



Darlington's Green Infrastructure Strategy

2013-2026

Foreword

I am delighted to be introducing Darlington's new Green Infrastructure Strategy which is a unique plan for the Borough's green environment. One of Darlington's distinctive selling points is the high quality green environment in which we live and work – the Council and our partners will build on this by placing a high priority on protecting, planning, managing and maintaining quality green infrastructure to 2026.

Responses from local residents and other stakeholders made during the consultation in September-October 2012 have been taken into account in finalising this document, but there have been difficult choices to make, particularly in light of the substantial reductions to the money the Council receives from Central Government.

It is more important than ever, in changing economic circumstances, that more is made of our green environment to ensure Darlington has a multifunctional green infrastructure network that can be easily managed and maintained but which meets the needs of local people. The Council has responded positively, by producing with partners a detailed Action Plan – over the next 15 years a range of projects will ensure that gradually improving green infrastructure will continue to play an important role in improving people's health, encouraging cycling and walking, improving the productivity of the countryside, establishing robust networks for wildlife, creating an attractive setting for new development and regeneration and reducing the impact of climate change.

To ensure that resources are invested in the most cost effective way, a new innovative Green Infrastructure Guide is being introduced – designed for, and with the input from, our partners, it sets out different green infrastructure priorities for different parts of Darlington so that those involved in promoting green infrastructure can add value to the Borough's unique environment.

This Green Infrastructure Strategy will therefore provide the necessary detail to help the Council and our partners maximise Darlington's green infrastructure network and help deliver a vibrant, multifunctional, safer, sustainable and inclusive green environment where people can fulfil their potential, live longer and have healthier lifestyles.



Councillor Nick Wallis

Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio Holder

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River Tees, Blackwell loop





Executive Summary

Darlington has an extensive green infrastructure network of multi-functional public and private green spaces and features linked in places by green corridors. Overall it helps deliver a range of social, economic and environmental benefits for people and the natural environment including:

- Places for outdoor sport, recreation and play – meaning that people can enjoy healthy lifestyles;
- Space and habitats for wildlife to live and breed with access to nature for people – important for air and water quality, climate control, food and crop growth;
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation - for example flood management;
- Food production - in allotments, gardens and through agriculture;
- Settings for new development and regeneration – helping to attract investment to the Borough, and encouraging people to live and work here;
- Excellent off road green leisure routes - so that more people can leave their car at home particularly for local journeys.

It is also based on extensive engagement with green infrastructure partners. Key messages from partners are:

- everyone involved in green infrastructure should work together to achieve common goals;

- identify local priorities and deliver them in a co-ordinated way so that everyone has the same access to different types of green infrastructure regardless of where they live;
- support local people to improve, manage and maintain their local environment to encourage more frequent, positive use.

In response, the Green Infrastructure Strategy takes the priorities of a wide range of national, sub regional and local strategies and translates them into local objectives, priority actions and projects:

Create a quality, distinctive landscape and townscape. Priority issues include restoring landscape quality in the inner urban area and in parts of the urban fringe to create an attractive setting for investment and development. For example, a new linear park will be key to the development of Central Park;

Provide a connected network for wildlife to live, breed and migrate. This will be done by protecting more sites for biodiversity, improving the wildlife value of existing spaces and linking them with wildlife corridors. For example, there is an opportunity along the River Tees to plant more trees and plants to encourage more wildlife to move between the Tees and Baydale Beck;

Continue to improve off road green leisure routes and public rights of way so people can easily and safely move around the Borough for local journeys or for recreation. For example, improving access to Piercebridge from the built up area will mean that people can enjoy the western urban fringe more frequently and easily;

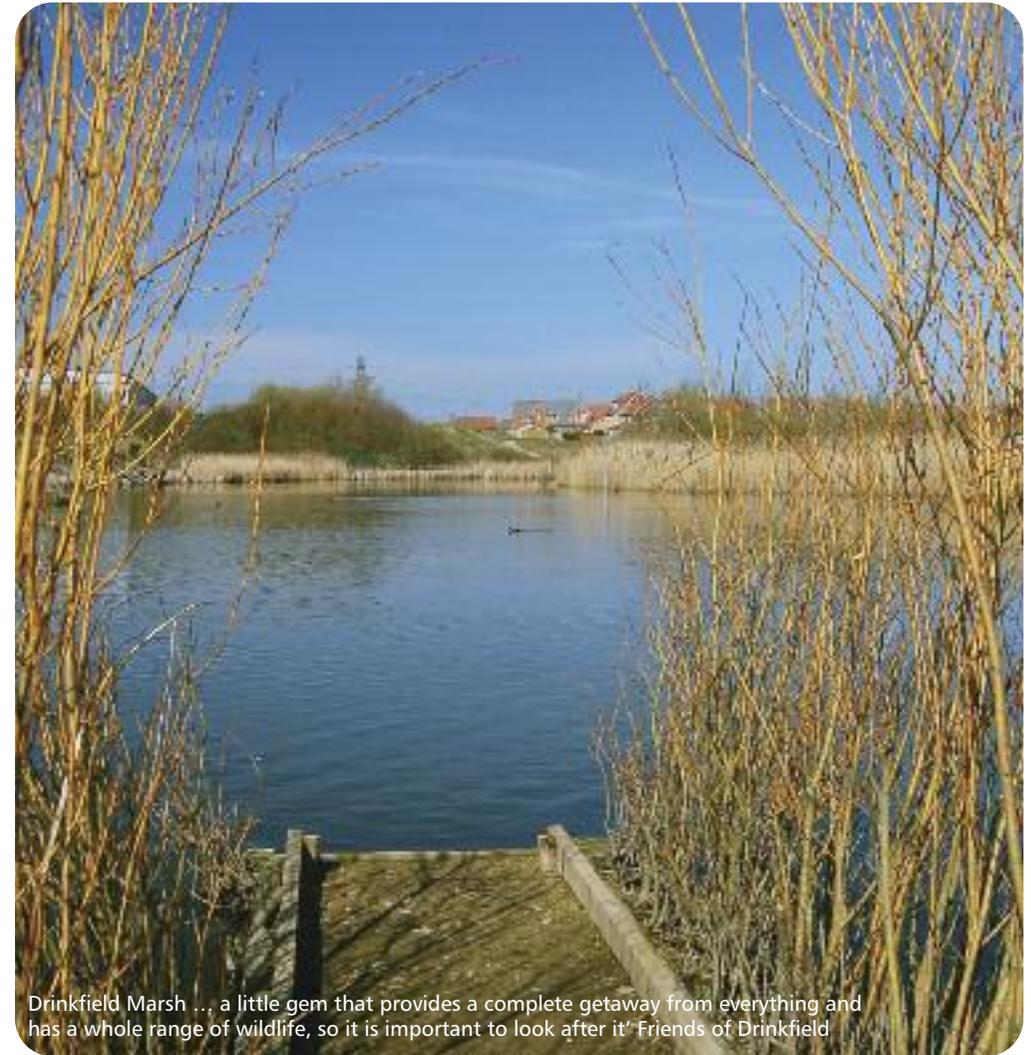
Improve the outdoor sport, recreation and play network. Priority issues include delivering multifunctional space for recreation and play close to home, improving the quality of what exists in places, and providing for playing pitches and ancillary accommodation;

Create a diverse and economically productive landscape that provides for a more competitive, profitable, sustainable and resilient farming and food sector. For example, opportunities exist to make better use of low quality greenspace as allotments;

Minimise the impact of climate change by using green infrastructure to help manage flood risk and manage temperatures as the climate changes. For example, the new linear park in the Town Centre Fringe will provide space for water to go should the River Skerne flood.

