

Darlington Neighbourhood Board

4th February 2026, 2:30-4:00pm

Room 406, Darlington Town Hall

1. Welcome & Apologies

Present - David Gartland, Martin Short, Sarah Bentley, Gordon Pybus, Hilary Bevan, Cllr Steve Harker, Cllr Jim Garner, Brett Nielsen, Seth Pearson, Mike Poulter, Trevor Watson, Janine Brown, Stephen Fenwick, Kay Sandham, Anthony Hewitt, Yvonne Beattie, Graham Hall, Gary Hewitson, Joe Passman, Sarah Small, Naomi Jenkins.

Apologies - Joy Allen, Andrea Petty, Angela Howey

2. Minutes of previous meeting

BN – Awaiting final Terms & conditions and grant offer letter guidance

3. Regeneration Plan

Plan submitted 28th November 2025

MHCLG requested further detail on the STEM Centre

SP shared the funding schedule, the fund is actually £19,539,000

Grant Funding Profile (TABLE 1)

	Year0	Year0	Period 1				Period 2			Period 3			
			Year1	Year2	Year3	Year4	Year5	Year6	Year7	Year8	Year9	Year10	
Capacity Funding (Revenue)	250	200	150										600
Programme Delivery Funding (Capital)			360	1,736	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	1,605	14,936
Programme Delivery Funding (Revenue)			232	256	432	432	432	432	437	450	450	450	4,003
													19,539

SP drew attention to the first four years; year one is expected to be a ramp up year.

TW asked how we account for spreading the cost of the STEM Centre over the programme.

SP DBC will effectively need to borrow the money and pay this back over the period of the programme.

BN stated this will be included in the business case and the board will be kept informed throughout.

4. New Pride in Place Guidance

SP shared a paper with colleagues.

339 areas are now in receipt of PIP across the country; some areas will only receive £1.5million for much smaller geographical areas (Impact areas).

There is an increased emphasis on community empowerment and community lead projects, in the 'doubly disadvantaged' areas.

Implications

Name Change – does not affect operations or funding.

PIP is aimed at “doubly disadvantaged” neighbourhoods with high deprivation and low social infrastructure.

JB asked if there was any information on neighbourhood governance.

SP it is referenced in the guidance but there is no guidance around what that looks like.

GP asked about the terminology, as there was reference to hard to reach, left behind and now doubly disadvantaged.

JG Doubly Disadvantaged is referring to areas of deprivation with no social infrastructure.

SP noted there are 264 areas that are Lower Super Output areas.

DG discussed whether the board should have a Communications Strategy

JB is there the possibility of using the One Darlington as tool to communicate the successes.

MP agrees we need a strategy, need to think about how we engage and how people want us to engage. Need to be out there in the areas speaking directly to residents, ensuring those with the smaller voices are heard.

GH there is a lot of knowledge and skills around the table, i.e. PACT, Community Safety meetings.

GP need to be mindful of equality – public transport, access to venues, digital exclusion.

SS need to ensure all the other programmes are included, and how messages are passed through the board members.

SP should Comms be DBC or should it be an external body.

SB should there be a brand for PIP in Darlington.

JB feels there is a strong role for DBC in this, because DBC are working hard to make life better for residents. This will help to instil trust in the local authority in the longer term.

SH it is clear the council needs to give support to the group, but the decisions come collectively from the board. So DBC comms can support, but ultimately the board makes the decision who takes the lead.

TW DBC comms would bring a skills set in advising on a comms strategy. But the message needs to come from the Neighbourhood Board not necessarily the council.

MP it will be a joint approach from various teams. As a board we need to look at what we want in terms of comms.

Action – proposal of a Comms Strategy to be brought to the next meeting – what do we want in terms of comms as a board.

Action – ensure DBC Comms team are present at the meetings.

5. Small Grants Funds

Meeting of the 17th October the board agreed they would like to look at options for a small grant's funds.

SP shared a paper for consideration.

Small grants funds are featured in the pre-approved list of interventions.

Considerations which need to be made in setting up a small grants fund and the options for managing a small grants fund.

After considering all the factors presented Seth gave a proposal to create a participatory grant making model where there will also be an opportunity to receive match funding from existing grant giving organisations.

Partnering with an existing grant making body

How it would work in Darlington

- E.g. The National Lottery Community fund and CDCF are active in Darlington
- They can manage end-to-end delivery, including due diligence and monitoring.

Pros

- Highly professional, high-quality grant governance.
- Strong track record of distributing larger funds and capital grants.
- Less administrative burden.

Cons

- Potential management costs.

GP emphasis on equality in grant giving, need to build in inclusivity to the grants awarded. Equality impact statement needed in the decision-making process. All agreed.

NJ noted such aspects should be included on the initial application form.

DG asked for approval from the board whether Seth can investigate this further. All agreed.

JB Added can we agree that as a board we don't want to be the grant awarding. All agreed.

Points to note when considering options:

BN Is there an agreed amount how would go into this pot, as we don't want a fund that costs just as much to administer as it does in relation to the amount available to give out.

JP how involved would the board be with the grant giving.

JG we do have time to consider this to make sure we make the best decisions, need to involve the communities.

GP need to look at monitoring how well the fund is going, so we can scrutinise its impact.

6. Project Updates

STEM Centre – Mike Poulter

MP suggested a presentation on the STEM Centre at the next board meeting.

£5 million has been allocated to the STEM Centre from PIP.

The government grant has been secured, but a business case needs to be submitted for compliance, a team has been established to ensure this is done correctly.

Sign off is expected for the end of March, this will then release the grant.

Fundamental aspect of the grant is to be onsite within 8 months.

On the 3rd March a paper will be presented to cabinet to approve the development partner so this work can begin.

All the risk elements have been considered.

Action – STEM Centre Presentation

Skerne Park – Seth Pearson

Contracts have been approved by procurement
Community engagement will be key to this piece of work

Youth Proposal – Janine

Contracts have been approved by procurement
Detached youth work will begin in April 2026

7. AOB

MP Towns Fund Update

Edward Pease House – contract in place to ensure building is weather tight.

156 Northgate – Northern Power Grid are currently doing to connection works.

Northern Echo Building – Waiting for Northern Power Grid to do all the connections, this could push access back till May, any later will be September.

Meeting Close

	Action	Person Responsible
1	Comms Strategy to be brought to the next meeting	Seth Pearson
2	DBC Comms in attendance	Sarah Small
3	STEM Centre Presentation	Mike Poulter