of all ages.

2.3 Opportunities to 2026

In recent years, Darlington has worked with Tees Valley Combined Authority and other parties to secure investment to create a Rail Heritage Quarter around the current site of the Head of Steam railway museum,



Darlington Rail Heritage Quarter and 2025 programme fast approaching

adjoining North Road Station, which is expected to open in advance of 2025 and to become a significant and distinctive visitor attraction in Tees Valley. The Rail Heritage Quarter will be one of the North East's tourism assets and a catalyst for regeneration in the Northgate area.

Work is also underway to preserve and promote public engagement with rail heritage within the Stockton & Darlington Railway Heritage Action Zone. The original track-bed of the railway runs 26 miles from County Durham, through Darlington, to Stockton and several programmes of work are moving forward to safeguard this heritage and build public engagement.

Darlington was involved in a significant programme of events in 1925 to mark the centenary of this historic journey, which is the birth of the modern passenger railway, and again in the Stockton & Darlington Railway Pageant 1975. Given the importance of railway heritage to Darlington, and the worldwide significance of railways, we aim for the 2025 bicentenary to celebrate and safeguard our heritage and to leave a legacy for people in the borough and the wider area working with partners. The bi-centenary events programme is expected to be of significant scale and to attract visitors to Darlington, Tees Valley. and County Durham. Subject to budget the programme may include live steam and motive power, the exhibition of early steam locomotives, education projects, knowledge sharing activity, community events and large scale outdoor cultural events.

Darlington secured a significant Town’s Fund Award in 2020 which is supporting significant regeneration activity within Darlington and will help develop the Rail Heritage Quarter as a visitor attraction and to protect key heritage assets. It is expected Darlington Borough Council will seek support from other government programmes for regeneration and that culture can be a component of these programmes subject to successful application, through protecting heritage and improvements to the public realm.

Culture is making a strong contribution to our Town Centre offer, and the Enjoy Darlington and Enjoy Tees Valley campaigns, and regular festivals and events play a part in attracting people to visit Darlington and add value to their visits, whether residents, tourists or people working here. Culture is contributing to encouraging extended visits and to the vibrancy of the daytime and evening economy, and we will continue to explore opportunities to share local, Tees Valley, regional and national events with people in Darlington.

Darlington Borough Council expects to work closely with Tees Valley Combined Authority in addressing shared cultural

priorities up to 2026 and beyond, and recognises the importance of culture as a high growth sector of the economy, in encouraging sustainable growth, encouraging investment, supporting place promotion, and contributing efficiently to agendas including education, health and quality of life. Tees Valley Combined Authority area was identified by Arts Council England in 2021 amongst 54 priority places for their focus during the first period of their Let’s Create strategy 2020 - 2030.



Enjoy Darlington – Town Centre

Darlington is the home of pioneering theatre company, Theatre Hullabaloo, who have recently delivered successful programmes engaging parents, babies and young children to support positive health outcomes. Darlington Borough Council has commissioned collaborative programmes including In2 led by Darlington Hippodrome and work involving Blue Cabin and our Virtual School, which help to maximise the potential of young people. We will explore opportunities to extend programmes of this nature working with Tees Valley Combined Authority and other partners in the health and education sectors.

Darlington Hippodrome has developed significant programmes to engage residents in Darlington's theatre heritage and we intend to maintain this work and to build on successful initiatives to make Darlington Hippodrome a place for everyone. Alongside celebrating the heritage of theatre in Darlington we intend to develop the reach of other assets including Darlington Library by exploring their heritage with people in Darlington.

Tees Valley has established a well-earned reputation for innovative practice in film, animation and creative digital practice. The Northern School of Art, Teesside University and Northern Film + Media through Tees Valley Screen are working alongside various partners, with Tees Valley Combined Authority support, to promote Tees Valley as a fantastic location for film and television productions. Successful film and television productions have provided significant economic returns for the locations in which they are housed, including employment and place promotion. Darlington has distinctive locations for film and television productions to utilise, given our railway, engineering and agricultural heritage and as a market town. Popular television series 'Vera' and films, including 'Atonement' and '1917', have utilised locations in Tees Valley successfully. We applaud the work undertaken in recent years in developing production facilities within Tees Valley, working with the sector to support progression routes and retain talent, and to attract film and television productions here.

