

## Appendix 1

# Darlington's Pride in Place Regeneration Plan

## Section 1: Local context

Darlington came to prominence during the industrial revolution. It is world famous for its role in the birth of the modern railway. In 1825, the Stockton and Darlington Railway, the world's first public railway to use steam locomotives, was opened by George Stephenson. This event marked a turning point in transportation history, an event that was celebrated across the town this year, the 200<sup>th</sup> centenary. The town became a hub for engineering, particularly locomotive and bridge building. This led to rapid population growth and the development of working class neighbourhoods around mills and railway works. The Pease family, prominent Quakers, played a major role in shaping the town's social and industrial landscape. To this day the statue of Joseph Pease overlooks the town centre commemorating his family's contribution to the railway industry that brought prosperity to Darlington and their values that influenced housing, education, and welfare.

Darlington continued to grow through the 20th century, with expansions in housing, education, and infrastructure. In recent decades, the town has diversified its economy, with developments in finance, services, and digital and science-based industries. Most recently it has welcomed the relocation of Government Departments at the Darlington Economic Campus.

Whilst Darlington has thrived as a place, some of its neighbourhoods have fallen behind. It's residents haven't prospered as in other areas and consequently the fabric of the areas has grown increasingly run down.

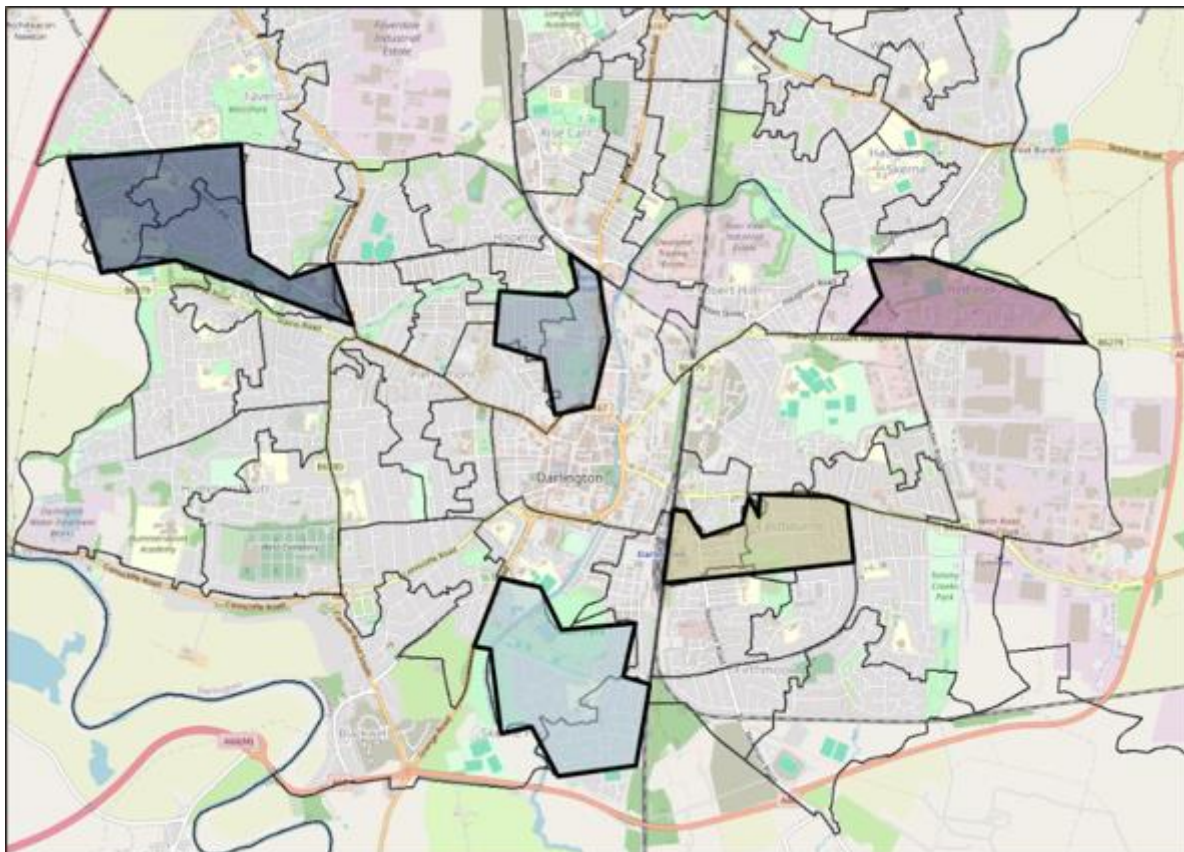
## Section 2: Spatial targeting –

The board intends to focus its funding and interventions in the following areas:

