

COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

OVERVIEW OF LOCAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO

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

Highway Maintenance Programme

2. The council has been awarded an overall Green rating by the Department for Transport for its approach to highway maintenance. We are one of only 16 authorities in the country to achieve this top rating.
3. Highway Maintenance Schemes on site:
 - (a) Unc Clifton Road: Footway Reconstruction (0.193km)
 - (b) Unc Bates Avenue: Footway Reconstruction (0.069km)
 - (c) C34a Lime Lane: Carriageway Patching (1.100km)
 - (d) Unc. Milbank Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.200km)
 - (e) Unc. Nunnery Lane: Carriageway remedials (0.137km)
4. Highway Maintenance schemes due to start:
 - (a) Unc. East St: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.060km)
5. The recent prolonged period of wet weather has impacted our highway network with many instances of potholes and verge damage being reported. Our reactive maintenance crews have been working in all weather conditions but, on some occasions, repairs have needed to be temporary to make safe and crews will return to complete a more permanent repair as weather allows.

Bus Services

6. Working with Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), the Council are reviewing supported services across the borough with a view to delivering improvements where these are affordable. The Council aspires to deliver improvements to services in the West End and to extend services in new developments like West Park and Elder Brook Park near Darlington Arena. It is expected that any improvements will use a mix of TVCA Local Authority Bus Grant funding and S106 funds.
7. The TeesFlex service will be withdrawn at the end of March 2026 and the funding diverted to two new fixed route services in the Tees Valley, one of which will serve rural communities in east Darlington on a temporary basis until the TVCA review of supported services is complete.

Safer Routes to School

8. The table below shows progress on Safer Routes to School (SRTS) schemes that are currently being developed. The construction dates are anticipated dates that will be dependent upon the outcome of consultation and the availability of construction resource at that time.

Scheme	Scheme Consultation	Ward Member Briefing	Portfolio Holder sign off	Traffic Regulation Order Consultation	Potential Cabinet (objections received)	Construction (currently programmed)
Abbey Infants and Junior School 20mph scheme	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	It is planned to complete the scheme during the Easter school holidays
Stanhope Road North Puffin crossing	Complete	Complete	Complete	March 2026	June 2026	Planning application required for works in the park subject to outcome of consultation. Construction programmed for June/July 2026
St. Augustine's School 20mph scheme	Complete	To be completed	Update provided during February 2026	April 2026	July 2026	A revised proposal with a one-way system and traffic calming on Beechwood Avenue, plus a signed 20mph zone on Oakdene Avenue and South End Avenue is proposed
St Bede's School 20mph scheme	Complete	Complete	Complete	TROs advertised January 2025	Complete	Summer holidays 2026. Organised to coincide with a planned maintenance scheme on Thompson Street East
Longfield School Puffin crossing	Complete	Complete	Engagement report complete	Not Required	Not Required	June/July 2026
Mowden Infant and Junior School 20mph scheme	Resident consultation by end of Spring 2026.	Complete	Awaiting outcome of consultation	TBD	TBD	Funding is in place subject to scheme consultation and way forward being agreed

Resident Parking Zone (RPZ) Review

9. The public consultation for the update on Resident Parking Zone Policy concluded in the Autumn with over 1,300 responses, which have been analysed and key themes have emerged. Consultation responses were presented to the January meeting of the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee who have asked that the draft policy be presented to them for further input in due course. It is anticipated this will be in early Summer. The policy will be drafted from resident parking operation best practice that has been researched and will be adapted to ensure it works for the Borough of Darlington by considering the responses received in the public consultation.

Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Funding

10. The Government's LEVI fund directly supports the government's long-term strategy to accelerate EV adoption with the aim of the capital funding being twofold:
 - (a) to deliver a step-change in the deployment of local, primarily low-power, on-street charging infrastructure across England and
 - (b) accelerate the commercialisation of, and investment in, the local charging infrastructure sector.
11. The fund supports local authorities in England to plan and deliver charging infrastructure for residents without off-street parking and includes capital funding to contribute to the costs of delivering charge points. It also includes capability funding to employ and train new staff specifically to plan and deliver the charge point infrastructure
12. In April 2023, local authorities were informed of their LEVI capital funding allocation, with TVCA allocated a maximum of £6,596,000. Following a successful application, TVCA were awarded the full allocation in March 2024. Since the award, TVCA have been working with the LEVI Support Body, on project development. To satisfy the scope and conditions of the LEVI fund TVCA propose to procure a single Concessionaire on behalf of the five local authorities, to deliver and operate on-street charge points across the Tees Valley. The Concessionaire will finance, install, own, maintain and operate the on-street charging infrastructure, with 80 per cent of the agreed programme to be delivered within the first five years of the contract.
13. Darlington's preference around the type of on-street infrastructure that's installed, is defined through LEVI as 'pedestal charging' which describes a charging unit, requiring build outs on the carriageway, which could be installed in locations such as the end of terrace streets and in existing parking bays.
14. To achieve equity of access in the EVCI roll-out across the Tees Valley, TVCA will utilise LEVI capital funding to provide a degree of subsidy, with a list of key locations included in the tender specification which the Charge Point Operator (CPO) will be contractually obliged to deliver, subject to an agreed site assessment. Key locations included in the list incorporate areas where provision of on-street charging opportunities are of strategic or local importance but are likely to be less commercially attractive to the CPO.
15. TVCA issued the tender for the provision of on-street EVCI on 5 January 2026, with a closing date of end March 2026.

