

Darlington Neighbourhood Board

Tuesday 9th December 2:30pm

Darlington College

Present – David Gartland, Seth Pearson, Trevor Watson, Brett Nielsen, Jonathan Gilroy, Naomi Jenkins, Hilary Bevan, Graham Hall, Sarah Bentley, Martin Short, Mike Poulter, Joe, Passman, Sarah Small

Apologies – Yvonne Beattie, Janine Brown, Kay Sandham, Joy Allen, Angela Howey, Chris Farlow, Anthony Hewitt, Andrea Petty

David welcomed everyone to the meeting as an opportunity to reflect on how far the board has come.

Regeneration Plan & Four-Year Investment plan submitted

- Thanks to Brett and Elizabeth Davidson – 151 Officer for DBC for supporting the plan.
- Thanks to the VCS for the community engagement work.
- Sign off expected in the new year.

Key Milestones to date:

- Board formed April 2025
- Strategic Vision & Priorities agreed June
- STEM feasibility study commissioned June
- Appraisal subgroup established
- Community Engagement programme undertaken
- Skerne Park Community Centre feasibility study commissioned
- Accessibility project agreed
- Youth engagement programme endorsed

This has been a strong start in a short period of time.

STEM Centre

The Board commitment to STEM Centre unlocked an additional £16 million from the Growth Mission Fund. A great amount of work was undertaken by Lola and Mike around what we would like to achieve in Darlington.

PIP has enabled us to bring this money into Darlington. Mike expressed this really was a full team effort between DBC teams and the college in bringing the money to the town. It will be an excellent legacy project and will unlock huge opportunities in STEM.

In the event any decisions need to be made in relation to the centre Sarah Bentley will step in as chair, to ensure transparency with David's role as CEO of the college.

Looking Forward

Prepare for the start of year 1 (April 2026)

- Continue with engagement in the targeted areas
- Create a Build Project management for STEM Centre
- Start Youth engagement programme
- Accessibility Programme

There will be a planned programme of comms for PIP in the New Year. This is likely to be led by DBC supported by the Board & the VCS partners, ensuring the messages are aligned. This needs to incorporate the online information available about meetings, minutes, decisions etc.

This will link with the Neighbourhood Health plans, community engagement evidenced the need for localised provision, especially around health in areas such as children's health.

Martin and Trevor both thanked everyone for their work in progressing this programme in such a positive manner.

Trevor – discussed balancing expectations with reality, this shows the scope for future funding opportunities for the town using the programme and the positive outcomes as a catalyst.

This aspect is featured in the appraisal group criteria around possible leverage funding.

The monitoring for the programme has now been released.

Discussion around the name of the programme, all agreed there needs to be a decision made on what the programme will be named moving forward. Plan for Neighbourhoods has been used with communities throughout the engagement work and there is no expectation from MHCLG on what the programme should be called when working with communities.

Meetings every six weeks, look at possible outside venues, emphasis on hybrid options & accessibility. Next meeting February 2026 college 2:30-4:00pm.

David wished everyone a Merry Christmas and thanked the board for all their support.

