

# DARLINGTON TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

**DRAFT**

2019 -2030





## OUR VISION

By 2030, Darlington Borough Council (DBC) working together with partners and local communities, will deliver real positive change to our town centre, placing it at the heart of our community for years to come.



## We will do this by:

Enhancing the attractiveness and vitality of our town centre.

Celebrating our heritage.

Supporting local economic growth.

Improving the health and wellbeing of people.

Making Darlington a great place to live, work and visit.



## WHY DO WE NEED A TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY?

Since the last town centre strategy was written in 2012, the landscape for town centres and retail has changed dramatically.

Many towns and cities across the UK have seen a huge change in the make-up of their local high streets. Closures of many prominent retailers including BHS, Maplins and Toys R Us and the uncertainty surrounding high-profile retailers like House of Fraser and Debenhams, has contributed significantly to this.

In addition, the changing business model of retailers is concerning and the role of department stores as anchors for entire high streets and shopping centres is under real threat.

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Given changes in both the high street environment and in peoples shopping habits, there is a need for all towns to develop plans that have business investment at their heart and are focused on transforming town centres into a community hub offering health, housing, arts, education, entertainment, leisure, business/office space, as well as retail.

Our strategy will make Darlington town centre a place people will want to continue visiting, shopping, working and living in for years to come.

# THE ROLE OF DARLINGTON TOWN CENTRE

Darlington town centre plays an important role in the borough's economy, serving 106,000 people in the immediate surrounding area and a further 100,000 people within a 15-minute drive.

The success of our town centre is key to the wider economic strategy for the borough. The town centre benefits from fine architecture, a Victorian indoor market and a retail offer which has fared relatively well in difficult circumstances.

In addition, we have seen significant investment in recent years with the development of DL1 leisure site in 2016 which brought a new cinema, restaurants and hotel to our town. Furthermore, the completion of the multi-million pound refurbishment of the Hippodrome Theatre has greatly enhanced Darlington's cultural and leisure offer.

However, while Darlington has performed relatively well in recent years, it has experienced several shocks to its retail profile. The closure of Marks and Spencer, the loss of BHS and other retail operators closing over the last few years has meant there are currently several empty premises in high profile locations which impacts negatively on the image and vibrancy of our town centre.

Like many town centres, Darlington needs to reinvent itself as a key destination not only for retail but for leisure, events, working and living. Put simply we need to reduce the number of buildings used for retail and DBC together with partners needs to consider other uses for vacant land and buildings.

This strategy sets out a clear direction for the town centre and provides a framework for planning, development and town centre management activities. This strategy details key priority areas for action to reshape the position of the town centre allowing Darlington to reclaim it's rightful position as a town centre of choice for everyone.



# STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Nationally, there is a strong emphasis on town centres becoming places of diverse use. They should provide a range of shops, housing, offices, sport facilities and schools as well as a range of social, commercial and cultural enterprises. They should also be a meeting place for people of all ages.

The national planning policy framework makes it clear that local plans should promote competitive town centre environments and sets out policies for their management and growth. The framework also stresses that a key use for town centres should be retail and leisure.

It is recognised that whilst town centres will continue to perform important economic and civic functions, their role in retailing is changing and it is important for local plans to establish a future direction for town centres, building on their distinctive assets with a focus on driving footfall and increasing residential opportunities.

Darlington's local plan acknowledges that a transformed and vibrant town centre is essential to the borough's prosperity and it is identified as a strategic objective with capacity for further development for housing growth and office accommodation.

The emerging local plan indicates that Darlington town centre should grow and retain its status as a sub-regional shopping centre serving a wider catchment area for retail, leisure and services. The emerging local plan is proposing policies for the town centre that will:

- Strengthen the retail offer focussing on a tightly defined town centre boundary.
- Protect the town centre from out of town retail and leisure developments.
- Encourage quality places for eating out.
- Protect and enhance the town centre's heritage assets.

- Identify sites for future retail, leisure and office uses.
- Encourage housing development in the town centre.

The town centre strategy does not replace planning policy and guidance. It has been developed alongside the local plan and policies such as those relating to housing, employment, conservation and urban design. They will also continue to be referred to for planning applications.