British Book Awards 2026

16. Darlington Libraries has been shortlisted among the finalists for The British Book Awards 2026 for Library of the Year.
17. Submissions are made by libraries who have implemented initiatives that reach deep into communities, improving the lives of individuals through storytelling and literature. Darlington's entry highlights two different projects aimed at reaching different audiences. The first, *On Track for Storytime*, gifted young children a book celebrating 200 years of our town's railway history alongside the production of a film featuring children reading and performing the story. The second was the campaign *Books that Bloom*, a print campaign to promote our digital reading offer of free books, audiobooks, magazines and newspapers, using seeded paper which when planted, grew wildflowers.

Social Media Engagement

18. Darlington Librarians welcomed the National Year of Reading with the re-release of a selection of high-quality short films featuring our incredible library spaces on social media, which have seen a record number of engagements with one film hitting over 73.5k views and 1.2k "likes" on Facebook. Over January their Facebook page accrued 240 new followers (up 176%) and over 91k viewers, an increase of 122%.

BookFit Challenge

19. The BookFit Challenge is underway, designed by Darlington Libraries for the National Year of Reading and linking health goals to reading goals. Our BookFit Challenge is open to adults aged 16+ and rewards reading of any format – including books, audiobooks, digital magazines and newspapers – with a "finish-line winner" chosen at random every month for a £10 shopping voucher.
20. The campaign is visible within libraries and doctors' surgeries around the town, highlighting the health and wellbeing benefits of reading. Assets for digital screens can be provided by contacting the library.

Children's Writing Competition

21. Libraries have been visiting selected schools offering a free writing competition in the run up to World Book Day, the winners will have their work published on the libraries' Borrowbox to download and read for free.

BookFest

22. Darlington Library's annual book festival for children and young people is back (first week of March). A fantastic variety of reading, digital, creative and cultural events for children and families in Darlington is offered completely free of charge, aiming to help even the poorest in our society to access a wide range of exciting opportunities.

Digital Loans

23. Our digital borrowing continues to grow as customers access free newspapers, magazines, books and audiobooks via our online apps, Borrowbox and uLibrary. This January, nearly 15k items were borrowed compared with over 9k in the same period last year. Libraries have been working hard to promote these excellent free apps with community pop-ups, and campaigns such as *Books That Bloom*.

Hopetown

24. *Brilli-ANT!* An immersive exhibition where inspiring insect encounters that show how even the smallest changes can make a huge difference, closed to the public on 15 March 2026. The exhibition, aimed at children aged 1 to 10-years, was very popular with families and schools who enjoyed the hands-on activities, storytelling, and accompanying workshops.
25. Hopetown Heritage Weekends are on the first full weekend of every month. During the heritage weekend the doors to Darlington Locomotive Works and the 1861 Shed are opened for visitors to engage with Darlington's pioneering and ongoing railway engineering. Visits are free, and each month will engage with a different railway-related theme. In February, visitors enjoyed pit walks, talks and could ring the replica Locomotion No.1's bell. Across the weekends, Saturdays are aimed at families and Sundays are aimed at the heritage audience. The S&DR 26 Miles team will be running craft activities at Hopetown on the Saturdays.
26. On Saturday 21 February Hopetown Darlington celebrated Chinese New Year with a day of a day of culture, celebration and colour. The Year of the Horse was celebrated with the S&DR 26 Miles team doing some fabulous horse-themed craft drop-in sessions. Visitors were also thrilled to see traditional Chinese Lion Dancers performing throughout the day.
27. In collaboration with Darlington Football Club, Hopetown Darlington are excited to announce a special-edition Hopetown Darlington-branded DFC football shirt. This shirt is part of an ongoing partnership celebration Darlington's culture and heritage and forms a small part of what will be our 'Summer of Sport' during the school summer holidays. There's only a limited number available and they are only available in-store at Hopetown Goods & Gifts.
28. February Half Term saw a week packed with family friendly hands-on activities, creative workshops and wild discoveries to keep the children entertained. From Bushcraft skills to bug handling sessions and science workshops, there was plenty for visitors to do as part of their visit to site during the school holidays.

Hippodrome

29. January was a strong month for the Hippodrome with the production and premier of *Horrible Histories the Concert*, Varna International Ballet offering 5 heavily sold performances, as well as popular tributes including the *ELO Show*. February highlights included Ellen Kent's Opera as part of her farewell tour, comedians Sue Perkins, Jason Manford and Chris McCausland, TV personality Michael Portillo as well as a presentation of *Macbeth (Revision on tour)* providing a great revision opportunity for hundreds of secondary school children from the local area.