- **Skerne Park** - located in south Darlington, is a mid-20th-century housing estate with a mix of council and private homes.
- **Red Hall** - a residential estate in Darlington, developed in the late 1960s.
- **Bank Top** - is a central neighbourhood in Darlington, split by Yarm Road and located near the historic Bank Top railway station, which dates back to 1887.
- **Northgate** - is a historically significant area in central Darlington, closely tied to the town's Quaker heritage and railway legacy.
- **Branksome** - is a residential suburb in north-west Darlington, developed primarily between the late 1940s and 1970s as council housing.

Each of the areas lies within the boundary agreed with MHCLG in April 2025 and indicated on the map below:

## Appendix 1



### Section 3: Vision for the future

The Neighbourhood Board's vision is:

"To foster connected, inclusive, safe and sustainable neighbourhoods across Darlington that celebrate local identity, support community wellbeing, and can adapt to the evolving needs of residents, ensuring every neighbourhood is a great place to live, work, and thrive."

It will be delivered via two objectives:

- Driving Growth
- Thriving Neighbourhoods

**'Driving Growth'** speaks to the core issue of access to opportunities, particularly employment. The Board is exploring the feasibility of providing a centre that delivers the skills needed for the growing number of science and technology-based jobs that are being created in Darlington and the wider North East. The key will be to engage people, particularly young people from the targeted neighbourhoods and enthuse and inspire them, then provide routes into learning and introduce them to employers. Experience of previous programmes is that, from small numbers, participation increases exponentially. Aspiration grows like a virus.

The vision for this objective is:

***'That a greater proportion of people in the targeted neighbourhoods are in good quality, well paid employment.'***

**'Thriving Neighbourhoods'** is about rebuilding community assets which foster social connectedness and access to resources. In some neighbourhoods, the sense of community has eroded so the Neighbourhood Board is working with agencies expert in community

## Appendix 1

engagement. Supporting individuals to come together and grow a sense of agency is recognised as the cornerstone of supporting neighbourhoods to thrive.

Each neighbourhood has a different demography and different challenges and opportunities. Therefore, the process of engaging with communities varies from place to place. In some areas there are community groups to start a dialogue with, in others there are community assets that could be developed and in some, neither.

The Board is committed to deploying an equitable share of time and resources to the targeted neighbourhoods whilst being aware each will progress at a different speed.

### The vision for this objective is:

***'Residents feel in control of their lives, have access to opportunities and are proud of the neighbourhood they live in.'***

Whilst it was recognised that the issues of concern were concentrated in the following neighbourhoods, they could not be bounded by a firm line.

**Skerne Park** - While the area has benefited from regeneration efforts, such as the refurbishment of Skerne Park Primary School and the development of the Coleridge Centre, it continues to face social challenges. These include lower rates of home ownership, economic deprivation, and below-average health outcomes. Community initiatives aim to improve engagement and wellbeing, but targeted support remains essential. A thriving and well-functioning community hub that is well used by a cross section of the community, providing a range of social and health related activities for the community and a point for access to health and wellbeing services. A vibrant community that has pride in where they live with a greater sense of connectedness.

**Red Hall** – The area faces notable social challenges. Red Hall ranks low in income, employment, education, and health, with crime, particularly violent and anti-social behaviour, being a persistent issue. Despite this, regeneration efforts and community support initiatives continue to play a role in improving local conditions. The existing community centre is refurbished to provide a wide range of activities for the community where local people feel a sense of ownership and are well engaged with the centre. It will provide opportunities for provision in leisure, health and wellbeing. It will provide a youth centre where young people are engaged with activities helping them choose positive life paths. The ambition is that crime and antisocial behaviour will have reduced, young people will have been encouraged into quality employment and overall prosperity in the area will have increased.

**Bank Top** – The area includes a mix of housing, including schemes focused on community living and wellbeing. Bank Top faces social challenges such as economic deprivation and housing-related support needs. Local initiatives aim to foster independence and engagement among residents. Ultimately we will want a sense of community in the area where people feel more connected and there are there are a range of community based activities. We will have brought people together in a community network around a viable community centre providing a range of leisure activities and access to services.

