
DARLINGTON TOWN CENTRE FOOTFALL STRATEGY UPDATE

**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Chris McEwan,
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -
Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Group**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an update to Members on the implementation of the recently approved Footfall Strategy, which was presented to Cabinet in November 2017.

Summary

2. Cabinet approved the Town Centre Footfall Strategy in November 2017. Since then a significant amount of work has been carried out on starting to deliver the strategy.
3. The key headline actions within the strategy are:
 - (a) Boosting the reputation of Darlington as a Market Town
 - (b) Improving attractiveness of the Town Centre
 - (c) Removing Barriers

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that :-
 - (a) Members note the content of this report, and
 - (b) Members support the ongoing positive work with regard to the town centre and receive further updates as necessary.
 - (c) To agree that a refresh of the Town Centre Masterplan is required.

Reasons

5. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-

- (a) To ensure the Council has a focused plan to support the town centre
- (b) To monitor performance of the town centre.

Ian Williams
Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Group

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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S17 Crime and Disorder	Reducing ASB in the Town Centre is a feature of the strategy
Health and Well Being	No direct impacts
Carbon Impact	No direct impacts
Diversity	No direct impacts
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	No financial impacts as a result of this report
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The strategy aims to improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre therefore directly impacting on Perfectly Placed
Efficiency	The strategy aims to utilise the Councils and partner resources in a collective more efficient manner.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Background

6. Town centres across the country continue to struggle in these challenging times and recently there have been a number of announcements from major retailers who are remodelling their businesses, reducing the number of stores within high streets feeling the pain across the country. Specifically at Darlington the two most recent announcements are the potential loss of Marks & Spencer and House of Fraser. Darlington is a relatively successful town and has been home to a number of national chains but unfortunately as High Streets change and major retailers remodel their businesses, Darlington is not immune to these changes.

7. Whilst this report clearly focuses on footfall and key actions, given the very fast pace of retail change currently being experienced, it is clear that a revisit of the Town Centre Masterplan Regeneration Strategy is now appropriate. We need to initiate a refresh of this document that identifies the key physical regeneration opportunities for the Town Centre, informed by a high level vision for the Town Centre as a whole for the next 20 years. This should consider areas of the Town Centre where buildings are either vacant, or no longer likely to be fit for purely retail purpose; reflect current and anticipated retail requirements especially with the independent sector, and respond to constraints alongside more flexible change of use in the Town Centre and neighbouring streets. As in 2012 the Council is keen to work with residents and stakeholders to develop this vision.
8. Set against the challenging Town Centre environment, as discussed in the previous report to Cabinet in November 2017, the Council has worked hard with partners over many years to develop and support the town centre using its land holdings to deliver developments and create opportunities such as:
 - (a) Feethams Leisure Development
 - (b) Bishopgate House, accommodating 500+ new jobs in the town centre
 - (c) Multi-story car park
 - (d) Riverside new park
 - (e) Bringing in a new partner and investment to Darlington Markets
9. There is also work ongoing to build a further office block at Feethams, which has the potential to bring in new jobs to the town centre. Whilst it is disappointing that some national retailers are closing and moving out of town centres, in Darlington the vacant units left through the withdrawal of Woolworth's and BHS have been filled by other retailers. In addition, in recent months the Council has supported four new businesses through to the Council's scheme to offer rate relief to new town centre business, there have also been a number of new businesses established without such support.
10. Whilst no doubt we are in challenging times, Darlington town centre is still thriving and a key sub-regional location for people to visit and shop.

Town Centre Footfall Strategy

11. The key elements of the Footfall Strategy were set out in the previous report to Cabinet and below is an update on the actions taken.
 - (a) **Boosting the reputation of Darlington as a market town**
 - (i) *Re-launch and promote Darlington Markets.*

Action to date:

 - Market Asset Management (MAM) have now taken over responsibility for the Market and are promoting the Market using various sources; Facebook, web, publications, etc.
 - The Council are working closely with MAM and providing opportunities through One Darlington and other outlets to continue to promote the

existing market offer.

(ii) *Redevelop the Covered Market.*

Action to date:

- Since taking over responsibility for the Market, MAM have been working with the Architects and Quantity Surveyors on looking at the redevelopment of the Covered Market. Proposals will be forthcoming in the near future.