Engage partners and promote initiatives to manage and maintain open spaces. Friends Groups, allotment associations and community associations will have a more formal role in the management and maintenance of their local space, instead of the Council. For example well established Friends Groups will take part in a pilot 'handover' scheme at two sites.

This Strategy sets out our 13 year ambitions, objectives and priority actions. It is supported by an Action Plan which explains how we will deliver and make progress. It also identifies which partners will help with delivery. The Strategy will also be used to help secure and co-ordinate different sources of funding so that delivery can take place. A Guide to Darlington's Green Infrastructure provides detailed information on the different priorities for those promoting green infrastructure in each part of Darlington as well as for those who will manage and maintain them.



Drinkfield Marsh ... a little gem that provides a complete getaway from everything and has a whole range of wildlife, so it is important to look after it' Friends of Drinkfield





Why Do We Need A Strategy?

Green infrastructure helps deliver a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits for people and the natural environment including:

- Places for outdoor sport, recreation and play;
- Space and habitats for wildlife with access to nature for people;
- Climate change adaptation - for example flood management;
- Local food production - in allotments, gardens and through agriculture;
- Quality settings for people who live and work in new development;
- Space for people to walk or cycle between home, work, shops and school.

Therefore it is important that proposals for Darlington's green infrastructure should deliver as many of these benefits as possible, making sustainable use of green infrastructure and maximising the use of resources for delivery.

'This Strategy will enhance the excellent work that has already been undertaken [in Darlington] to integrate nature conservation and the natural environment and will open up opportunities for access and improve health and wellbeing in [the Borough].'

Malcolm Steele, Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership

This new Strategy is an opportunity for us to reflect on what we have achieved over the past ten years and set out what we need to achieve in the future taking into account our vision to offer a multi-functional green infrastructure network that delivers multiple benefits for residents in each part of the Borough.

It sets out our 13 year ambitions, our objectives and priority actions. It is supported by an Action Plan (in Appendix 1) which explains how we will deliver and make progress. A Guide to Darlington's Green Infrastructure (in Appendix 2), provides detailed information on the different priorities for those promoting green infrastructure in each part of the Borough. The Action Plan and Guide will be reviewed and updated annually.

Green infrastructure is a cross cutting issue and does not stand alone. Policy context, including maps and links to other strategies (of the Council and other partner organisations) are provided in Appendix 3. This new Strategy will replace parts of other Council plans and strategies including the Open Space Strategy, the Allotments Strategy and the Darlington Rights of Way Improvement Plan. These will also be identified in Appendix 3.

Appendix 4 sets out what will be measured, how and by whom to monitor our progress. Appendix 5 sets out a glossary of terms.

Delivery of the Strategy's objectives will require contributions from a range of agencies and organisations across all sectors. It will help co-ordinate the interests of many different organisations to deliver its objectives and will ensure that resources are prioritised to the areas that need it most, or the projects that deliver most benefits, thereby making best use of resources and green infrastructure itself. We will, therefore, continue to build on strong relationships and develop new ones to make best use of resources and to learn from best practice.

downhill cycling, West Park



'The Darlington Green Infrastructure Strategy... will enable green infrastructure to be provided as an integral part of all new development.'

Adrian Vass, Green Infrastructure: Principal Advisor, Natural England

We have developed this Strategy during a period of very challenging economic conditions, which are expected to continue. However, this new Strategy will be expected to deliver more, using fewer public sector resources than before. To achieve this, with partners we will maximise the value of public assets, ensuring the best value for money, and secure maximum gap funding from organisations such as the National Lottery to support our shared ambitions for Darlington.

'This Strategy builds on the mosaic of Darlington's urban area, connects it to the countryside, and will also develop the countryside further.'

Gillan Gibson, Darlington Committee for CPRE



Our Vision

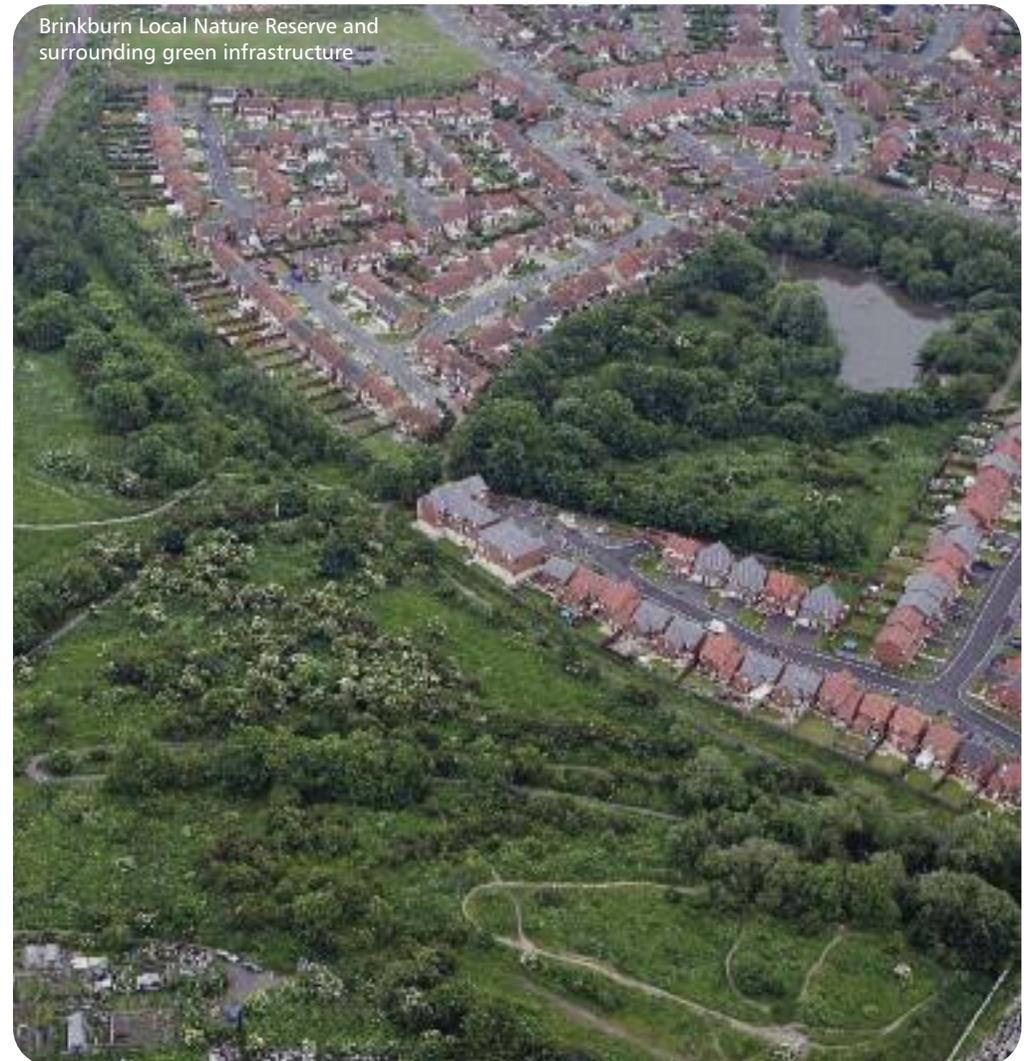
In 2026 Darlington's green infrastructure network is high quality, multi-functional and accessible, which significantly enhances the community's quality of life and the natural environment for wildlife.