**Northgate** – Despite its rich cultural background, Northgate has experienced economic decline, physical dilapidation, and social deprivation in recent years. Key landmarks like Northgate House and Edward Pease House are in poor condition, and the area has become a hotspot for anti-social behaviour. The communities of Northgate should feel less isolated and there should be a greater sense of cohesion in the area. People particularly youths will

## Appendix 1

have the confidence to access opportunities particularly quality employment bringing greater wealth to the area. There will be a greater awareness and access to health and wellbeing services. We will have engaged and brought together people from all communities of Northgate to create a community centre which provides access to facilities and services.

**Branksome** – While many homes have been sold under the Right to Buy scheme, a significant number remain under the management of Darlington Borough Council. Today, Branksome faces social challenges including anti-social behaviour and economic deprivation. However, it also benefits from community-focused housing schemes like Branksome Hall Drive and Windsor Court, which offer supported living for older residents. The area is well-connected to local amenities and green spaces, contributing to ongoing efforts to improve quality of life. A particular focus in this area will be provision of youth services, which will be youth led and empower young people to develop their confidence and skills enabling them to take advantage of learning and employment opportunities.

By focusing on these neighbourhoods, the Board considered that this would provide the best opportunity to concentrate energy on the greatest need and to leave a tangible legacy.

### Section 4: Strategic case for change

The Neighbourhood Board has taken the evidence compiled in the data pack provided by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHCLG) as a starting point and carried out analyses within the Borough. Evidence compiled for previous strategies in Darlington have revealed that there was a wide disparity between the more affluent and poorer areas of Darlington and the sense was that this had grown rather than narrowed. Now, 13 Lower Super Output Areas are in the 10% most deprived in the country. Also, whilst the town centre has received a variety of targeted public sector investment, left behind neighbourhoods have received much less. The analyses carried out confirmed that this was indeed the case with five neighbourhoods in particular (detailed above) experiencing poorer outcomes across a range of wellbeing indicators. Perversely, these communities are failing to thrive against a backdrop of a town with a vibrant economy.

#### Darlington's Economic Growth: A Decade of Transformation

Over the past ten years, Darlington has emerged as one of the UK's most dynamic and resilient local economies, driven by strategic public and private sector investment, infrastructure development, and a commitment to inclusive growth.

##### a. Private Sector Investment and Economic Expansion

- Darlington's economy has grown steadily, contributing **£2.8 billion in GDP by 2021**, with a **6.1% annual growth rate**.
- Over **£500 million in public and private sector investment** has been attracted since 2012, supporting transport, infrastructure, and regeneration projects.
- The town has seen the creation of **over 4,000 new jobs**, with employment rates consistently outperforming regional averages.
- Strategic sectors such as **advanced manufacturing, logistics, digital, construction, and professional services** have flourished, supported by a skilled workforce and strong connectivity.

## Appendix 1

### b. Darlington Economic Campus (DEC)

- Established in **2021**, the Darlington Economic Campus has become a flagship for civil service relocation, hosting departments like HM Treasury, Department of Business and Trade, the Office of National Statistics, and others.
- The campus has created **nearly 1,000 jobs**, with **over 800 recruited locally**, and is set to expand to **1,400 jobs** by 2027 with the new Brunswick Street development.
- Independent evaluations highlight DEC's "**massive impact**" on local employment, business interest, and regional pride, positioning Darlington as a **Northern economic hub**.

### c. Town Centre Vibrancy and Regeneration

- Darlington Borough Council secured funding for **nine regeneration projects** focused on North Road, the Town Centre, and Victoria Road.
- Long-term redevelopment of key sites including East Street, Commercial Street, and Kendrew Street, adjacent to the Economic Campus is underway.
- Recent completions include the **Hopetown visitor attraction**, **Innovation Central business hub**, and **refurbishment of the Hippodrome Theatre**, enhancing cultural and commercial vibrancy.

### d. Housing Development and Community Growth

- Darlington Borough Council has launched an ambitious **10-year plan to build 1,000 new council homes**, with over 400 already completed.
- Joint ventures with developers like **Homes by Esh** have delivered mixed-tenure housing, supporting both affordable and private ownership.

Darlington's decade of growth reflects a successful blend of strategic planning, investment attraction, and community-focused development. With continued expansion of the Economic Campus, vibrant regeneration projects, and ambitious housing plans, the town is well-positioned to sustain its upward trajectory.