In addition, the challenge facing the five local authorities in the Tees Valley (town centre regeneration) is acknowledged by the combined authority. It recognises the opportunities offered by their unique characteristics, their role as economic drivers and the need to optimise the scale and range of the town centre offer. These objectives are set out in the Tees Valley Combined Authority's Strategic Economic Plan (2017).

This strategy has also been informed by

- The national planning framework
- Darlington town centre regeneration strategy 2012

The town centre strategy aligns with the following DBC plans and strategies:

- Darlington's emerging local plan
- Darlington Borough Council economic strategy 2012-2026
- Experience Darlington – A visitor economy strategy 2016-2026
- Tees Valley Combined Authority's strategic economic plan (2017)
- Darlington's town centre fringe masterplan 2013

# DARLINGTON TOWN CENTRE – MOVING FORWARD

During this part of the strategy we set out the current position of the town centre in relation to its strengths, challenges and opportunities going forward.



## BUILDING ON OUR STRENGTHS

Darlington town centre has many attributes making it an attractive and accessible town to visit.

While evidence suggests footfall in the town centre has fallen, and the number of empty retail units is above the national average, our town centre is home to a high proportion of top national retailers and also has a strong representation from independent retailers.

A report commissioned by the North East Chamber of Commerce (and undertaken by Litchfield's) called *Town Centres: Planning for the Future* (November 2018), identified Darlington as the highest ranked retail town in the Tees Valley and the third highest retail centre in the North East behind Newcastle and the Metro Centre.

Unlike many local authority areas, Darlington truly is a monocentric borough with the town centre the only retail and social centre. Because of this, the town centre acts as the major focal point for a variety of social, cultural and leisure events and is a key element in the make-up and fabric of the area. This also means there is a great deal of empathy and passion from local communities regarding the vitality and attractiveness of the town centre. Our citizen's survey (2018) highlighted that 75% of residents felt they strongly belong to their local area.

Darlington is well connected to the strategic road network given that it is located immediately next to the A1(M) for north and south traffic and the A66 runs through the borough for connection between the east and west of the north of England.

Darlington also has good public transport connections. Darlington railway station is a 10 minute walk from the town centre and direct trains can be caught to London, Edinburgh, Newcastle and York via the East Coast Main Line and to Stockton, Middlesbrough and Bishop Auckland via the Tees Valley Line.

The main bus stops are located within the heart of the town centre on Northgate, Prebend Row and Tubwell Row. These provide approximately 30 different bus routes to surrounding communities. The town centre also benefits from a wide range of long and short stay car parks in central locations.

Darlington town centre benefits from being relatively compact and largely within the inner ring road. The town centre has retained much of its Victorian character with attractive buildings and historic wynds and yards. Darlington's Victorian indoor market is clearly an important focal point for the town centre. In terms of a unique proposition, the indoor market has the potential to attract people to Darlington from across the North East, Cumbria and North Yorkshire.

The main shopping area is centred around the Cornmill Shopping Centre and High Row while a growing cluster of independent retailers can be found in the Grange Road, Duke Street and Skinnergate areas. The improving and increasing evening economy is widely spread across the town centre and the DL1 Leisure development has greatly enhanced the choice available to residents and visitors.

Alongside the DL1 development there has been investment into public realm along the river Skerne as part of the town centre fringe strategy (2013). These environmental improvements have enhanced the accessibility to the town centre and are an important factor in connecting the town centre with the central park business quarter and the railway station.

The town centre hosts many large scale events and festivals including specialist markets, music festivals and sporting events. DBC along with its partners continue to develop a vibrant events programme putting a strong emphasis on community benefit, enhancing civic pride, boosting wellbeing, improving mental health and tackling isolation.





# FACING THE CHALLENGES

While Darlington town centre has many positive attributes, it has not escaped the impact of the dramatic structural changes to the retail industry that's occurred over the last few years. These changes are as a result of changing consumer behaviour driven by technology, out of town shopping, unrest over the business rates system and the prevailing economic conditions. In more recent years this position has been compounded by new and unforeseen factors like Brexit which have exacerbated problems with a weaker pound and a subsequent pressure on retail prices.