Our rights of way network is well connected - building on our strengths as a sustainable transport town, more people of all ages and abilities can move safely, easily, comfortably and more frequently on foot, by bike or horse along green corridors, through green spaces, historic parks and village greens and between our distinctive, mature and valued green neighbourhoods and tree lined streets to an improving urban fringe and attractive, wildlife rich countryside.

Our range of sports facilities in the town and urban fringe offer a variety of activities to meet the growing and changing needs of local residents, community teams and professional clubs, while promoting healthy lifestyles. Parks and local greenspaces are truly multi-functional offering space for recreation, play and wildlife close to home.

Our green infrastructure accommodates more protected and priority habitats and species than ever before; valuable healthy ecosystems are flourishing, making them more resilient to climate change, while the ever expanding mature treed landscape that occupies parts of the built area and the urban fringe provides extensive opportunities for recreation, biodiversity, food and fuel production.

Our landscape and townscape continues to be an important attraction for new investment and development; through quality, well connected green infrastructure, Darlington delivers exceptional quality of life benefits. Distinctive new



neighbourhoods at Central Park, Lingfield Point, the Town Centre Fringe and in the East and North West Urban Fringes provide significant quality greenspace for sport, recreation, play and education as well as a greater variety of habitats and trees for wildlife. Sustainable drainage and flood storage ensures the Borough will mitigate the effects of, and help the natural environment adapt to climate change.

Our extensive countryside is thriving - building on our reputation as a quality supplier to regional and national markets, more pastoral, arable and locally grown produce is being sold in the Borough and further afield, flourishing farms and rural businesses are sustaining more jobs for local people, while sustainable energy crops and renewable energy initiatives form part of a truly green landscape. Environmentally friendly practices ensure a greater variety of wildlife is visible helping to sustain good soil, water and air quality as part of an increasingly vibrant rural landscape.

Our eclectic mix of quality parks and greenspaces, green venues as well as the uniquely accessible railway, Quaker and Victorian heritage along the River Skerne, the former railway trackbeds and in the countryside attracts a growing number of visitors from outside the Borough and region helping to sustain the green environment and local economy..

Our local residents are our strongest asset. Working together, Friends Groups, Allotment Associations and other community associations manage and maintain all large local green spaces in the Borough to a high standard. Our partners offer an extensive range of expertise, skills and training to support the continued development of our quality local green spaces.

In 2026, Darlington therefore offers the right type and mix of green infrastructure, in the right locations at the right time as part of a robust, sustainable green infrastructure network which meets the needs of local residents and visitors alike.



'West Park is the heart of a new community... creating a new, quality park in Darlington was an opportunity to make a difference. It drives the rest of the development, adding value to properties overlooking the park.'

Bussey & Armstrong, Developer, West Park





Darlington's Green Infrastructure Network

Darlington is a green Borough; with a strong rural presence, distinctive river and rail corridors and tree lined landscapes, its green infrastructure network connects numerous public and private green spaces, landscapes and features (see overview [Map 1](#)).

→ Darlington's Green Infrastructure Network

- Strategic green corridors
- Local green corridors
- Green wedges;
- Designated wildlife sites;
- Local open spaces: parks, cemeteries, wildlife friendly green space, informal open space, landscape amenity space, children's play areas, civic spaces;
- Playing pitches and outdoor sports facilities;
- Ornamental parklands;
- Trees, woodlands and community woodland;
- Allotments and community gardens;
- Private gardens;
- Urban fringe;
- Agricultural land;
- Public rights of way network; and
- Open countryside.

Its got a distinctive landscape: Darlington's green infrastructure provides links to its industrial, railway, Victorian and Quaker heritage, reinforces its natural features and adds value to new development, attracting people to live, work or visit;

Wildlife friendly environment: one of the Borough's best green infrastructure assets is its growing range of designated and wildlife friendly greenspaces, and protected and priority habitats and species, which help mitigate climate change and improve local air and water quality;

Its got an outstanding pedestrian and cycle network: existing strengths include green links to the Tees Valley and County Durham by sustainable transport. Darlington also has an excellent choice of off road leisure routes and public rights of way that go through parks, Local Nature Reserves and green corridors to help people move easily around the Borough;

Opportunities for sport, recreation, play and education: Darlington is home to an increasingly wide range of safe and affordable quality sport, recreation and play facilities close to home, as well as unique green venues where people can learn about nature and heritage;

A highly productive rural landscape: is a significant contributor to the local, regional and national produce markets and contains several regionally renowned rural green venues which promote local produce and tourism;

It helps minimise the risk of climate change: wind turbines and sustainable drainage are becoming increasingly common features in the Borough's landscape helping to produce sustainable energy and reduce flood risk. Tree planting in new development and at greenspaces helps keep the built area cool in the long term;

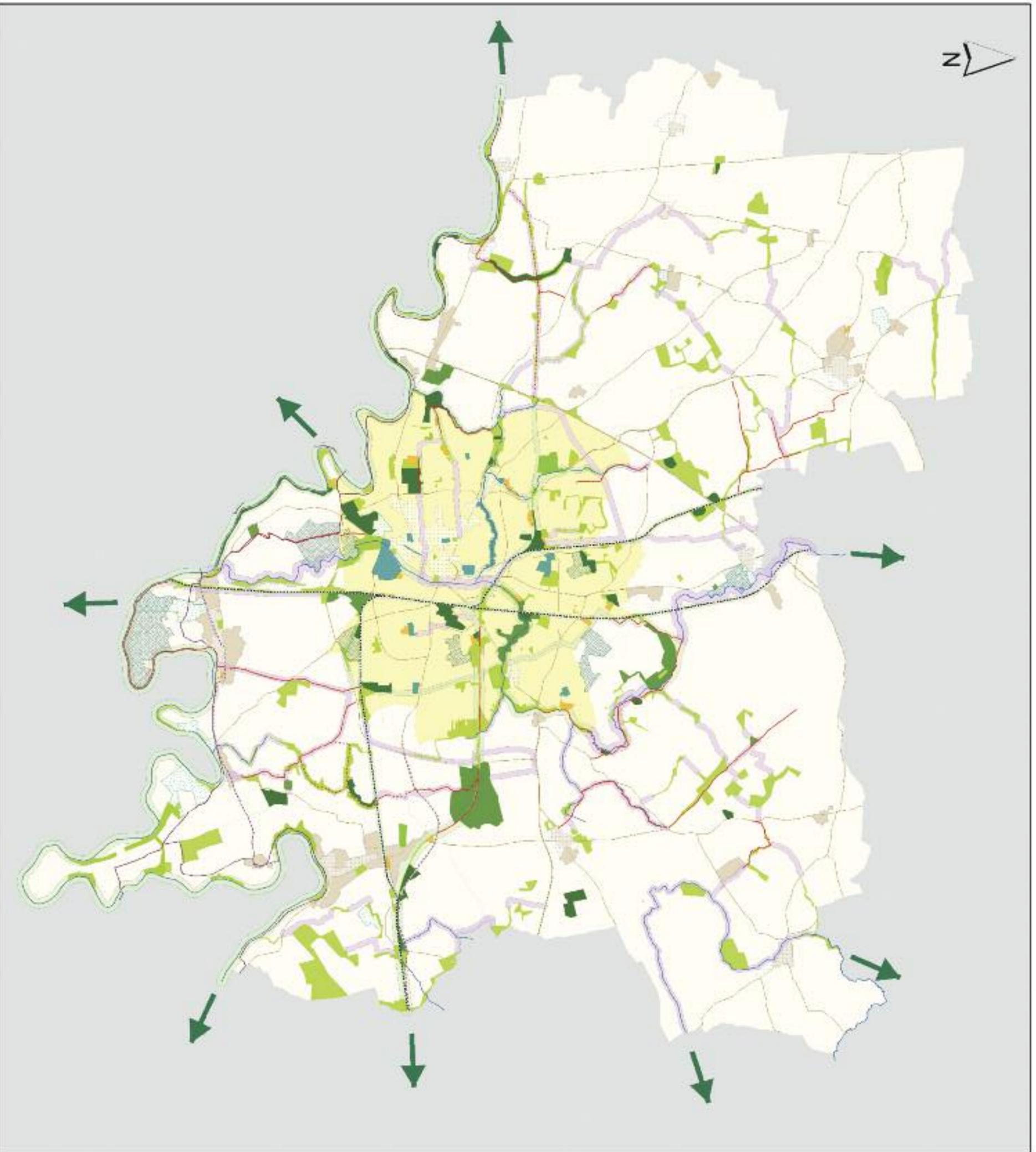
Opportunities for community ownership of parks and green spaces: existing strengths include the amount of local residents that help manage and look after their local green spaces. The successful management and maintenance of open spaces happens when local people who live closest to a space are involved, as they care most deeply about it, and spot opportunities or problems first.