### Neighbourhoods left behind

However, not all communities have managed to access the opportunities presented by this growth. Be it due to lacking the skills needed for these new jobs, confidence or barriers associated with lack of resources (e.g. transport, childcare), many people from particular neighbourhoods haven't benefited and consequently the wealth generated through better paid jobs hasn't flowed into these areas.

As every other town, Darlington has always had less wealthy neighbourhoods. But as other areas of town have prospered the gap between these and the left behind neighbourhoods has widened. Consequently, the fabric of these areas has deteriorated compounding the disillusionment felt by their residents.

## **Appendix 1**

This relative decline coincided with a period of austerity resulting in a reduction in public sector funding. For Darlington Borough Council this necessitated disinvestment in community development which had been a means of engaging and empowering communities. So, its withdrawal compounded the sense of being left behind.

### **Community Engagement**

The Board recognised the importance of Community Engagement and requested the voluntary and community sector collectively through the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy Group to conduct engagement. Importantly, whilst there would be a focus on left behind neighbourhoods it was felt important to hear the views all residents in Darlington.

The community engagement exercise generated 2,398 responses, vastly more than any similar exercise in Darlington providing a sound evidence base for the programme.

### **Community Engagement Strategy**

A comprehensive community engagement strategy was developed to ensure meaningful participation, with local communities remaining central to the Pride in Place programme throughout its duration. The strategy recognises the importance of building trust and empowering residents. An approach that requires consistency, dedication, and time, alongside clear evidence that community priorities are being acknowledged and acted upon.

### **Engagement Programme**

To support this strategy, a structured programme of engagement was implemented. This began with the launch of a Community Survey, designed to capture residents' views and perceptions of their communities. The survey included a combination of multiple-choice questions and open-ended responses to allow for both quantitative and qualitative insights. Engagement activities were delivered through 18 events held in Darlington Market Square, attracting a broad and diverse audience. In addition, five face-to-face events were held within the five targeted communities to ensure localised engagement.

A range of bespoke outreach activities were also undertaken, including visits to care homes and clubs for the deaf and blind. These sessions provided tailored support to help residents complete the survey. Promotion of the survey was extended through various channels, including the Talking Newspaper, Independent Living Forums, and social work teams supporting individuals with sensory impairments.

To ensure accessibility and inclusivity, the survey was made available in an easy-read format, translated into seven languages, and distributed via a QR code to facilitate digital access.

In the process, the names of people who are interested in being involved going forward were gathered which can be used to launch the all-important community development work.

Initial findings from the community engagement programme reveal that 56% of residents are satisfied with their neighbourhood, while 31% feel neutral, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. A strong sense of safety was reported, with 1,690 out of 1,860 respondents stating they feel safe in their local area.

## **Appendix 1**

Key insights include:

- 1,019 residents expressed a desire for increased youth services across neighbourhoods.
- 1,172 respondents called for a stronger presence of police and community wardens.
- There was a clear emphasis on improving community spaces to foster social connections and cohesion.
- Residents also highlighted the need for more locally accessible services, including health, employment, and general welfare support.
- Additional support for disabled residents within their own communities was also a recurring theme.

The Neighbourhood Board has partnered with Teesside University who are carrying out a detailed analysis of the finding

### **Darlington's Neighbourhood Board - Priorities**

The Board reviewed the findings of the Community Engagement alongside an analysis of data. Looking at heat maps of the town it became readily apparent that there were areas where there were concentrations of the issues raised and concluded that these should be where resources should be focused. Whilst it was recognised that the issues of concern were concentrated in the following neighbourhoods, they could not be bounded by a firm line:

- Skerne Park,
- Red Hall,
- Bank Top,
- Northgate
- Branksome

By focusing on these neighbourhoods, the Board concluded that this would provide the best opportunity to concentrate energy on the greatest need and to leave a tangible legacy.

The Board also considered the preliminary findings of the community engagement exercise and recognised some clear messages which inform the focus of its work. There is a clear message that residents would like to have better community spaces. Not only should these spaces provide venues for social and leisure activities but also enable access to services including health, employment, and general welfare support.

Residents recognise that there is little to do for young people. In conversation with respondents, there was a commonly held view that there was an obvious link between this and antisocial behaviour and crime. It was felt that, whilst more visible policing was seen as important, the root solution revolves around engaging the young people.

