

Darlington Neighbourhood Board

17 November 2025 15:30-17:00

By Microsoft Teams

Minutes / Actions

Present - David Gartland, Martin Short, Sarah Bentley, Gordon Pybus, Lola McEvoy, Hilary Bevan, Cllr Steve Harker, Cllr Jim Garner, Brett Nielsen, Seth Pearson, Mike Poulter, Trevor Watson, Angela Howey, Janine Brown, Stephen Fenwick, Kay Sandham, Andrea Petty, Sarah Small

Apologies - Yvonne Beattie, Anthony Hewitt, Naomi Jenkins, Hayley Jones, Lucy Simms, Joy Allen, Rose Rouse, Graham Hall

1. Actions from previous meeting

- SP will discuss the possible funding

2. Regeneration Plan (SP)

- Format of the plan has been directed by MHCLG, deadline 28th November
- Submission via a portal, decisions will be delivered early 2026
- Seth walked everyone through the main aspects of the Regeneration Plan
- David thanked everyone who has been involved in pulling the plan together, excellent piece of work.
- BN asked about the options to move spend around depending on how the programme pans out.
- SP there will be six monthly returns and everyone involved from MHCLG is aware of the need for fluidity & change throughout the programme.
- DG echoed this in relation to other areas,
- SB asked when the com eng
- JG asked clarity on the 7.5% of delivery costs
- SP it is 7.5% of overall costs and would come from the revenue side of the budget
- JG this would suggest around 30% of the programme will go on delivery costs, suggested this may be something to look at & how to capitalise on this, Brett will look into this further
- TW made suggestions around the presentation of the document to include imagery within the plan
- SP there are no expectations from MHCLG for this to be included
- MS agreed with all that it is a really comprehensive and compelling case for change developed in the timescales available, setting the scene for next steps in terms of planning interventions
- DG concluded that everyone is approving the document for submission – all agreed
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3. Projects Updates

- **STEM Centre (MP)**
- Mike provided a presentation on the STEM Centre, feasibility and potential funding required from the programme.
- This project has gathered a large amount of positive feedback, interest and traction, especially gathering interest from central government.
- The board needs to demonstrate a commitment to the centre through the agreed allocation of £5million over the life of the programme. This will be reassigned should other sources of funding not be successful.
- JG queried the timeframe for finding the additional funding
- MP agreed this could longer
- MS sounds like a really exciting opportunity, it would be great to see more on how this will impact and benefit those left behind neighbourhoods.
- MP agreed, this will be demonstrated more through the business case.
- SB in agreement with MS in relation to what the pathways will look like for those young people who wouldn't normally access such opportunities.
- MP agreed this will need to be embedded from the beginning in those communities, to ensure people are aware of the opportunities. A working group may be required to make sure all these aspects are covered.
- BN asked for finer details on the decision-making process and how the board will be kept informed.
- MP due to the pace at which this project is moving, decisions/notifications won't align with board meetings, so there may be a need for a more hybrid approach.
- JB as the youth partnership works with those young people furthest removed, there will be a positive role for them to play in the development of this & would therefore like to be involved in the working group.
- LM this will be transformative for the whole town, there will be scope for the working group be involved in the actual build of the centre should it be given the green light, for example the trades for the build including Darlington trades people.
- MP we will drive this as hard as possible, the tight window for development will require us to be creative.
- TW agreed with everyone on the pathways for those who live in the left behind neighbourhoods. Reflected on the need to move quickly, which will prove difficult but it's an excellent position to be in. DBC will be heavily involved project management, procurement, etc.
- Need to remember there are other funding sources out there should the initial funding not be available.
- BN pointed out that the agreement is based on the everything being completed correctly in relation to due diligence.
- SB suggested looking at the social value in the contracts.
- MP agreed this will be part of the approach.
- LM the outcomes linked to this project are huge, it is exciting time as a grant fund allows more strength for the programme.

- A project like this would normally take up to 4 years, this needs to be onsite within 10 months, a huge ask but it will be a reliance on the skill & knowledge. But will without a doubt be transformative to the town.
- DG concluded the board have agreed £5million in principal for the STEM Centre.

- **Skerne Park(SB)**
- The appraisal panel met last week and involved some wider discussion on how that panel works and how decision will be made.
- The DBC officer support group had looked at the options in more detail on behalf of the group. Around other provision on Skerne Park, procurement, governance of the proposal and what the feasibility would entail.
- Updates will continue at the next meeting.

- **Youth Proposal (JB)**
- There is a strong case to create spaces with young people opposed to for young people.
- The first element is to have a presence within the five targeted areas, through detached youth work. This will help establish and build relationships with the young people, ensuring a voice for the young people of the town.
- The Youth Partnership would be the lead for this piece of work.
- This will be taken to the appraisal group for approval.

- JG suggested giving the appraisal group the delegated authority to approve projects up to a certain amount, so not all projects need to be brought to the board for approval.
- DG agreed this would be a good idea.
- LM expressed the definite need for effective work with young people and the need to work with those already on the ground with the skillset to carry out this piece of work & therefore supports this proposal.
- JB this will also help to identify the bigger picture for the town & attract additional funding for young people.
- SP proposed a direction from the board to work up an agreement with the Youth Partnership following the support across the board for this proposal.
- SP & SB will discuss this further outside this meeting, to ensure this aligns with the appraisal group. This is very much an emerging process.

4. AOB

The next meeting date will be circulated with colleagues