Archers Ice Cream Parlour, New Moor Farm, Walworth







Darlington's Green Infrastructure Network

- Formal Parks
- Designated Wildlife Areas
- Semi-Natural Greenspace
- Allotment Sites
- Sports Facilities
- Historic Parkland
- Existing Strategic Corridor Buffer 30 m
- Existing Local Corridor Buffer 15 m
- Proposed Strategic Corridor Buffer 30 m
- Proposed Local Corridor Buffer 15 m
- Strategic Access Routes
- Proposed Strategic Access
- Urban Area
- Villages
- Conservation Areas
- Rivers
- Primary Road Routes
- Railways
- Strategic Cycle Routes
- Tees Long Distance Footpath

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What Has Been Achieved?

Considerable public and private sector investment has taken place in Darlington over the last ten years – which has significantly improved the quantity, quality and accessibility of green infrastructure in the Borough.

Major projects provided over the last 10 years include:

A new neighbourhood with 700 homes and **17ha of new quality greenspace at West Park**, on land previously used as a chemical works. Nationally recognised with the RICS Gold Award for Regeneration in 2004 this visually attractive, green landscape attracts people to live in the area. The innovative **West Park Levy** provides a multi-disciplined team including the Friends Group with resources for management and maintenance.

The 680 acre **Acorn Dairy farm** has used the **Organic Higher and Entry Level Stewardship schemes** to help nature keep its natural balance – widening and coppicing hedges and creating a 4ha wildflower meadow has seen a significant rise in insects and small birds, while new ponds are rich in amphibians and ground nesting birds.

Friends Groups now help run most parks and Local Nature Reserves – using **management plans** they ensure that their local space is managed to meet local needs. Friends Groups can more easily secure funding for new projects or improvements to add value to their space.

A £131,000 grant from the Big Lottery Fund at **Maidendale Local Nature and Fishing Reserve** has transformed over 7ha of low quality scrubland into a vibrant, accessible network of ten ponds surrounded by a mosaic of rough grassland, reedbeds and native trees. It is now inhabited by the protected Great Crested Newt, the water soldier butterfly, the broad bodied and the four spot chaser dragonflies and the regionally rare water soldier plant. Paths and platforms into the ponds ensure people of all abilities can enjoy fishing or experience nature at close hand.

'A gem of a place ... there is a lot of bird activity around the lakes and the trees with Kingfisher, Gold Finch, Great, Blue, Willow Tits, Chaffinch and Robins ... the blue print is in place it only needs tweaking now...'

Barry Raper, Local resident





A **new grass cutting programme** has reinvigorated over 25ha of low quality amenity grassland in the urban area. Planting wildflower mixes has successfully transformed areas of **Rockwell LNR, Cocker Beck and Baydale Beck**, resulting in a significant rise in invertebrates and a corresponding rise in bird populations throughout the year.

A **new off road green corridor for pedestrians and cyclists** (National Cycle Network 14) and a **new pedestrian/cycle bridge** over the A66 was an essential part of the **Eastern Transport Corridor** giving easy access between central Darlington and the eastern urban fringe. A new wildflower belt, ponds and wetlands at Red Hall are also important stepping stones for wildlife between town and country.

In 2011 two new football pitches were added to the four rugby pitches at Darlington Rugby Club to create the new **Blackwell Meadows sports hub**. Four more football pitches are being added so that local football teams can enjoy sport in a safe, quality environment.

£60 million ongoing capital investment has transformed the derelict **Rockcliffe Hall** and its surrounding **375 acres of parkland** into the North East's newest hotel and golf resort. Set in a curve of the River Tees this impressive 18th century house is surrounded by one of Europe's longest and most challenging **Championship Golf courses**, which helped restore the 19th Century designed landscape to its former glory. The new **Rockcliffe Loop** now provides access to this part of the Tees.

A £3.9m Heritage Lottery Fund grant **regenerated the historic South Park in 2005** – the restored Terracotta Fountain, bandstand and Edwardian flower beds helped the park achieve **Green Flag** status.



1.63ha of early successional derelict brownfield land was transformed into a robust ecological network - **Brinkburn Local Nature Reserve** spans three connected areas of woodlands, grasslands and wetlands. It is now one of Darlington's most important assets for the protected Great Crested Newt, Dingy Skipper and the Little Grebe.

Almost £1.5million of Playbuilder and developer funding has been invested to significantly improve **Darlington's play offer - ten play areas** including **Broken Scar, North Park and West Park** now have exciting natural and adventurous play space for children of all ages.

The rapidly expanding **Farmway** is a highly successful **farmers cooperative** – the largest employer in the rural area, in 2012, it produced more than **80,000 tonnes of animal feed for the local and national market** and also supplies a range of quality rural products from eight sites to the consumer.

The **award winning Archers ice cream** made at New Moor Farm, Walworth is now a recognised regional brand, sold at several outlets in the North East employing many local part time staff as well as further afield in North Yorkshire and the North West. Recognised at the **North East England Tourism Awards 2009 as a small visitor attraction**, it is a popular green venue for a day out. A permissive walk gives access to the attractive Walworth countryside.

The £6.5million **Northwood Primary School** is an exemplar of **sustainable design, winning the RICS Design and Innovation Awards 2012**. Northwood makes little impact on the environment; its living green walls, sedum roofs and balancing pond reduce the risk of flooding and lower carbon dioxide emissions, while providing a softer environment for wildlife in the inner urban area.