The Board has also listened carefully to the call for more support for people with disabilities in their communities. Darlington Association on Disability is part of the consortium of voluntary and community sector organisations that carried out the engagement and confirmed the need for a joined up network of step free routes for people to access services and the town centre.

## **Appendix 1**

The engagement activity is seen as the first step in working alongside communities. Not only has it given a valuable insight it has identified people who are keen to be involved in improving their neighbourhood. From here, there will be two strands of activity running concurrently: 1. Direct engagement with residents on the targeted neighbourhoods and 2. A deeper analysis of the data and intelligence in each neighbourhood. The first of these analyses is focused on Red Hall and is included in the attached data pack. What is emerging from the analysis is a picture of an isolated community with poor outcomes across a whole range of indicators.

### **Programme Development**

A programme of initiatives is being developed in line with the community engagement. There are two clear routes for projects: one via the targeted neighbourhoods and the other driving growth.

As described above, building social capital is critical to supporting local communities to taking ownership of their local resources.

The Board is working with a local charity, the Tees Valley Community Assets Preservation Trust, to engage with the community in Skerne Park and help them determine what they want in their neighbourhoods and develop plans with them for a community resource.

### **Project Evaluation**

The Board has designed an evaluation process to support them in assessing project proposals as they emerge.

A subgroup of Board members supported by relevant Council officers has been established to appraise projects as they are submitted. This allows projects to be considered in depth to ensure they have sound probity, address the objectives and have a credible plan to deliver.

### **Current Programme Development**

#### **Driving Growth**

The Neighbourhood Board has commissioned a feasibility study into a STEM Centre, the flag ship initiative of this objective. This is a significant piece of work which opens an opportunity for a facility which, not only will provide opportunities for people, particularly youth from the targeted neighbourhoods access quality employment but play a significant role in growing Darlington's economy.

#### **Thriving Neighbourhoods**

The Community engagement exercise delivered by the voluntary and community sector is the most successful in generating responses of any similar carried out in Darlington.

Work is currently underway with residents of Skerne Park to reimaging the Community Centre. A feasibility study is currently at appraisal stage which will allow the community to work with professional architects to design a facility that meets their needs and that can be run sustainably.

On behalf of the Board, Darlington Association on Disability are working with Darlington Borough Council's Highways department to plan work to realise a network of step free access around Darlington.



## **Appendix 1**

### **Neighbourhood Board Priorities and Strategic Alignment**

Following analysis of the engagement findings and supporting data, the Board identified areas with concentrated issues. These areas will be the focus of targeted resources.

The identified priorities align with the three core objectives of Darlington's Pride in Place programme:

#### **Thriving Places**

The objective of Thriving Places is reflected in the community's call for investment in local infrastructure and public spaces. Residents highlighted the need for improved access to essential services such as health, employment, and welfare support, which are critical to enhancing overall quality of life. Additionally, concerns around safety and environmental conditions point to the importance of creating clean, secure, and well-maintained neighbourhoods. Together, these priorities aim to foster vibrant, resilient communities where people can live, work, and connect in a supportive environment.

#### **Stronger Communities**

The objective of Stronger Communities is reflected in residents' calls for expanded youth services and more inclusive support across neighbourhoods. There is a clear desire for increased visibility of community policing, which contributes to a greater sense of safety and trust. Additionally, the emphasis on promoting social cohesion and intergenerational engagement highlights the importance of building relationships and shared responsibility within communities. These priorities aim to strengthen the social fabric of Darlington's neighbourhoods, fostering resilience, inclusion, and a sense of belonging.

#### **Taking Back Control**

Through inclusive engagement and the collection of names for future involvement, the programme has laid the groundwork for sustained participation. Transparent decision-making and responsiveness to community needs are key to building trust and ensuring that residents feel heard and valued. Additionally, the strategy supports the development of local leadership and capacity, enabling communities to take ownership of initiatives and influence the direction of neighbourhood improvements over time.

#### **Pre approved interventions and use of powers**

The focus of the Board to date has been on interventions that are included in those listed as pre-approved.

Under the objective of 'Driving Growth', the STEM Centre will create skills provision tailored to local opportunities and skills gaps. It will specifically support young people into learning that will help them avoid becoming NEET or economically inactive.

Under the objective of Thriving Communities, the central plank is to renovate and develop existing or new community spaces. By promoting community led management and broad engagement with communities the aim will be for greater cohesion.

