



WHAT THE LOCAL PLAN SETS OUT TO DO

- Safeguard and enhance the vitality and viability of Darlington Town Centre by protecting and promoting its role as a Sub-regional centre and market town within the Tees Valley and neighbouring North Yorkshire and South and West Durham.
- Ensure the need for additional comparison retail floor space by 2016 will be provided mainly or wholly by a retail-led scheme at Commercial Street.
- Safeguard and enhance the role of the District and Local Centres in providing food shopping and a range of other shops, leisure uses and services to meet people's day-to-day needs in accessible locations.

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED?

Retail, Office and Leisure: Activity in the Town Centre during the last year includes the refurbishment and occupation of office space at Beaumont House. On the edge of the Town Centre, Sainsbury's supermarket secured planning consent on appeal for a 2,323 square metre expansion of retail floor space which was completed and opened in August 2012. Planning permission has also been granted for the Northern Echo offices to be converted into a department store, with a link through to the upper level of the existing Cornmill Shopping Centre. The reconfiguration of the building and change of use would result in 5,516 square metres of additional A1 retail floor space.

The Council has also been preparing plans for the redevelopment of the Feethams area of the Town Centre. This culminated in the selection of the leading property development and investment group Terrace Hill to deliver a £30 million leisure scheme on land to the south of the Town Hall. The development will create an additional 13,000m² of leisure and retail space and will comprise a nine screen multiplex cinema, 80-bedroom hotel and a number of restaurants and bars. This will be an important addition to the already strong culture and leisure offer in the Town Centre.

While the above activity creates the foundations for future development, there were no additions to retail, office and leisure floor space within the Borough within the monitoring period from 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012. The rate of development has actually declined over the last five years as shown in the table below. The database shows no additions to class A1 shop floor space in any of the Borough's defined centres in 2011/12. The results reflect the current slow down in economic activity experienced within the Borough, and Sub-regionally and Nationally.

Retail, Office and Leisure Floor Space

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Floor Space by Type	Total Gross (net)	Total Gross (net)	Total Gross (net)	Total Gross (net)	Total Gross (net)
Retail	432 (288)	56 (56)	266 (175)	20 (20)	0
Office	6472 (6472)	151 (151)	80 (80)	289 (289)	0
Leisure	0	0	0	10,774	0
Total (sqm)	6,904	207	346	11,083	0

Source: Darlington Borough Council.

Darlington Local Plan Annual Monitoring Report 2012

RETAIL AND TOWN CENTRE FACT SHEET



Vacancy Rates: Encouragingly, vacancy rates for retail units in the Town Centre have remained fairly stable overall. The data shows only a marginal increase in vacancy rates of retail units from 10.4% in the Town Centre in 2010/11 to 10.56% in 2011/12. However, many of the vacancies are in smaller than average units and this means that in floor space terms, only 7.5% of total floor space is vacant. This compares well to a National average of 13.4% vacancy for units and 10.4% for floorspace (Colliers National Retail Barometer, 2012). While the following table shows a small rise in the number of units in the Town Centre since the last monitoring period in 2010/11, this has been largely due to subdivision of some units.

Retail Floor Space and Vacancy Rates

Town Centre and District/Local Centres	Number of retail units	Number of vacant units	% vacant units	Total A1 floorspace (m2)	Vacant A1 floorspace (m2)	Completed A1 floorspace 2011/12
Darlington Town Centre	445	47	10.56%	99691	7967	0
Cockerton District Centre	57	3	5.20%	5662	222	0
North Road District Centre	57	4	7%	15924	220	0
Mowden Local Centre	10	1	10%	1187	70	0
Neasham Rd Local Centre	5	1	20%	6162	403	0
Whinfield Local Centre	4	1	0%	5421	0	0
Yarm Road Local Centre	11	1	0%	4487	0	0
Total	589	56		138534	8882	0

Source: Darlington Borough Council: Please note that there is a change in the recording of data since the last AMR which incorrectly included the figures for all floorspace rather than A1 floorspace. In turn, we are constantly updating our records and this accounts for any other discrepancies.



Business Improvement District: During the last year, Darlington Council put resources in to support the establishment of the Business Improvement District (BID). The Town Centre was declared a BID in April 2012. The BID is run by a private sector led, not-for profit company, 'Distinct Darlington' which has been formed to oversee the delivery of over £1.5 million of projects and objectives from its Business Plan over the next five years. The investment is designed to improve the vitality and viability of the Town Centre. The Council is committed to working in partnership with Distinct Darlington to support the programme of improvements to the Town Centre.

Town Centre Strategy: During 2012, the Council began to prepare the Town Centre Strategy which included a phase of public consultation over summer

2012. The Strategy provides a strategic direction for the development of the Town. It seeks to capitalise on Darlington's success as a retail centre and will help to inform local planning policy. It identifies key infrastructure requirements which closely connect with those set out in the Town Centre Fringe Masterplan. The focus is on improvements to the river corridor and improving pedestrian and cycle access to the Town Centre.



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

The lack of significant completed retail and related office space and leisure development in the Borough reflects the economic position over recent years. However, strategic planning permissions granted during the last year could play a key role in bringing forward additional retail and leisure space over the next few years.

In some cases, due to economic conditions, there has been some pressure for more diverse uses within the Town Centre, a trend that is apparent throughout the country. Work is underway to identify the most appropriate sites for main Town Centre uses, and to review the Town Centre boundaries and the primary shopping area. This will tie into work underway as part of the Town Centre Strategy and Town Centre Fringe Masterplan which will inform planning policy for the Town as a whole. Allied to this is the Business Improvement District which provides the foundations for strong partnership working between businesses, Darlington Council and other stakeholders and which will deliver improvements to the Town Centre to boost vitality and viability.

MOVING THINGS FORWARD: KEY ACTIONS

- Allocate specific sites for main Town Centre uses in the Making and Growing Places Development Plan Document (DPD).
- Update the Darlington Retail Study in 2013. The results will inform retail policy in the Making and Growing Places DPD.
- Review extent and composition of primary shopping area and the primary and secondary shopping frontages within this, and, consider whether current frontages are still appropriate taking into account changes in recent years.
- Review the Town Centre boundary and its relationship to the Town Centre Fringe and Feethams area.
- Identify the type and volume of retail development that has taken place in District and Local Centres in recent years and review the boundaries.
- Adopt the Town Centre Strategy in December 2012, with future consultation to follow in Spring 2013.

Contact Us: You can access more information on planning policy in Darlington at:

www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy

If you are particularly interested in statistics and data for Darlington borough, you can view these at:

<http://lis.darlington.gov.uk/>

Alternatively, contact the Planning Policy Team on **01325 388644** or email planning.policy@darlington.gov.uk

This document is available in different formats on request.