The visually striking [North Wood] school with a low carbon, sustainable and inclusive design....has produced a quality learning environment and community resource.' Gordon Chard, RICS Design & Innovation Judge



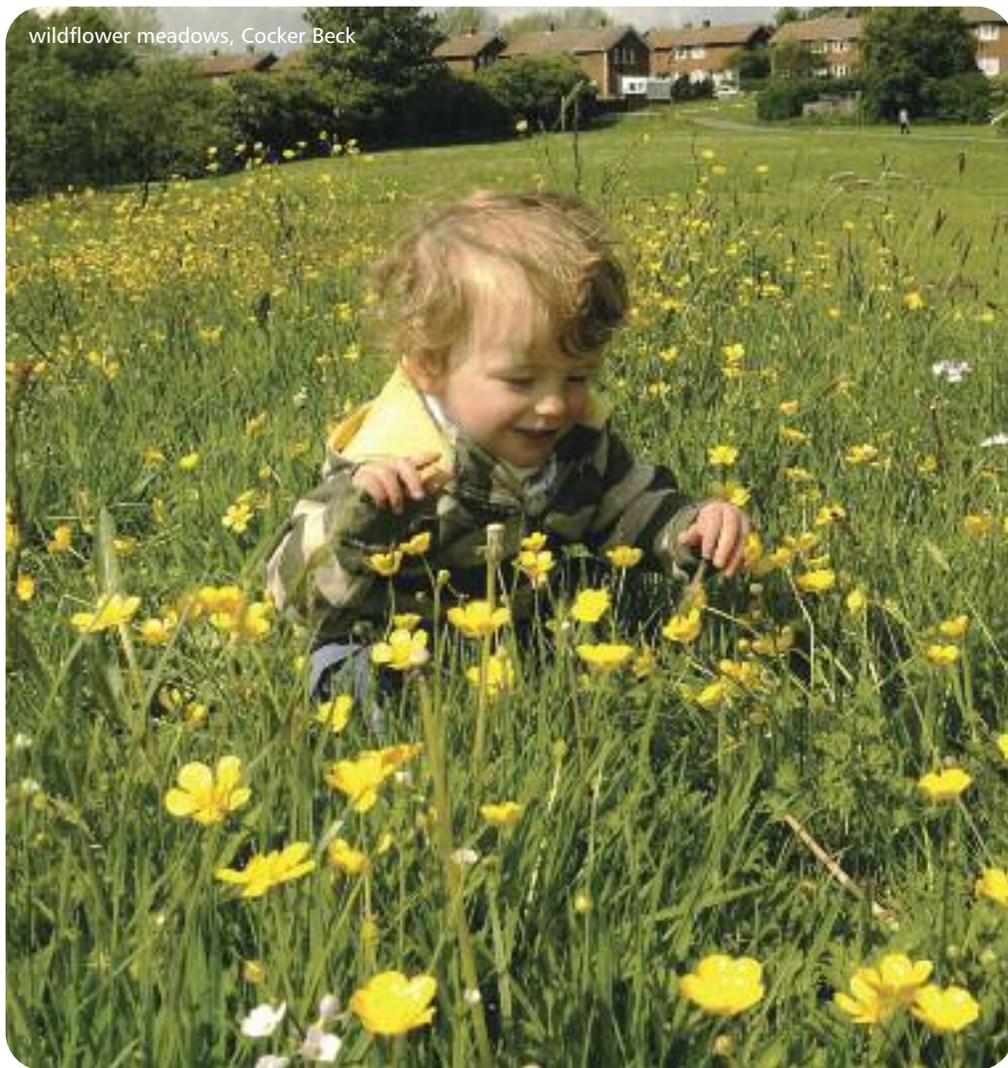


What Needs To Be Done...

Despite our successes, Darlington's green infrastructure lacks connectivity for people and wildlife, needs to support the changing demands of the working landscape and still includes some lower quality spaces that do not meet local sport, recreation and play needs. Some of our key challenges therefore are:

- **Restoring landscape character;** we need to re-establish native species and natural features in the rural area, restore natural river courses (specifically along the River Skerne in the Town Centre Fringe and at Cocker Beck) and improve the attractiveness of derelict land in the inner urban area;
- People living or working in a new development can add pressure to local green spaces. **We need to make sure that the right amount of quality space for sport, recreation and play** is provided at the right time;
- **Greenspace maintenance** can be a complex issue – we need to agree appropriate maintenance programmes for each new space depending on its type (specifically in large developments like **Central Park a maintenance levy will be negotiated**);
- **Managing parks and greenspaces with limited resources** will be challenging – ensuring local residents have the tools to take on a more formal management role of their local spaces through **Friends Groups** and **self management allotment associations will be a priority**, while changes to grass cutting regimes and revenue generation schemes will also be introduced;
- **Reversing habitat fragmentation;** we need to create a network of quality sites connected by wildlife corridors, stepping stones and buffer zones. This will help make sure that biodiversity levels in Darlington remain viable in the long term;
- Some landowners and farmers use **organic farming and/or agri-environment schemes**. But we need to find ways to encourage a more of the Borough's farmers to get involved so that more land meets entry or organic entry/higher level requirements. How do we encourage participation while maintaining output?
- Some gaps exist in the sustainable transport and public rights of way network. **Improving connectivity for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians** to the urban fringe, the rural area, between greenspaces and to new development remains a priority for the Borough;
- Some small gaps exist in the accessible open space network. Promoting healthy lifestyles by **improving the quantity and quality of accessible greenspace to meet local needs** remains a high priority;
- **More, quality football pitches are needed to meet the demand for junior football and rugby.** Therefore improving access to affordable, quality pitches in managed locations remains a high priority;

wildflower meadows, Cocker Beck



- Although not just a Darlington specific issue, **the changing economy is putting increasing pressure on those working in the Borough's large rural area**. How do we all effectively support the farming sector, rural businesses and enterprises to help them diversify and grow?
- Darlington like other parts of the country is increasingly **at risk from flooding**. We need to give increased emphasis to protecting and restoring **green infrastructure next to watercourses for flood plains and by using sustainable drainage** in new development to reduce surface water run off. In the Town Centre Fringe and Eastern Urban Fringe this is a high priority;
- **Sensitively accommodating renewable energy** - significant potential exists in the urban fringe and rural area to produce biomass and biofuels, and to deliver other types of renewable energy. This can also help Darlington deliver long term local, Tees Valley and national energy targets.



Moving Forward

These issues need to be delivered in a challenging economic landscape. Key to future growth will be making better use of existing green infrastructure thereby adding value to what exists, meeting local needs close to home. New greenspace particularly through large new developments will complement these improvements.

Public expenditure will be severely limited and therefore grant and gap funding will be at a premium. This will require the Council and partners to prioritise activities seeking public funding to ensure the best possible use of resources. Projects that deliver more than one objective will be prioritised so that multiple benefits can be delivered in a realistic timeframe to meet the needs of local people, wildlife and the environment itself.

To succeed, new ways of working and new ideas will be used to help tackle this ambitious Strategy. This will mean us making better use of our collective resources by identifying the organisation best placed to deliver, manage and maintain green infrastructure in Darlington. Using this approach there could potentially be a higher success rate in securing funding from organisations including the National Lottery for projects.