2.4 How the strategy will impact on Darlington's culture

We will use this strategy to inform:

- Where Darlington Borough Council focuses resources
- Our engagement with people living in Darlington Borough around culture
- Darlington Borough Council's engagement with Arts Council England, National Heritage Lottery Fund, North East Cultural Partnership and Tees Valley Combined Authority and other bodies
- Our fundraising strategy

This Cultural Strategy has been informed by dialogue with people resident in, working in, visiting and invested in the borough, and by strategic priorities in Darlington, Tees Valley, the North East of England and Nationally, given Darlington's connectivity and outward looking instinct.

Section 3

Where the Cultural Strategy sits and how it is actioned

3.1 Where the Cultural Strategy sits

The Cultural Strategy is informed by Darlington's Borough Council's Delivering success for Darlington Council Plan to 2023, by Tees Valley Combined Authority's work on culture and tourism, by the North East Cultural Partnership's Case for Culture and by Arts Council England's Let's Create strategy to 2030.

Darlington Borough Council's Council Plan 2020 – 2023 Delivering success for Darlington vision sees:

Darlington is a place where people want to live and businesses want to locate, where the economy continues to grow, where people are happy and proud of the borough and where everyone has the opportunity to maximise their potential.

It is focused on growing Darlington's Economy by delivering more sustainable well-paid jobs, more businesses and more homes and commits Darlington Borough Council to supporting economic growth by keeping the borough clean, safe, healthy, sustainable, well-planned and on the move, whilst valuing our heritage and culture.

The Council's overarching focus on growing Darlington's Economy feeds into commitments to:

- Maximise the potential of our young people by working with partners to maximise educational achievement, working to remove barriers to young people reaching their potential, working at a Tees Valley level to match jobs with skills and training.
- Work with communities to maximise their potential by maximising the benefits of a growing economy for all communities, targeting services where they are most needed, working with partners and working with communities.
- Support the most vulnerable in the borough by providing care and support when needed, working with people to build on their strengths to maximise their potential, working with partners.

Darlington's Cultural Strategy 2022 – 2026 is informed by and aligned to the vision and commitments above.

Tees Valley Combined Authority are leading significant work around Culture and Tourism and Darlington Borough Council and organisations and enterprises working in Darlington, regularly engage with Tees Valley Combined Authority around Culture and Tourism. Through its Culture and Tourism programme, the Combined Authority is currently taking the Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Programme forward and has allocated significant budget to support development of a Rail Heritage Quarter in Darlington. Tees Valley Combined Authority is included amongst 54 Priority Places that Arts Council England will prioritise working with between 2021 and 2024. Darlington Borough Council engages with Tees Valley Combined Authority around culture through a variety of mechanisms, including Creative Darlington board meetings.

North East Culture Partnership's The North East Case for Culture 2015-2030 vision is *'...a positive statement of ambition for the next 15 years, building on the strengths of our diverse communities and pointing to the opportunities for further investment in arts and heritage right across the North East'*.

North East Culture Partnership's five aspirations address Participation, Children and Young People, Talent and Progression, Economic Value and Quality of Life. The partnership is backed by the region's arts and heritage sector, the business and private sector, North East universities, the further education sector and the twelve local authorities in the region including Darlington Borough Council. They have reached out beyond the cultural sector to universities, business networks, the health and well-being sector, and organisations working with children and young people.

Arts Council England's Let's Create strategy 2020 – 2030 will inform their work with the arts, libraries and museums and contains their vision that *'by 2030, we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish, and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences'*. The strategy seeks three outcomes, Creative People, Cultural Communities and A Creative and Cultural Economy and recognises the importance of involving people in shaping culture, the value of culture to communities and the economic value of the sector and the importance of leadership and diversity. Arts Council England have shared four investment principles for the first period of the Let's Create strategy, these being Ambition and Quality, Dynamism, Environmental Responsibility and Inclusivity and Relevance.

Arts Council England have a National Portfolio of Organisations they support through regular funding, co-ordinate support for Music Hubs, lead strategic programmes and manage Project Funding (Lottery). Within Darlington as of May 2021 Theatre Hullabaloo are the sole Darlington based National Portfolio Organisation, although Darlington Borough is within the remit served by Tees Valley Museums who are a National Portfolio Organisation. Darlington Borough is also served by Durham Music Hub, who receive support through Arts Council England.