The change in retail habits is continuing. Online shopping increased six-fold between 2007 and 2018. In 2000 online shopping accounted for less than 1% of retail sales while in 2018 almost a fifth of all retail sales took place online. The Centre for Retail Research forecasts that this trend will continue and that from the 2012 levels a further 27,000 shops will have closed in town centres across the UK by the end of 2019.

Over recent years Darlington town centre has experienced several shocks to its retail profile. The loss of BHS and Marks and Spencer and the uncertainty surrounding the future of House of Fraser have changed the retail environment. Ongoing challenges to town centres cannot be denied or ignored, therefore, for Darlington to maintain and improve its position several interventions need to be adopted to enhance the durability and sustainability of our town centre.

Since July 2017 the town centre has lost over 13,000m<sup>2</sup> of retail space. Today over 10,000m<sup>2</sup> of that space remains empty. The town has seen a year-on-year increase in the number of empty properties with a current vacancy rate of 16.5% compared to the national rate of 11.5%. In some areas it is much higher, for example in Queen Street shopping centre the vacancy rate has reached 40%.

This is a real threat to the fabric of Darlington town centre due to its heavy reliance upon retail. Approximately 55% of all occupied buildings in the town centre are currently used for retail compared to 26% nationally.

The large increase in retail vacancy rates within Darlington is also reflected in the continued drop in footfall in the town centre. While there have been very short-term spikes in footfall coinciding with events, Darlington town centre has experienced a dramatic reduction of 18% in footfall over the last three years.

This dramatic fall is also reflected in the reduction of footfall to the town's main indoor shopping centre the Cornmill. Over the last three years the Cornmill Centre has experienced an 11% reduction in footfall which has increased the pressure upon retailers operating within the centre.

Taking everything into account, there is a clear need for the town centre to move away from its reliance upon retail. Therefore, DBC together with various stakeholders and partners agree the town centre needs redefining to continue to be at the core of community and economic life, offering spaces in which to live, meet and interact, do business, and access facilities and services.



## GRASPING THE OPPORTUNITIES

Resilient town centres are those which respond to challenges by adapting. To do this businesses, partnership agencies and the community must work together.

There are so many opportunities to make Darlington town centre an even more attractive place to be and it is important to approach change with a holistic and structured plan.

There is an opportunity to introduce a significant residential element to the town centre. The anticipated increase in the number of residents presents positive economic improvements. For example late night convenience stores, restaurants, bars and leisure facilities will all benefit from this new target market.

Of equal importance is the potential for creating a 'living town centre' where an increase in residents going about their day-to-day business has a positive impact on how safe the town feels. The creation and development of a 'living town centre' needs to be a primary objective of work going forward.

Over the last three years Darlington has seen growth in financial and professional services, creating demand for office space. Regional growth is forecast to continue, and Darlington is well located to accommodate new business. The town centre is ideal for developing businesses with the opportunity to link up with Teesside University enhancing the growing professional, science, digital and technology sectors while still ensuring growth and investment at Central Park.

As well as attracting new businesses there is also ample opportunity for existing businesses to expand, taking advantage of the attractive heritage streets and buildings Darlington town centre has to offer. Our town centre may be particularly attractive for small to medium sized businesses because of its convenient location and transport links.

The relocation of the Department for Education (DfE) into the town centre has significantly increased the number of potential shoppers and leisure users while DBC continues to focus efforts on ensuring council staff are town centre based.

Darlington currently has several opportunities for new office developments. The Feethams office development will provide 3,000m<sup>2</sup> of high quality office accommodation in the heart of the town centre. DBC with partners will aim to increase the number of new office developments which in turn will have the potential to increase the number of new shoppers and leisure consumers in our town.

The town centre hosts several events and festivals during the year, including the 10k road race, the Festival of Ingenuity, the rhythm and blues festival and several food festivals. In our citizens survey (2018) 25% of residents said they had visited the town centre to enjoy one of the events and one in seven had attended an event while passing through the centre.

Working with partners we are determined to see Darlington town centre further develop as a centre for cultural activities, events and festivals. In 2015, 1.64m visitors came to Darlington from other parts of the UK, spending £52.65m in the local economy. Through an increase in the range and quality of events and festivals, improvements to our historical assets and the provision of a greater choice in accommodation, we would hope by 2026 to increase the average spend of day visitors by £13.8m and increase the number of overnight visitors by 30%.