In many cases the most successful management and maintenance of open spaces happens when local people who live closest to a space are involved in the process, as they care most deeply about it, and spot opportunities or problems before anyone else. Friends Groups, allotment associations and community associations already help look after and improve parks, Local Nature Reserves, allotments, bowling greens and other greenspaces. Building on this, more local people will be



Salters Lane corridor

Friends of Geneva Wood



encouraged to get involved; taking over the management and maintenance of a local space, sharing knowledge and expertise to plan and deliver projects, submitting bids for funds for improvements works, joining a Friends Group or an Allotment Association or by attending a fundraising event, will together help deliver the objectives in this Strategy.

Measuring Our Performance (in Appendix 4) sets out detailed project specifications, funding streams and detailed timescales for delivery.



Priorities for Action

To address our challenges and barriers to creating a green infrastructure network our priorities for action include:

	Objective	Actions	Priority Actions
1.	Create a quality, distinctive landscape and townscape	Action 1	Protect and improve natural and built green heritage assets.
		Action 2	Restore the natural course and riparian features of rivers and becks.
		Action 3	Strengthen the character and landscape quality of the urban fringe and the countryside.
		Action 4	Create a quality environment to attract new development and promote regeneration.
2.	Provide a connected network of healthy, wildlife rich, natural ecosystems	Action 1	Improve the amount and mix of protected and priority habitats and species in the urban area.
		Action 2	Improve the biodiversity value of the urban fringe and countryside.
		Action 3	Provide more stepping stones and buffer zones for wildlife to move more easily.
		Action 4	Maintain and improve the Borough's air and water quality.
3.	Continue to identify initiatives to maintain, expand and enhance an accessible green network for people	Action 1	Provide connections so that people can move easily between urban green spaces, the urban fringe and the countryside.
		Action 2	Design green infrastructure for safe, positive use by people of all age groups and abilities.
4.	Promote outdoor sport, recreation, play and education	Action 1	Protect and enhance facilities for sport, recreation and play in the urban area.
		Action 2	Create a softer urban fringe and rural area for sport and recreation.
		Action 3	Provide opportunities for people to learn about nature and the environment.
		Action 4	Engage more local people in the design or re-design of locally important open spaces.

	Objective	Actions	Priority Actions
5.	Create a diverse and economically productive landscape	Action 1	Support initiatives for maintaining and expanding the farming sector.
		Action 2	Promote initiatives that expand local food production.
		Action 3	Support initiatives for expanding the renewable energy sector.
6.	Minimise the impact of, and adapt to the effects of climate change	Action 1	Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and minimise the use of resources.
		Action 2	Minimise the risk of flooding and pollution.
		Action 3	Provide for species adaptation.
7.	Engage partners and promote initiatives to manage and maintain parks and green spaces in the long term	Action 1	Encourage more community groups to provide the long term management and maintenance of local green spaces.
		Action 2	Promote initiatives to make better use of lower quality amenity green space.
		Action 3	Support initiatives to generate income from green space.





The Action Plan 2013-2026

The Action Plan 2013-2026 (see Appendix 1: The Action Plan) identifies the priority actions we intend to deliver under each of the seven objectives. Under each objective we outline the rationale, the actions we aim to take, and explain exactly what we will do to ensure delivery. The Action Plan also sets out the broad timetable for delivery. Actions will be delivered along twelve green corridors and the rural area (see [Map 1](#)):

→ Strategic green corridors:

- 1 River Tees
- 3 River Skerne
- 4 River Skerne To Faverdale
- 5 Darlington, Middleton St. George, A66/A67 to Stockton

The numbers are the same as the Tees Valley Green Infrastructure Strategy; there is no corridor 2.

Local green corridors:

- A Former Barnard Castle Trackbed
- B Cocker Beck
- C West Beck
- D Baydale Beck
- E Salters Lane
- F Nunnery Lane-Cemetery Lane
- G Central Park
- H A66

Rural area: all green infrastructure outside the urban area.

Each corridor has one or more projects identified to deliver the objectives and priority actions. Some of the corridors exist, others are proposed. The Green Infrastructure Guide (see Appendix 2: Darlington's Green Infrastructure Guide), supplements the Action Plan and provides a detailed guide to each corridor, identifying locally specific priorities and provides more information about each project.

The Action Plan and Guide will be reviewed and updated annually to take into account new development opportunities, available funding and changes to the economic climate.





Appendix I: Darlington's Green Infrastructure Action Plan

see separate document

Appendix 2: Darlington's Green Infrastructure Guide

see separate document





Appendix 3: Policy Context

European Guidance

EU Water Framework Directive, European Union, 2006
ec.europa.eu/environment/water/waterframework

establishes a framework to protect rivers, lakes and groundwater so that all aquatic ecosystems and, for their water needs, terrestrial ecosystems and wetlands meet 'good status' by 2015. A requirement is to establish a river basin management plan for each river basin district.

National Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework, DCLG, 2012
www.dclg.gov.uk

aims to protect and enhance valued landscapes and soils from new development and minimise the impacts on biodiversity, where possible providing net gains. It seeks to establish coherent, ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures while recognising the 'wider benefits' ecosystems services can have.

Green Food Conclusions, DEFRA, 2012
www.defra.gov.uk

identifies the challenges facing the food system and the relationships between them to help determine how to improve the environment and increase food production in England.

Sport England Active People Survey 2012
www.sportengland.org

summarises the participation rates for different sports for each local authority area.

Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services, DEFRA, 2011
www.defra.gov.uk

sets out the UK's biodiversity policy for the next decade on land, rivers and lakes. It seeks to deliver a real step change to halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people.

UK National Ecosystem Assessment, DEFRA, 2011
www.defra.gov.uk

provides a comprehensive account of how the natural world, including its biodiversity and its services. It shows that nature is consistently undervalued in decision-making and that many of the services we get from nature are in decline.

Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management, English Heritage, 2011
www.english-heritage.org.uk

provides guidance on the importance and content of conservation area appraisals and management plans.

Understanding the Importance of Retaining Good Quality Parks and Green Spaces and the Contribution They Make to Improving People's Lives, Green Link, 2011

www.green-space.org.uk

outlines the benefits open spaces bring, including the cost effective benefits green space has for health and well-being and for increasing community involvement in volunteering.

The Future of Food and Farming, Government Office for Science, 2011

www.bis.gov.uk

explores the pressures on the global food system between now and 2050. It identifies measures that need to be taken by different partners today and in the future to ensure that the rising population can be fed sustainably and equitably.

Urban Green Nation: Building the Evidence Base, CABI Space, 2010

www.designcouncil.org.uk

gauges the state of England's urban green space and its impact on people's health and well-being.

The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature, DEFRA, 2010

www.defra.gov.uk

recognises that an interconnected natural system can promote 'sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing'. An integrated landscape-scale approach to delivery is encouraged, using local partnerships where possible.

Making Space for Nature: A Review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network, DEFRA, 2010

www.defra.gov.uk

states that the UK's biodiversity network is fragmented and in decline. It aims to re-establish the diversity, function and resilience of biodiversity and ecosystems in a self sustaining network. It emphasises the value functioning ecosystems and their services can bring to the environment and wellbeing.

The Case for Trees in Development and the Urban Environment, Forestry Commission, 2010

www.forestry.gov.uk

emphasises the value trees, particularly as part of good development. It aims to inspire people and organisations to get involved in planning their local green environment.