3.2 Equality

Darlington Borough Council aims to promote equality in everything it does. This means treating people fairly, valuing diversity and removing barriers that prevent people being able to fully participate in public life and fulfil their potential. Much of the local authority's work, together with its partners, is focused on narrowing the gaps in health, attainment, prosperity and quality of life between more vulnerable and disadvantaged people and the Darlington community as a whole. Darlington's Cultural Strategy 2022 – 2026 embodies the local authority commitment to equality in various measures, including supporting diverse public events, festivals and programmes and continued support for bespoke activity and the promotion of opportunities for people with protected characteristics.

Darlington Borough Council supports a rich array of cultural activity involving people with different protected characteristics and consults with appropriate partners to ensure that equality underpins our cultural planning and service provision. Programmes including the Darlington Hippodrome led In2 are engaging children in diverse areas of Darlington including Northgate, while free Town Centre festivals like the Mish Mash music festival and Darlington Pride Weekender, celebrate the rich diversity within Darlington. Between 2022 and 2026 this commitment to equality will continue to inform the various cultural services and programmes we provide. Our Cultural Strategy seeks to provide opportunities for everyone including minority groups ensuring all residents can experience Darlington's rich and vibrant cultural programmes. Darlington's cultural offer is distinctive and ever evolving and we welcome and appreciate people from all ethnicities and nationalities contribution to this.

We will support diversity within Darlington Borough Council's cultural programmes and build or maintain productive relationships with individuals, enterprises, organisations and services who develop provision for people in Darlington. For example, as a Corporate Parent we expect to continue to engage with registered charities, like Blue Cabin, who nurture meaningful relationships between children and young people with experience of the care system, and the adults and organisations who play a significant part in their lives. We will work with community based creative organisations and enterprises who value equality, and will promote funding opportunities like Darlington for Culture's small grants programme widely, which has supported Chinese and Polish cultural events engaging people in Darlington in recent years.

3.3 Sustainability

Darlington Borough Council is also committed to promoting a sustainable approach, which means balancing different, and often competing, needs against an awareness of the economic, social and environmental limitations that we face as a society. In July 2019, Members acknowledged the threat of climate change and passed a motion committing Darlington Borough Council to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Plans to develop or refurbish cultural assets within Darlington by 2026 are informed by our commitment to sustainability. For example, the refurbishment programme at Darlington Library will incorporate improvements to the energy efficiency of heating and lighting the building, and plans for Darlington's Rail Heritage Quarter pay due consideration to those travelling on foot, bicycle, via public transport and automobile.

3.4 How we will act on the Cultural Strategy and where we aim to be in 2026

Darlington Borough Council will implement the Cultural Strategy working with partners including Tees Valley Combined Authority, North East Culture Partnership, organisations including Arts Council England, National Heritage Lottery Fund, and sharing information on progress through the Creative Darlington Board and Darlington Partnership as appropriate.

Detailed annual action plans will be presented to Darlington Borough Council on an annual basis. Annual reports on progress will be made to the Creative Darlington Board, which includes board members from Darlington for Culture, Darlington Partnership and Arts Council England. Darlington Borough Council will consider climate change and other environmental concerns when taking forward these action plans.

Subject to our success in taking forward the Cultural Strategy by 2026 and beyond Darlington will be where culture enriches lives, involves people and plays a central role in the identity and prosperity of the borough.

We will have creatively celebrated the birth of the modern railways in 1825 and the bicentenary celebrations in 2025, investment in our Rail Heritage Quarter and the Stockton & Darlington Railway Heritage Action will have left a positive legacy for the borough, Tees Valley and the North East region. Darlington will have a distinctive, accessible and vibrant culture, encouraging economic growth. Culture will be a significant component of our vibrant Town Centre offer, enriching the lives of those living, working or visiting the borough, contributing to place promotion and encouraging investment here. Darlington's theatres and cultural assets will be vibrant, thriving and known for their innovative work and Darlington will be known for its creative people, creative communities and making a positive contribution to England as a creative and cultural country. Equality and environmental sustainability will underpin our cultural offer. We encourage all people interested in culture in Darlington to get involved with this strategy and welcome your comments.