In addition, plans to celebrate Darlington's heritage, particularly around the passenger railways' bicentenary in 2025, will expand the wider visitor offer and attractions for tourists.

With the introduction of the DL1 leisure development and the opening of other bars and restaurants across the town centre, Darlington can be proud of a strong and diverse evening economy which helps to support the day time economy. We will continue to encourage the opening of evening facilities that appeal to many different groups, in particularly families and a mix of age groups.





## WHAT DO WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE?

This strategy sets out a clear direction for the development of the town centre.

DBC cannot deliver this strategy alone and we will work with key partners including government, the combined authority, property owners, retailers, businesses and developers to deliver a town centre that is fit for the future.

By 2030, DBC working together with partners and local communities, will deliver real positive change to our town centre, placing it at the heart of our community for years to come.

In delivering this vision our aims are to:

- Work with communities and visitors to develop and enhance Darlington's unique selling points.
- Establish a richer understanding of the current and future demands upon the town centre particularly for young people.
- Continue to improve the cleanliness of the town centre and further invest in public realm.
- Ensure community safety concerns are addressed and achieve Purple Flag status.

- Create an accessible town centre for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.
- Establish new attractions within the town such as a revitalised, refurbished and refreshed Victorian indoor market.
- Invest in our heritage assets like the historic yards and wynds using them to hold regular events and activities.
- Deliver an annual programme of events and festivals.
- Reduce the retail footprint of the town replacing empty shops and derelict pieces of land with appropriate, sustainable and high-quality residential accommodation.
- Create a range of quality office and business accommodation for established businesses and start-up enterprises.
- Ensure any future developments of the town centre complements forthcoming investments into Darlington train station and the Darlington 2025 programme.

# OUR ASPIRATION IS TO MAKE DARLINGTON...

## A TOWN TO SHOP

To reinforce Darlington's position as a first class shopping destination, we will:

- Work with Market Assets Management (MAM) to deliver the redevelopment of the Victorian indoor market.
- Work with owners in Skinnergate and the Yards to attract more independent traders.
- Work with potential new businesses to assist them in locating to the heart of the town centre.
- Introduce grant schemes for retail business enhancements and shop fronts improvements to enhance retailer resilience and attractiveness.
- Work with Cornmill and Queen Street Shopping Centres to further support their growth and development.
- Expand the current convenience store offer.



# A TOWN TO VISIT

Being the birthplace of the passenger railway gives Darlington a unique selling point. It is a key element of our vision to build on this unique heritage, ensuring Darlington is recognised as a key destination. Our aim is to ensure our railway history and Quaker heritage is recognised and embraced across a wide range of projects to reinforce local distinctiveness and celebrate the town's history. We will:

- Ensure the town centre plays an integral part in the programme of events for 2025.
- Increase the number and quality of events and festivals.
- Improve the presentation of our heritage assets through various initiatives including events, festivals, public art, enhanced lighting, effective signage and public realm improvements.
- Introduce more opportunities for the arts sector in the town centre.
- Improve traffic management by providing variable messenger signage and improved parking signage.
- Review the condition and contribution of council owned car parks.
- Examine the options for changes to traffic management in the Skinnergate and Duke Street areas.



# A TOWN TO LIVE IN

An objective of this strategy is to create a choice of high quality town centre residential accommodation which will improve the look and feel of the town centre and will contribute to housing provision, economic growth and the evening economy.

We have commissioned a master planning exercise which has identified locations which could provide real opportunities for residential development. We will:

- Progress the master planning exercise to develop a 'living town centre'
- Identify areas of the town which can be redesigned for residential accommodation.
- Establish a joint venture with a private sector partner to increase residential properties using private sector land and buildings and parts of council owned assets.
- Work with current owners to increase the number of homes above shops to contribute to a 'living town centre'





## A TOWN TO DO BUSINESS IN

This strategy will develop new office accommodation. This will use empty buildings, provide additional footfall for day time and evening economy and deliver real opportunities for employment and economic growth. We will:

- Deliver 3000m<sup>2</sup> of new high quality office space at Feethams.
- Work with partners to deliver a new hotel.
- Work with agents and property owners to attract more businesses.
- Actively implement a 'town centre first' policy for appropriate office accommodation while continuing to support office accommodation development at our key growth sites.