Helping Community Groups to Improve Public Spaces, CABI Space, 2009

www.designcouncil.org.uk

encourages local authorities to make better use of local people in the management and maintenance of their local spaces in the future.

Community Led Spaces, CABI Space, 2010

www.designcouncil.org.uk

identifies the benefits that community run spaces can bring to local people and Councils. It highlights different approaches to transferring management and maintenance responsibilities to the community.

Green Infrastructure Guidance, Natural England, 2009

www.naturalengland.org.uk

promotes the delivery of a network of 'more, bigger, better and joined up' wildlife sites to create effective green infrastructure that can contribute to the recovery of biodiversity and help people value and conserve their local green environment. Quality green infrastructure in and around the urban area is seen as creating quality places where people want to live and work.

Countryside Character: North East, Natural England, 2002

www.naturalengland.org.uk

uses statistical analysis and landscape assessments to identify those elements that influence the countryside and describes how the landscape reflects this.





Sub Regional Guidance

An assessment of the impact of climate change on the natural environment of the Tees Valley, Tees Valley Climate Change Resilience Group, May 2012
teesvalleynaturepartnership.org.uk

sets out the implications climate change can have on the character and vulnerability of environmental assets in the Tees Valley and promotes appropriate mitigation and adaptation.

Tees Valley Biodiversity Action Plan, Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership, 2011
www.teesvalleybiodiversity.org

sets out coordinated and targeted programmes of action to help increase the protection and viability of priority species and habitats that are considered to be under threat in the Borough.

Tees Valley Economic and Regeneration Statement of Ambition, Tees Valley Unlimited, 2011

www.teesvalleyunlimited.org.uk

shows how for the next 15 years economic assets will be developed and barriers to growth tackled.

Building natural value for sustainable economic development: the green infrastructure valuation toolkit, Genecon LLP, 2011

www.greeninfrastructurenw.co.uk

identifies and assesses the benefits of green investments and existing green assets either directly to the local economy or as wider non-market returns for society and the environment.

Tees Valley Climate Change Strategy, Tees Valley Unlimited, 2010

www.teesvalleyunlimited.org.uk

identifies the key issues climate change may bring to the Tees Valley and proposes actions for mitigation and adaptation.

River Basin Management Plan: Northumbria River Basin District, Environment Agency 2009

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

identifies the pressures facing the water environment in this district and the actions that will address them.

Tees Valley Green Infrastructure Strategy, Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit, 2008

www.teesvalleyunlimited.org.uk

highlights the importance of having a planned, integrated network of multifunctional greenspaces so that by 2021 the Tees Valley will provide an enhanced quality of place for residents, business, new development, regeneration and housing market renewal with high quality design. It will also create and extend opportunities for access and enhancement of biodiversity and provide a buffer against the effects of climate change. It promotes a landscape approach to delivery for four strategic corridors in Darlington at the River Tees, River Skerne, River Skerne-Faverdale and the Darlington-Middleton St George-Stockton corridors.

Local Guidance

www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy

unless stated

Joint Single Needs Assessment, DBC, 2012

www.darlington.gov.uk

identifies the top ten issues facing Darlington's community, as well as locality and ward specific issues.

Darlington Economic Strategy, DBC, 2012

www.darlington.gov.uk

identifies a range of actions and initiatives for economic recovery and growth by 2026.

Darlington Core Strategy, DBC, 2011

helps protect and where appropriate enhance and extend the green infrastructure network to provide a quality, accessible and safe network of well connected, multifunctional greenspaces for informal and formal recreation, amenity, biodiversity, landscape and heritage to 2026.

Third Local Transport Plan for Darlington, DBC, 2011

www.darlington.gov.uk

sets out a transport strategy to 2026 to achieve a transport system that is accessible to all, environmentally sustainable and operationally effective.

Darlington Tree and Woodland Strategy, DBC, 2011

www.darlington.gov.uk

focuses on the management of the urban and rural tree environment including the creation of more community woodlands near where people live.

Darlington Allotment Strategy, DBC, 2010

www.darlington.gov.uk

aims to deliver a more accessible and sustainable allotment service, by increasing the level and the quality of provision.

Darlington Playing Pitch Strategy, PMP, 2009

sets out the quantity, quality and accessibility standards for playing pitches in the Borough. It helps identify where gaps in provision exist at a Borough wide level.

Darlington Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, JBA Consulting, 2009

identifies the areas of the Borough at high, medium and low flood risk.

One Darlington: Perfectly Placed, Darlington Partnership, 2008

www.darlington.gov.uk

Darlington's Sustainable Community Strategy recognises that quality green infrastructure is important to quality of life and provides an attractive setting for property and business, helps attract people to the Borough or encourages them to stay. It acknowledges that transport, healthy living, education and anti social behaviour can be positively influenced by a coordinated approach to green infrastructure.

Darlington Open Space Strategy, DBC, 2007

sets out the quantity, quality and accessibility standards for publicly accessible recreational and amenity space in the urban area and the villages. It helps identify where gaps in provision exist at a ward, area and Borough wide level.

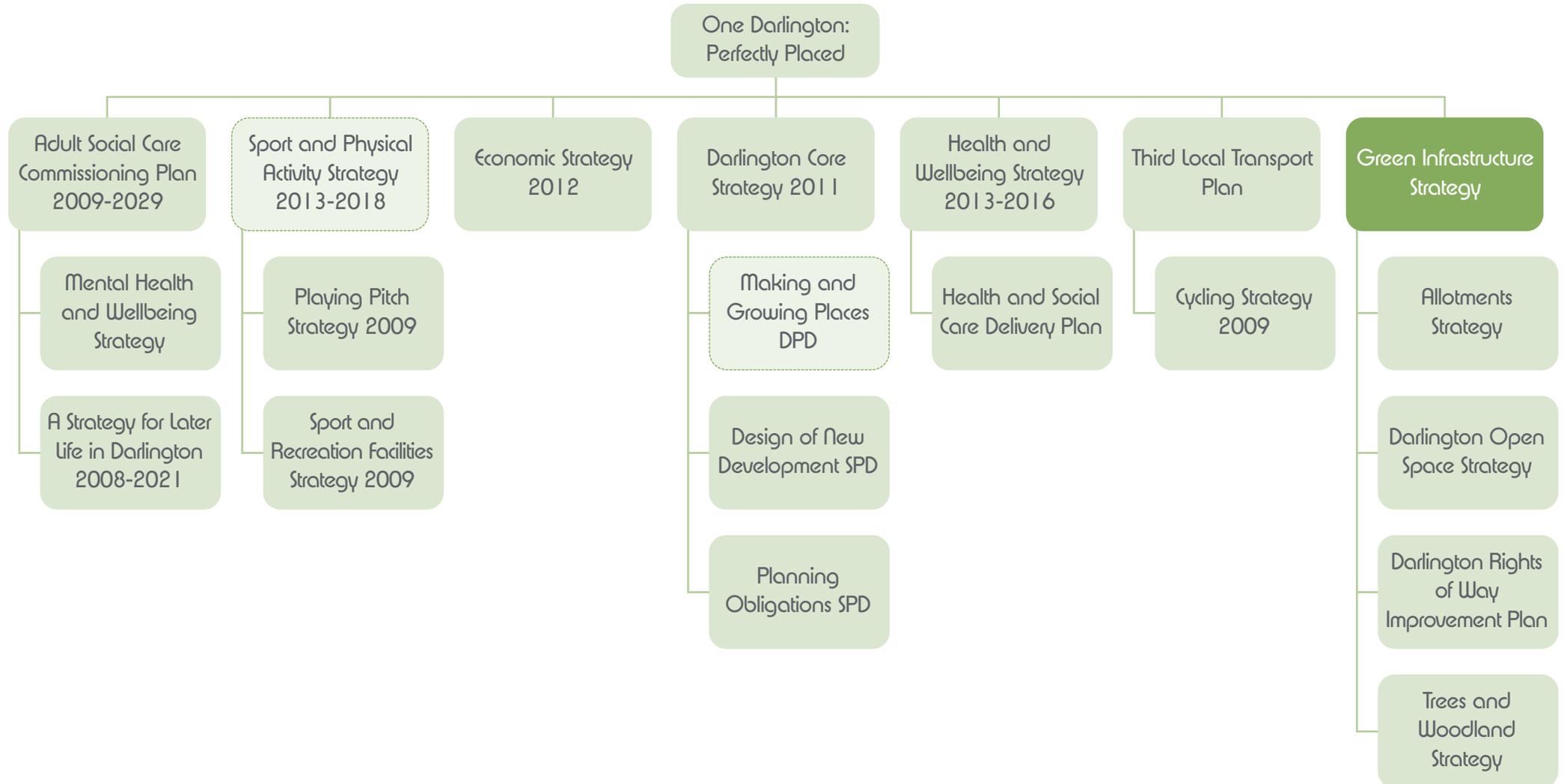
Darlington Rights of Way Improvement Plan, Bowes Green Limited, 2007