30. Weekly engagement with community groups has continued with great success. These include Tuesday's warm space, Weekly Daisy Chain drop-in's and Dementia Café every Thursday.
31. The Hippodrome Youth theatre and dance groups and the Monday Movers (over-65 movement class) started back in mid-January after the Christmas break. They are now working towards the Darlington Dance Festival and theatre performances at the end of the summer term to be performed in the Hippodrome and Hullabaloo theatre spaces for family and friends.

Creative Darlington

32. There were 3,339 visits to Darlington Library Art Gallery during an exhibition of paintings by Darlington born artist Jane Noone (1934 – 1959) between 20 December 2025 and 5 February 2026. This was the first public exhibition of her work in Darlington in 60 years, and secured comments from a child aged 10 $\frac{3}{4}$, *"I love art and want to be an artist, and this gallery has inspired me even more!"* and adults, one remembering *"...Jane from my childhood, a lovely, warm and caring person, she taught me to swim in the old swimming baths, such a talented young woman"*. The Northern Echo featured this exhibition in articles on 13 December 2025 and Saturday 24 January 2026.
33. An exhibition of 27 works from Darlington Borough Art Collection opened on Saturday 7 February in Darlington Library and was on display until Thursday 26 February 2026 exploring the theme of change. Comments following the exhibition include, *"Brought back lots of memories of the 3 cooling towers!!"* and, *"Absolutely superb exhibition of Darlington paintings and drawings showing a rich variety of approaches to this varied and fascinating town Lovely to see the many changes to the townscape & surroundings!!"*. A group exhibition by artists from Darlington Mind followed this exhibition and will run between Saturday 28 February and Thursday 26 March 2026.
34. The Heritage and Culture fund (Creative Darlington) programme budget has contributed to partnership work between Darlington Hippodrome, Durham Music Service, Orchestras Live and Darlington schools since 2016. The 5 March 2026 concert by Royal Northern Sinfonia at Darlington Hippodrome began with a premiere performance of a new work showcasing local young peoples' talent and creativity, performed with Royal Northern Sinfonia musicians
35. Darlington's next Culture Strategy is being developed to cover the period from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2030. Meetings have been held or are being scheduled with stakeholders, including Arts Council England and Tees Valley Combined Authority, alongside creative enterprises and organisations based in the borough including The Forum Music Studios and Theatre Hullabaloo. A report will be presented to Community and Local Services Scrutiny in the coming months on the new Darlington Culture Strategy 2026 - 2030, the proposed Action Plan for delivery in 2026/27 and on delivery against the 2025/26 Action Plan.

Town Centre Partnership and Events

36. Restaurants across Darlington participated in the bi-annual Restaurant Week, offering promotional menus that attracted strong customer interest. Participating venues saw increases in footfall and table bookings during the campaign period, alongside some first-time visitors. Several restaurants also reported maintaining the promotional offers in response to sustained demand and positive customer uptake.
37. Chinese New Year celebrations brought vibrant colour and energy to the town centre, featuring spectacular lion and dragon dance performances that captivated visitors. Alongside the parade and traditional displays, families enjoyed a range of interactive activities, themed trails, and creative crafts, encouraging them to explore and engage with different areas of Darlington's high street.
38. Darlington has once again been recognised for the quality of its evening and night-time offer, with judges confirming in January 2026 that the town has successfully retained its Purple Flag status for another year. This achievement continues a longstanding track record of excellence, Darlington having first secured Purple Flag accreditation in 2019.
39. The Town Centre team programmed a drop-in day for businesses to learn about 2026 events and how they can get involved. These sessions aim to encourage more engagement and support from local businesses with opportunities for them to benefit from increased customers and footfall in their business and the town centre.
40. The Events Team has drafted the 2026 events calendar and is progressing with detailed programming. The programme has a strong focus on sustainability, prioritising the local suppliers, reusing existing equipment, and minimising waste across all planned activities.
41. Building on the success of previous town centre trails, which encourage movement along the high street, a new themed trail inspired by *The Magic Faraway Tree* was delivered featuring clues, prizes and family-friendly activities. Trails continue to provide valuable opportunities for local businesses to welcome new visitors into their shops and to showcase the breadth of Darlington's high street offer.

Environmental Services

42. Members will be aware that the council have had to delay the introduction of food waste and weekly recycling collections as we have been let down by the vehicle supplier, who have not fulfilled their order in time despite reassurances to the contrary. A new 'go-live' date of 2nd June has been confirmed.
43. Containers and information packs are being delivered to residents in readiness for the service. An ongoing communications plan is encouraging participation in recycling, ensuring as many residents as possible dispose of their waste in the correct manner. Over 136,000 people have seen social media posts relating to changes in waste collections. Further communications with the public will support the revised 'go live' date.

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Local Services Portfolio