# A TOWN TO BE PROUD OF

We will enhance the quality of buildings, streets and public realm making the most of the town's historic buildings and green spaces ensuring the town centre is safe. We will:

- Introduce more trees, shrubs and plants.
- Secure Purple Flag accreditation.
- Improve cleanliness.
- Review the lighting strategy and develop proposals for improvements.
- Extend the Riverside Park to incorporate land north of Stonebridge.





Despite a period of significant change and economic uncertainty during recent years, Darlington town centre has remained relatively resilient and there's much to be celebrated. Key achievements are:

- The delivery of the DL1 cinema and leisure site.
- Improvements to the public realm adjacent to the river Skerne.
- The relocation of DfE.
- Extensive refurbishment of The Hippodrome.
- Improved coach facilities.
- Improvements to bus stops and pedestrianised areas of the town.

Despite these achievements, the town centre continues to face challenges and without DBCs direct intervention, the pace and scale of change will not be achieved. The private sector will not deliver economic objectives on its own. Further refinement and review of the existing strategy, together with the introduction of several additional key interventions are now necessary if the objectives for the town centre are to be achieved.

# HOW ARE WE GOING TO ACHIEVE OUR VISION?

## TARGETED INTERVENTIONS

Several vacant sites present the opportunity for major development and regeneration. DBC is keen that areas identified for development will have the biggest impact in delivering this strategy.

It will be necessary for DBC together with its public, private and voluntary sector partners to carry out several focussed actions to begin to transform the town centre. These actions will include targeted interventions to develop housing and new business space, an increase in the quality and number of events and festivals and improved public realm.

More than ever before, Darlington town centre must be competitive if it is to be vibrant, diverse and successful. To achieve this, it is vital that DBC leads in facilitating and enabling conditions for economic growth through direct intervention, in partnership with business and communities.

As such, this report reviews and refreshes the 2012 strategy for Darlington town centre and sets the framework for DBC's investment to support its delivery.

In January 2019 DBC identified four geographical areas where intervention was required to deliver this strategy; Victorian indoor market, Skinnergate and the Yards, Northgate and Crown Street

Developments in these four areas will be complemented by other improvement work such as public realm, highways, landscaping both in and around the town centre.



## VICTORIAN INDOOR MARKET

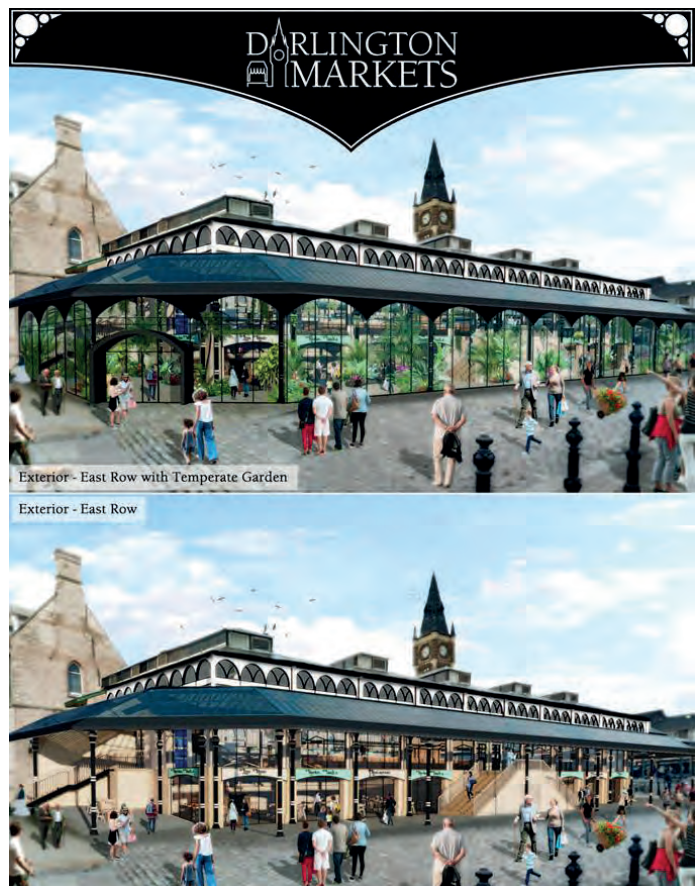
Darlington's Victorian indoor market is an iconic part of the town and as such is key for investment. However, this building is underperforming and not fulfilling its potential. DBC has recognised the need for further investment and in 2017 entered a partnership agreement with MAM.

