

Darlington Neighbourhood Board

24th March 2026, 2:30-4:00pm

Room 411, Darlington Town Hall

1. Welcome & Apologies

Present - David Gartland, 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, Sarah Small, Naomi Jenkins, Emma Caile, Rose Rouse.

Apologies – Martin Short, Graham Hall, Yvonne Beattie, Angela Howey, Jonathan Gilroy.

Representatives from MHCLG joined the meeting - Jack Sneddon, Charles Farrer, Bethany Gorman.

2. Minutes from Last Meeting – all agreed

All actions for completion during this meeting as follows:

	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

MHCLG – Bethany announced the Regeneration Plan has been agreed and signed off, MHCLG will be in touch with a MOU to release the funding.

DG reported back on a day at Lancaster House which looked at how PIP really can make an impact on towns. It was made very clear that it is about the community and the board making the decisions not the councils. The board has the freedom to make decisions for the town based on community voice.

There is scope to work with local grant giving bodies to enhance the programme. There is also hope that Neighbourhood Boards will continue beyond PIP.

3. Board Membership Representation

JB would like to see representation from health.

KS business representation from businesses outside of the town centre

GP requested that people send a delegate from their organisation if the named person is unable to attend.

SP possible representation from the Health & Well Being Board, opposed to a council officer.

JB feels a public health representative would be beneficial.

RR suggested an officer from Public Health could advise opposed to taking a place on the board.

SP suggested Lorraine Hughes from Public Health, SS to invite.

DG encouraged board members to think about other people who may be suitable to join the board, please let Seth/Sarah.S know.

4. Comms Options

SP explored the possible comms strategy with DBC Comms team. Given that PIP needs its own identity, it was decided it would be best to source comms support externally. DBC Comms have supplied a strategy to enable a short tender exercise, SP asked for agreement from the board. All agreed, SP will bring this to the next meeting.

LM shared a street sign type graphic which can be used, Charles will share additional information on this with the board. Emphasis on digital comms to be included.

SP is working on around £10,000 per year for the comms contract.

LM encouraged colleagues to have a look at Ealing Councils social media, it is very different and a positive example of doing things differently.

5. Grant Fund

The National Lottery has received national direction not to undertake any small grants funds for PiP.

Possible options – Balinger Trust & Hartlepool BC is holding their own grant fund.

SP will contact both, to look at possibilities.

JG This could be useful to support the five targeted areas and their ideas.

LM possible opportunity to look at match funding, this could be tried in the first year with use of the capacity funding and reviewed. It is often the case that smaller groups only need smaller amounts of money.

RR possible to look at what would be 'capital' for the smaller grants.

SB need to be mindful that some organisations may charge for administration of funding.

JB involving an organisation with a charge does mean money would be lost, so needs to be considered.

6. Accessibility

AH removing everyday barriers for residents with mobility issues. £100k per year to deliver a town wide programme of dropped kerbs. This investment will be met with DBC commitments.

GP spoke about the impact of this piece of work, the bigger picture of how this will impact on people's day to day lives, ability to work, socialise, be independent.

JB there could be scope in looking at other programmes, such as Place Based Expansion work which has a focus on accessibility.

LM to conclude that's 100 new dropped kerbs, could 50 be placed in the five target areas every year.

GP this wasn't agreed, it is very much for the wider benefit of the town.

AH this is about making the town as a whole, more accessible.

LM discussed the opportunity to look at the worst affected areas across the town.

GP this can work but it can result in areas of little benefit receiving dropped kerbs.

DG if we agree to this now its £1million over the 10-year period, however we could opt to agree to look at the DBC commitment year on year.

SP discussed the four-year MOU which could help in making this decision.

BN agreed with Seth that it would be sensible to use the four-year benchmark.

BN recommends including it in the plan with the option to up or downscale the funding as the board sees appropriate.

DG requested guidance on how much funding would be required to create a more accessible town. This decision will not be made at this meeting.

JG mentioned the previous decision to provide £75,000 a year, not £100k.

AH will provide a proposal for the next meeting for a decision to be made by the board.

7. Skerne Park Feasibility Update

Work is now underway with the steering group. Tees Valley Community Asset Preservation Trust have commissioned architects who specialise in community centre development (D3 Associates) to support the group and develop an options appraisal.

The options appraisal will form the basis of a wider community consultation, in partnership with DBC consultation hopes to identify a preferred option for redevelopment or location for a new building. Retaining the existing building will be difficult in relation to expansion due to the high-pressure water main on one side and the sewer on the other.

The steering group's work is ongoing, and by 30 June the aim is to have a draft costed proposal for a redeveloped/new community centre for consideration.

8. STEM Centre

MP provided a short presentation on the STEM Centre, including designs and current position with the aim of sign off April 2026. This isn't just about the build, it is about providing a space for the children and young people of Darlington to have access to STEM learning.

DG thanked Mike for his work on this and expressed his gratitude for the collaborative work. GP asked if he could have a copy of the plans.

MP this will be shared once everything has been agreed and welcomed GP to be involved in the future planning stages.

9. Towns Fund Update

Towns fund is coming to an end.

NE Building – due for handover Summer 26

Skinnergate – tenders received for final phase for housing and commercial development.

156 Northgate – completion 8th April, options appraisal for usage in underway.

Edward Pease House – Final specification for works to commence in May for 12 weeks approx.

Overarching comms is planned to celebrate and formally end the work of Towns Fund.

10. Any other business

LM – Open session about STEM for businesses to find out more, essential for the local growth agenda.

BN – Thanks to MHCLG Colleagues for their confirmation of the regeneration plan and will look forward to receiving the MOU.

SP – submission for the first monitoring report 30th April 2026.

Actions

	Actions	Person Responsible
1	Suggestions for new board members – send to Sarah Small.	All
2	Invite Public Health representation to meetings.	SS
3	Undertake a short comms exercise, share outcome with colleagues at the next meeting.	SP