Interventions currently planned would not involve the use of any of the listed powers though this may change as the programme evolves.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Expected Long-Term Outcomes**

The interventions being developed under the two objectives of Darlington's Regeneration Plan: Driving Growth and Thriving Neighbourhoods are designed to deliver sustainable, long-term improvements across Darlington's neighbourhoods. By investing in infrastructure and improving access to essential services, communities are expected to experience enhanced wellbeing, increased economic participation, and greater pride in their local environment. Strengthening social cohesion through expanded youth services and inclusive support will help build resilient, connected communities where individuals feel safe, supported, and valued. Empowering residents through active participation and transparent decision-making will foster a culture of local ownership, enabling communities to influence change and maintain momentum beyond the life of the programme. Collectively, these outcomes aim to reduce inequality, improve quality of life, and ensure that all neighbourhoods in Darlington have the opportunity to thrive.

### **Section 5: Alignment with other programmes and investments**

As outlined in the attached business case, the STEM Centre initiative aligns with:

- the Government's Growth Strategy
- Tees Valley Combined Authority's growth plan priorities

Discussions are currently underway to determine how this alignment will translate into investment.

Darlington has been chosen as a Place Partner to work alongside Sport England in exploring ways to boost local physical activity levels. This initiative focuses on whole-system change, bringing together a wide range of partners to embed physical activity into everyday life. It goes beyond traditional sport and sports facilities, addressing broader themes such as inactivity, accessibility, health, and lifestyle.

Three of the Pride in Place communities Northgate, Red Hall, and Skerne Park are closely aligned with this programme. Involvement with the Sports England programme will offer valuable insights, foster community engagement, and support long-term, sustainable improvements for residents in these areas.

Though Darlington isn't in the first wave of Neighbourhood Health pilots the intention remains that this will be the direction of travel. Discussions have been progressed through the Integrated Care Board about how the Pride In Place programme would align with this, particularly in the realisation of access to health services in 'micro neighbourhoods' which would tally with the left behind neighbourhoods in focus.

Darlington's Pride in Place programme will directly support the Council Plan in addressing inequality. By focusing on 'Driving Growth' it supports the priority of an inclusive and sustainable economy, specifically by the ambition of enabling people from left behind neighbourhoods to access quality employment in STEM related employment. It's focus on Thriving neighbourhoods aligns directly with the Council Plan.

### **Section 6: Match funding and leveraged investment**

The Tees Valley Combined Authority invests heavily in the local workforce and is committed to delivering a world-class education and skills system that provides a base for the economic

## **Appendix 1**

growth for the future of the area. It recognises that Science Technology Engineering and Maths is critical to meeting the needs of the local economy. Discussions are underway between the Neighbourhood Board, TVCA and Darlington Borough Council about joint funding for the STEM centre.

Darlington benefits from strong anchor institutions, including the NHS, Teesside University, and Darlington Borough Council. The Board will work closely with these partners to co-design projects that attract joint investment and unlock additional funding streams. Existing infrastructure, such as Central Park and the National Horizons Centre, will be positioned as catalysts for innovation and growth.

### **Section 7: Community and stakeholder engagement**

The Neighbourhood Board membership evolved from the Towns Fund Board. In recognition of the revised focus of Pride in Place, membership was expanded to include broader representation of civic life. The Voluntary and Community Strategy Group held a fair and inclusive selection process to appoint additional members which has resulted in a Board with a diverse representation of different communities of interest.

The Neighbourhood Board operates as a strategic, community-led partnership distinct from the formal structures of the local authority. While it works closely with Darlington Borough Council, the Board maintains a level of autonomy, enabling it to respond flexibly to local needs and priorities. Its strength lies in its partnership arrangements, bringing together representatives from the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, public services, and residents to co-design and co-deliver neighbourhood interventions. The Board also collaborates with the Public Sector Engagement Group (PSEG) to ensure alignment with statutory services while retaining its grassroots focus. This model allows the Board to act as a bridge between communities and institutions, ensuring that decision-making is inclusive, locally informed, and responsive to the lived experiences of Darlington's residents.