The reinvigoration of the indoor market is one of the key components of the future development of our town centre. Our aspiration is for the indoor market to be considered a place of interest with diverse and quality traders. High quality, small independent retailers and food operators will be encouraged to trade from a safer and more engaging environment that will attract workers, residents and families, as well as visitors from far and wide.

A newly refurbished and refreshed indoor market is a key part of creating a unique and local offer which distinguishes Darlington town centre from other high street developments. Despite challenges, the indoor market still enjoys some unique advantages. It is centrally-located, enjoys strong customer loyalty and offers a range of fresh produce.

MAM has produced a redevelopment scheme for the Indoor market. In March 2019 MAM launched a public conversation exercise aimed at gathering views on the development work. The suggested design recommends renovation and remodelling of the market hall which considers the historical significance of the building. The main elements of the redevelopment proposal include:

- Structural repairs and redecoration throughout the building.
- Public toilets in the old Town Hall to replace those closed several years ago.
- The creation of a mezzanine floor for retail use.



- Conversion of underused storage space on the mezzanine floor looking onto West Row to create an enterprise haven and encourage business start-ups.
- The creation of a farm shop facility as an outlet for local producers and growers.
- Improved extraction, heating, ventilation and fire protection.
- A comprehensive IT network enabling tenants to adopt the latest sales techniques and allow for more promotion of the market.
- A more diverse food and beverage offer.

In addition and following public consultation it has been agreed to develop a 'winter garden' on the eastern side of the market. This will be installed beneath the existing canopy and will include enclosed glazed sides to create a weather proof space which connects to the market square.

DBC and partners are confident the transformation of this much loved heritage building into a modern retail and leisure venue will provide a popular retail and leisure option for both residents and visitors.

## SKINNERGATE AND THE YARDS

Skinnergate is at the heart of the town and in the past was a busy retail thoroughfare. More recently the area has suffered from empty units or a high turnover of retail units. Although the local plan identifies the area as being within the primary shopping zone, given the changing retail environment it's likely the amount of retail space here will not be required. On this basis other uses should be considered for several of the buildings on Skinnergate such as:

- Introduction of more mixed use buildings. Put simply this means keeping some shops but increasing homes. This will increase the number of people using the town centre which will have a positive influence on the economy.
- General improvements to how this area looks. This means improving shop fronts and the public realm including in the Yards and the Wynds. Lighting and access will also be improved making the area more attractive.

These types of developments, particularly residential new build, will require a considerable amount of work and in addition will need the support of cooperative landowners. We have identified a potential development area which incorporates one occupied building and several vacant buildings along Skinnergate. The properties identified are currently in private ownership.

An initial design for the proposed development has been completed and a full business case for the construction of the properties as council owned homes is being finalised and will be taken to cabinet.

The proposed mixed-use development schemes offers one route to develop the Skinnergate area whilst at the same time providing an opportunity to create more homes. It is anticipated that the Governments' recently announced future high streets fund, possible funding from Tees Valley Combined Authority and DBC's own investment will provide sources of funding for this. DBC has started negotiations for the purchase of the buildings and while it is hoped a negotiated settlement can be achieved it should be noted that if this approach is not successful then DBC may need to consider other acquisition options.

The historic Yards and Wynds adjacent to Skinnergate include examples of medieval architecture and are a real hidden gem. There is opportunity through careful investment and working with local traders to improve the floor space of these areas, the lighting and the shop fronts and consider ways in which footfall can be increased.



## NORTHGATE

To the north of the town centre lies the Northgate area. This area was previously the subject of major development plans that reached an advanced stage prior to the recession. Since then, whilst some properties remain, the quality of land and buildings has further deteriorated. The closure of Marks and Spencer in 2018 was a blow to the retail profile of this area. The 25,000 ft<sup>2</sup> of retail space together with additional space on the higher levels of the building is in a prominent position. While recent store openings next to the building have helped, partial derelict and empty properties make this area of the town feel run down and unwelcoming.