(iii) *Improve the Outdoor Market with a view to more frequent markets and a review of locations.*

Action to date:

- MAM are working with existing and new traders to expand the current Outdoor Market offer.
- MAM are looking to increase the frequency of the Outdoor Market.
- The offer now includes street food vendors on a Wednesday afternoon.

(iv) *Provide specialist markets and market events during the year.*

Action to date:

- The first Food Festival was held this year over the bank holiday weekend 25-28 May. The event proved extremely successful and was popular with both visitors, traders and the town centre businesses.
- Other specialist markets are planned for the summer and also at Christmas time with the Lights Switch-on.
- MAM are working with a number of providers with a view to providing a regular monthly specialist market within the town.

(v) *Deliver a covered market that includes a wider range of products with longer opening hours with a view to exploiting the night time economy.*

Action to date:

- As part of the development of the Market Hall, MAM looking at extending the opening hours and also exploiting the night-time economy. Proposals will be forthcoming in the near future.

(b) Improving attractiveness of the Town Centre

(i) *Maintaining and improving the physical aspects of the town centre including the public realm and private property.*

Action to date:

- The water feature on High Row has been restored and is now operating through the summer months.
- A new Team Leader has been employed within Street Scene to focus specifically on the Town Centre, ensuring that the public realm is clean, tidy and presentable.

- The Council is working in partnership with town centre businesses, Darlington Cares, Friends Groups, and have entered Northumbria in Bloom City Centre Competition this year.
 - As part of the above there will be a significant increase in floral displays throughout the town centre during the summer months.
- (ii) *Animate the town centre with events and activities that deliver “let’s go to Darlington there is always something to see and do” feel within the Council’s overall approach to tourism and culture.*
- Action to date:**
- The Council has invested further funds in providing events and activities within the town centre, expanding on the existing programme. There is a range of activities taking place most weekends throughout the summer months.
 - #LoveDarlo events brochure has been produced and circulated, which details all the events taking place.
 - The Council is working in partnership with MAM on delivering a range of specialist markets, which will also include events and activities.
- (iii) *Market and promote the town centre locally and within tourism outlets to raise awareness of what is available.*
- Action to date:**
- #LoveDarlo Events 2018 brochure produced.
 - #LoveDarlo Facebook and Twitter pages set up on behalf of businesses in the town centre. On Facebook there have been 2178 likes and it has reached over 400,000 people.
 - A group of town centre businesses including House of Fraser, Cornmill, Queen Street, Arriva, The Keys, Hole in the Wall, Marks and Spencer, Darlington Building Society, Vue Cinema, Feethams Complex, Mecure Kings Head Darlington, Market Asset Management, TGI Media, DBC Communications are now meeting regularly with Mike Crawshaw and Marion Ogle, developing marketing and awareness campaigns for the town centre.
 - A campaign to support the town centre has been developed including actions such as Back Your Town Centre campaign, positive promotions with regard to events, parking and other activities taking place, positive stories through press release, social media, leaflets in shops, as well as a range of other actions.
- (iv) *Work to reduce vacant properties and to improve the offer by attracting new businesses or by changing use. Work to retain current business.*
- Action to date:**
- Work to reduce vacant properties is ongoing with the Council reviewing potential business redevelopment opportunities.
 - Council are currently offering business rate relief for small businesses to open up in premises within the town centre and within the last four months ten businesses have been set up.

- (v) *Creating a DBC town centre staff resource to co-ordinate and deliver elements of the strategy.*

Action to date:

- The Council has now re-designated Marion Ogle as the Town Centre Partnership & Events Manager.
- A new post of Town Centre Partnership Officer is shortly to be recruited to.
- As part of Street Scene a new Team Leader has been employed in the town centre to focus specifically on the overall cleanliness, appearance and maintenance of the town centre.

- (vi) *Improve attractiveness of the two major routes to the Town Centre from the Railway Station, Parkgate and Victoria Road.*

Action to date:

- Later this year/early next year a feasibility study will be carried out on Parkgate to look at what improvements can be carried out to enhance the streetscape. Subject to the outcome of that feasibility study, work will then take place in 2020.
- Work is ongoing with partners with regard to potential improvements for Bank Top Railway Station.
- Work has been carried out on Parkgate improving footpaths and the Hippodrome has recently reopened, improving the overall appearance of the area.