To secure broad-based support for the Plan for Neighbourhoods, the Neighbourhood Board will implement a proactive engagement strategy targeting local businesses, voluntary sector organisations, and community groups. This includes working closely with the Science Park Strategy Group to align neighbourhood priorities with innovation and enterprise agendas, leveraging the presence of anchor institutions such as Teesside University and the Centre for Process Innovation. Local businesses will be invited to contribute through sponsorship, skills-sharing, and place-based investment, while civil society organisations, particularly those within the VCSE sector, will be engaged as delivery partners and advocates for inclusive development. The Board will also collaborate with the PSEG to ensure alignment with statutory services and to unlock joint funding opportunities. Through transparent communication, co-design processes, and shared governance, the Board aims to foster a sense of ownership and collective responsibility, ensuring that neighbourhood transformation is driven by cross-sector collaboration and long-term commitment.

To ensure effective delivery of the Plan for Neighbourhoods, the Neighbourhood Board will adopt a collaborative, place-based approach that embeds community voice and leadership at every stage. Central to this will be the development and support of local community structures, such as resident-led groups, neighbourhood forums, and grassroots partnerships, which will be empowered to co-design and co-deliver interventions. The Board will maintain ongoing engagement with residents and key stakeholders, including the VCSE sector, PSEG, and the Science Park Strategy Group, through regular consultation events, feedback mechanisms, and transparent communication channels. This continuous dialogue will ensure that the plan remains responsive to evolving community needs and priorities. Capacity-building activities,

## **Appendix 1**

including training and mentoring, will be provided to strengthen local leadership and ensure long-term sustainability. By embedding participation into the delivery process, the Board will foster shared ownership, accountability, and resilience across Darlington's neighbourhoods.

### **Section 8: Governance**

The governance of the Plan for Neighbourhoods investment programme is led by the Neighbourhood Board, which operates as a strategic, cross-sector partnership with a clear distinction from the formal structures of the local authority. Darlington Borough Council serves as the accountable body, responsible for financial oversight and compliance, and also acts as the secretariat for the Neighbourhood Board, providing administrative and coordination support. The Board has established strong links with key existing partnerships to ensure that interventions are informed by local intelligence and aligned with broader strategic priorities. These include the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy Group, which brings insight from grassroots organisations; the Youth Partnership, which ensures young people's voices are represented; the Science Park Strategy Group, which connects neighbourhood planning with innovation and enterprise agendas; and the PSEG, which facilitates alignment with statutory services. Together, these groups contribute to a robust governance framework that supports collaborative decision-making, transparency, and accountability throughout the delivery of the programme.

The Neighbourhood Board will operate under a robust governance framework designed to ensure transparency, accountability, and integrity throughout the delivery of the Plan for Neighbourhoods. The programme will be managed in full accordance with the Nolan Principles of Public Life, upholding standards of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership. In addition, all financial and operational decisions will adhere to the principles outlined in Managing Public Money, ensuring regularity, propriety, value for money, and feasibility. Darlington Borough Council, acting as the accountable body, will oversee financial compliance and provide secretariat support to the Board. To ensure informed decision-making, the Board has established a clear vision and strategic objectives, shaped by extensive community engagement. Investment proposals will be appraised through a dedicated Appraisal Subgroup, which will assess alignment with strategic priorities, community need, and deliverability. The Board has also forged strong links with key partnerships, including the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy Group, the Youth Partnership, the Science Park Strategy Group, and the PSEG, to ensure that governance is informed by local intelligence and cross-sector collaboration. This structure ensures that the programme is delivered with integrity, transparency, and a strong focus on community impact.

The Council supports the Neighbourhood Board in realising its proposals using its existing procurement and project management systems. This will ensure there is adherence to public procurement legislation and that projects are delivered in a structured way that ensures value for money.

The Council makes available officers from across its provision to give advice to the Board to enable it to make informed decisions.

### **Section 9: Assurance**

Darlington Borough Council, as the accountable body for the Plan for Neighbourhoods programme, will ensure that all aspects of delivery meet the standards set out in Managing Public Money, including regularity, propriety, value for money, and feasibility. The Council will apply its established financial controls, procurement procedures, and performance monitoring

## **Appendix 1**

frameworks to oversee the programme's implementation. All investment decisions will be subject to rigorous appraisal through the Neighbourhood Board's Appraisal Subgroup, which will assess proposals against strategic objectives, community need, and deliverability. The programme will also be delivered in line with Best Value principles, ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively to achieve maximum impact. Governance will be underpinned by the Nolan Principles of Public Life, with transparent decision-making, ethical conduct, and accountability embedded throughout. Regular reporting, stakeholder engagement, and independent scrutiny will further support assurance and continuous improvement across the programme lifecycle.

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