However, the area presents a major opportunity and lends itself to a mix of commercial and residential development and is particularly suited for the development of a convenience store.

The initial phase of proposals will focus on site clearance addressing the derelict Trinity Church and empty night club on Commercial Street. Owners of both buildings have made commitments to start demolition.

For any future developments in the area DBC needs to consider the contribution the Commercial Street car park can play. The draft local plan highlighted a lack of convenience food retailers in the town centre and this area could provide the necessary land for this type of development.

Recent evidence suggests that despite their modest size, these stores play a significant role in attracting people to the town centre. Furthermore, such an approach would meet the requirements of the 'Town Centre First' policy within the National Planning Policy Framework.

In addition, there are opportunities to consider how the Queen Street Shopping Centre supports the development of Northgate. The positioning of a convenience food store on the Commercial Street carpark would benefit the shopping centre. It may encourage current or future owners to change the current layout of the shopping centre to strengthen its links to the convenience store. DBC may wish to consider the role it plays in encouraging this to be achieved.

Such a development would have an impact upon the availability of car parking space and income achieved from the car park. However, a capital receipt would be forthcoming for any sale of land and a number of spaces could be increased from land made available through the demolition of derelict buildings.

It is acknowledged these proposals represent a change from the current land use however it is felt a sustainable and high quality development would improve how the area looks and assist in increasing footfall.

The Marks and Spencer building has been vacant since 2018. Work carried out by IDP has suggested the building could be demolished to make way for the development of approximately 100 modern apartments. However, given the objective of developing a convenience store within the area together with the current type of retailers operating in the immediate area it may be more practical and deliverable to work with the current owners to attract an additional discount retailer to create a hub of similar retailers.



## CROWN STREET

To the north east of the town centre is the Crown Street area. This side of the town is dominated by a Wilko retail store, a multi storey car park and a large vacant retail unit.

Darlington's Central library, Post Office and the Northern Echo offices are also prominent buildings in this area.

The quality of some vacant buildings has deteriorated, and the retail areas need investment. The master plan highlights that the central location and scale of the area presents opportunity for a significant mix of housing with higher density living to the western part nearer to the town centre and lower density family accommodation to the east towards the River Skerne.

The master plan proposes improvements along the river corridor to maximise the value of a waterside setting and natural environment. Clusters of housing could be developed along an integrated waterway within the urban context. Housing will need to reflect the street pattern and site levels are a key consideration as land slopes down to the River Skerne.

Private sector interest in investing in the area has begun with planning permission granted to transform the Northern Echo office into 52 apartments and 1065m<sup>2</sup> of commercial/office space. This development will be a good test of demand and the developer's confidence in residential investments. DBC may wish to consider the role it plays in bringing this investment forward as a future development of this nature in the Crown Street area will complement our commitment to refurbishing Crown Street Library which is likely to take place during 2019/20.

If successful the regeneration of this area would have wider positive implications on the performance of the town centre. Development of a residential offer can only help to increase footfall outside of retail hours.

It is important to note most of the land in the Crown Street area is in private sector ownership. Therefore, the role of DBC at this early stage is very much that of a facilitator. DBC needs to understand the long-term aspirations of the landowners and therefore officers have starting engaging with the landowners to establish what could be delivered.

## OTHER INTERVENTIONS

Cross cutting infrastructure investment such as public realm, highway, landscaping and other works will be delivered within the town centre boundary to complement other plans and strategies.

The delivery of such interventions will be aligned to this strategy and will also take into account other strategies such as highways and transport, crime reduction, culture, town centre partnership, events/tourism, licensing, support services and greenspace management.

Grant funding schemes will be developed in consultation with partners to support existing and new businesses within the town centre and to achieve the priorities of DBC. Any grant scheme developed would be subject to an open and transparent application process.

In addition, and particularly outside the key intervention areas, other individual/windfall development sites including private schemes on private ownership may come forward on a site by site basis. These will be considered in accordance with DBC policies and procedures and, where appropriate, shall be determined by the relevant authorities (planning, licensing, highways etc.) with consideration for the general principles of the town centre strategy as appropriate.





Thank you to the local photographers whose photographs are featured in this document.