(c) Removing Barriers

- (i) *Work with partners to reduce fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.*

Action to date:

- The new Community Safety Unit has just been set up and is finalising recruitment and training with a view to being launched in September this year.
- Work continues with partners to address fear of crime and anti-social behaviour within the town centre, and a number of interventions have taken place.
- A further report is included for Cabinet to consider, going out to consultation, to introduce a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for the town centre. Subject to the outcome of that report and consultation later this year, a PSPO will be put in place for the town centre.
- The Council have recently appointed a private sector partner to enforce litter and dog fouling across the Borough with a particular focus in the town centre. It is anticipated that this contract will start in September this year.

- (ii) *Improve signage and way finding so people know where things are and how to get there.*

Action to date:

- A review using a specialist in the field of wayfinding is currently underway with a view to providing new signage and fixed maps

throughout the town centre later this year.

- (iii) *Review ease of town centre car parking for short term collections and the overall parking policy for the Town Centre.*

Action to date:

- Cabinet considered a report in June to provide 2 hours free parking in the car parks outside of the ring road. As well as £2 all day in East Street car park. This was approved and came into place on Monday 9 July 2018.

- (iv) *Review and develop how we can best work together to promote the town collectively – how do we do this post Business Improvement District (BID).*

Action to date:

- The group that has been set up in the town centre, which includes House of Fraser, Cornmill, Queen Street, Arriva, The Keys, Hole in the Wall, Marks and Spencer, Darlington Building Society, Vue Cinema, Feethams Complex, Mecure Kings Head Darlington, Market Asset Management, TGI Media, DBC Communications, Mike Crawshaw and Marion Ogle is currently working with Council officers on promoting the town centre.

12. In a short space of time, a significant amount of work has taken place on delivering the Town Centre Footfall Strategy. There is still however a great deal to do and officers working closely with town centre businesses and other partners will continue to develop and deliver the strategy.

Performance

13. A number of key performance indicators are identified in the original strategy to monitor throughout the year. Below are the key performance indicators that are currently available:

(a) **Footfall**

Across the town centre there are 10 footfall counters located at various sites, which when an individual passes that counter, they are recorded on the system. No counters are located in the Feethams development area therefore anyone passing there and not entering the town would not be recorded.

Footfall within the town centre from January through to early June is 6% down on the same period for the previous year. It needs to be noted that the weather this year in January through to Easter was particularly poor, which would have an impact on attendances within the town centre. Nationally, most town centres are experiencing a reduction in footfall.

Whilst footfall is clearly down this year on the previous year, an example of where the strategy is working with regard to markets and events is the recent Food Festival over the May Bank Holiday Weekend. From the Friday through until the Monday, footfall within the town centre was 8% up on the same

weekend in the previous year.

(b) DBC Car Parks

For the period of January to the end of May for all DBC car parks and on-street parking, the tickets sold against the same period last year is up by 7%.

(c) Retail Units

The occupancy of retail units within the town centre is as follows:

- (i) Shops – 87%
- (ii) Pubs -80%
- (iii) Cafes – 75%
- (iv) Restaurants – 92%
- (v) Overall occupancy – 86%

These figures are taken from the Council's Business Rates Records

(d) Darlington Town Centre Crime and Disorder

The table below shows a comparison of crime and anti-social behaviour April to May this year against last.

Offence	Number for 2017	Number for 2018	Increase/ Decrease
Robbery (theft with violence)	4	2	50% decrease
Burglary (from all premises)	8	9	13% increase
Shoplifting	76	79	4% increase
Violence with Injury	35	34	3% decrease
Vehicle Crime	3	2	33% decrease
Total Crime	310	332	7% increase
All Anti-Social Behaviour	58	106	83% increase
Alcohol related ASB	25	29	16% increase
Youth related ASB	21	52	148% increase

Generally crime and anti-social behaviour is up on the previous year, however the Council is working closely with the Police and other partners and the new Community Safety Unit within the Council will be fully operational from September this year.