www.darlington.gov.uk

aims to create a rights of way network that gives the public sustainable access to quality countryside where they can experience biodiversity and recreation safely.

Links to a number of other local documents are shown on page 29.





Appendix 4: Measuring Our Performance

The priority actions and the initiatives contained within the Darlington Green Infrastructure Strategy and Action Plan have been identified as Tier 1, Tier 2 or Tier 3 actions:

Tier 1 Actions: These actions significantly contribute to the delivery of the Green Infrastructure Strategy. Tier 1 actions either require urgent direct action by the Council or urgent support for the external responsible lead.

Tier 2 Actions: These actions are important but require less Council input.

Tier 3 Actions: These actions are important but are already being delivered by partners but may require some Council input.

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Restore the natural course and riparian features of rivers and becks.	Protect and improve natural and built green heritage assets.	Strengthen the character and landscape quality of the urban fringe and the countryside.
Create a quality environment to attract new development and promote regeneration.	Design green infrastructure for safe, positive use by people of all age groups and abilities.	Maintain and improve the Borough's air and water quality.
Improve the amount and mix of protected and priority habitats and species in the urban area.	Engage more local people in the design or re-design of locally important open spaces.	Provide opportunities for people to learn about nature and the environment.
Improve the biodiversity value of the urban fringe and countryside.	Support initiatives for maintaining and expanding the farming sector.	Support initiatives for expanding the renewable energy sector.
Provide more stepping stones and buffer zones for wildlife to move more easily.	Minimise the risk of flooding and pollution.	Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and minimise the use of resources.
Provide connections so that people can move easily between urban green spaces, the urban fringe and the countryside	Provide for species adaptation.	Support initiatives to generate income from green space.
Protect and enhance facilities for sport, recreation and play in the urban area.	Promote initiatives to make better use of lower quality amenity green space	
Create a softer urban fringe and rural area for sport and recreation.		
Promote initiatives that expand local food production.		
Encourage more community groups to provide the long term management and maintenance of local green spaces.		





Appendix 5: Commonly Used Definitions

Accessible greenspace: space for the public to use free of charge and without time restrictions; some spaces may be closed overnight;

Agri-environment scheme: provides funding to farmers and land managers to deliver environmental management of farmland, includes Entry Level and Organic Entry and Higher Level Stewardship Schemes;

Allotment association: group of local residents who manage and maintain allotment sites;

Ancient woodland: woodland that has existed continuously since 1600 or before;

Biodiversity: variety of life including different plants, animals and micro-organisms, and the ecosystems of which they are a part;

Biomass: material from living or recently living organisms including trees and plants to be used directly or as biofuels to deliver renewable energy;

Buffer zone: area around the edge of a wildlife site or corridor which links greenspaces, increasing their biodiversity value;

Carbon footprint: total amount of carbon dioxide emissions produced by a person, group, organisation town or country;

Climate change: effect of global warming on weather conditions and unpredictable variations in temperatures;

Community woodland: woodland that is provided for community use;

Conservation Area: area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which is desirable to preserve or enhance;

Ecosystem: relationships between living things, water, soil and people;

Ecosystem services: are the benefits healthy natural ecosystems provide directly or indirectly including food, fresh water, clean air, climate regulation or pollination of crops;

Flood plain: flat-lying areas adjacent to a watercourse, where water flows in times of flood or would flow but for the presence of flood defences;

Friends Group: group of local residents who work in partnership with the Council and other organisations to help manage and maintain a local park or greenspace;

Green corridor: linear green feature connecting different greenspaces, can incorporate walking and cycling routes. Most are also wildlife corridors;

Green infrastructure: strategically planned and delivered interconnecting, visually linked network of public and private multifunctional green spaces, landscapes and natural environments used for recreation, biodiversity and food production, which supports natural, cultural and ecological processes, with benefits for people, wildlife and place;

Green venue: a value for money attraction that generates a second income on site;

Green wedge: open area between neighbourhoods which helps to maintain their separate distinctive qualities;

Honeypot: a popular green space that attracts visitors in large numbers

Landscape: consistent, distinct pattern of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use and settlements;

Listed building: property or structure, protected by the Government because it has special architectural or historic interest;

Local Nature Reserve (LNR): designated by the Council and Natural England for its special local wildlife or geological value, also provides people with opportunities to learn about nature or enjoy it;

Local Wildlife Site: designated by the Council for its wildlife importance;

Maintenance levy: sum paid by homeowners to be used to maintain green space in a new development;

Multi-functionality: the ability of a space to perform more than one green space function at the same time.

Priority habitats and species: habitats and species of principal importance identified in the UK and Tees Valley Biodiversity Action Plans;

Protected habitats or species: protected by Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 because of their vulnerable status;

Public art: permanent or temporary works of art visible to the public either as part of a greenspace, a building or as freestanding artwork;

Public Right of Way: includes public footpaths (walking), bridleways (walking, horse riding and cycling) and byways (walking, horse riding and cycling and vehicles) where the public have the right to go;

Registered Historic Parks and Gardens: protected by English Heritage as being of special historic interest;

Renewable energy: energy that occurs naturally and repeatedly in the environment from wind, water, sun and biomass;

Scheduled Monument: nationally important monuments protected from inappropriate development;

Site of Special Scientific Areas Interest (SSSI): protected by the Government because it contains animals, plants, geology or geomorphology of national importance;

Surface water run off: excess rainwater of from drains that flow over land;

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS): reduces and slows the quantity and rate of surface water run off from new development, dealing with it as close to the source as possible;

Wildlife corridor: linear green feature that provides links for wildlife dispersal and movement, but may also offer wider amenity benefits;

Wildlife friendly greenspace: space where naturalness dominates.



