

ANNUAL PARTNERSHIP REVIEW FORM YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

PARTNERSHIP NAME:

Creative Darlington

PARTNERSHIP FUNCTION:

To develop and implement the goals of the Creative Darlington Vision and to ensure it is constantly refreshed

OBJECTIVES FOR THE YEAR

1. Contribute to the Action Plan for Darlington Cultural Strategy in 2025/26.
2. Contribute to the creative exploration of Darlington's railway heritage by commissioning or supporting the development of proposals.
3. Contribute to the S&DR Bicentenary Festival programme where appropriate, within available resources.
4. Further develop the theatre town momentum including strategic engagement with Darlington Hippodrome and Theatre Hullabaloo.
5. Supporting an accessible, distinctive and excellent cultural offer through a combination of events, festivals and programmes.
6. Manage access to the Borough Art Collection and support the return of parts of this to Darlington Library and manage the exhibition programme there.
7. Maintain positive working relationship with Darlington for Culture, other Darlington and Tees Valley enterprises, networks and organisations to develop creative programmes in Darlington.

PERFORMANCE AGAINST OBJECTIVES

1. Contribute to the Action Plan for Darlington Cultural Strategy in 2024/25

- As Creative Darlington Manager I gathered information from colleagues in various services (Library, Museums, Leisure Service, Darlington Hippodrome etc) and provided information to inform the content of a report which went to Communities and Local Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 12 June 2025, showing delivery against the Culture Strategy Action Plan in 2024/25 and proposing the Culture Strategy Action Plan for 2025/26. Delivery against the 2024/25 Culture Strategy Action Plan was strong and Creative Darlington contributed to all priorities for 2024/25.

2. Contributing to the creative exploration of Darlington's railway heritage by commissioning or supporting the development of proposals.

- Creative Darlington supported TeesDance's MoveAhead commission of a new work relating to our railway heritage, which was secured by Resound Theatre in 2024/25. The commission will be showcased at Darlington Hippodrome in 2025/26 and is part of a three-year programme to enhance progression routes for Tees Valley talent (dancers and choreographers).

- In August 2024 Darlington Borough Council Heritage & Culture fund budget was offered to Bob Beagrie, subject to his success in securing additional budget from another source, for the Bi-Centennial Pen Pals & Love Letters proposal. This is a creative community engagement project involving creative writing and focused on engaging adults. The project subsequently secured grant support through the S&DR Community Grants Scheme and activity in Darlington Library and other locations began in 2024/25.
- In 2024/25 budget was allocated to Ann Cuthbert and Pam Plumb for their Write on Track then proposal. This incorporates a variety of creative writing activity for children and adults, through a variety of approaches, including school-based activities and public competition. Write on Track secured an S&DR Community Grants Scheme offer, Tracks Darlington are providing project management support and a Write on Track sharing event is scheduled at Hopetown Darlington in 2025/26.
- Creative Darlington committed budget support in 2024/25, to bring a temporary public artwork, Kiosk by Adam Shaw to Hopetown Darlington in 2025/26. The proposal to share Kiosk in Darlington secured a S&DR Community Fund offer in April 2025 and will be shared at Hopetown Darlington in 2025/26. Through Kiosk people can explore railway heritage and printmaking.

3. Contribute to the S&DR Bicentenary Festival programme where appropriate, within available resources.

- Creative Darlington supported promotion of various aspects of the S&DR200 festival, including a World of Women Think In on 5th February 2025 at Darlington Library which will inform the WOW conference at Gala Durham during the S&DR200 Festival.
- Creative Darlington significantly contributed to the writing of the Expression of Interest which secured permission to apply for Arts Council England Major Project funding for the S&DR200 festival and contributed to the submission of the successful bid which secured Arts Council England grant support in 2024/25.
- The S&DR200 programme contains a touring exhibition, Whistle Stop, which was scheduled in 2024/25 for exhibition at Darlington Library in 2025/26 (the first of three exhibitions relating to railways).

4. Further develop the theatre town momentum including strategic engagement with Darlington Hippodrome and Theatre Hullabaloo

- Darlington Borough Council Heritage & Culture fund programme budget was allocated to the Walk in Wonderland programme as part of the Hullabaloo in the Park 2024 programme. Walk in Wonderland involved Theatre Hullabaloo and Northern School of Arts. 5 rehearsal days and 3 days of performance were held, 2 participatory sessions + 9 interactive promenade performances delivered, 23 people engaged with participatory sessions, 10 artists were involved in the project, which gained audience of 380 people in total, with 10 new works commissioned (2 workshops

commissioned from director, 1 Walk in Wonderland performance, 7 bespoke costume commissions).

5. Supporting an accessible, distinctive and excellent cultural offer through a combination of events, festivals and programmes.

- In 2023/24 and 2024/25 Heritage & Culture fund budget support was allocated to support a programme of organisational development activity commissioned by the D-Project, which was also supported by Arts Council England. The programme has informed a remodelling of this creative enterprise, and with Creative Darlington budget support over this period 12 artists have been involved in delivering activity, with 1,625 workshop participants and 1,800 performing in a community show or joining a class.
- Creative Darlington budget supported Darlington Community Carnival in 2024/25 (focused on music programme) and Darlington for Culture offered an additional Small Grant (focused on dance, parade). Darlington Community Carnival 2024 delivered the following outputs:

36 community workshops were delivered with 12 groups
the carnival attracted an estimated audience of 3,000
46 artists took part in the parade
567 individuals participated in the parade
56 performers took part in the wider carnival
there were 32 separate performances on the day itself
- Tracks Darlington programmed the Last Train Home Express event at Hopetown Darlington, Last Train Home 2024 music and comedy festival split across 7 stages at 3 venues on 7 September 2024 (Darlington Hippodrome, The Forum Music Studios and The Hullabaloo) in 2024/25 alongside other activity with support from Darlington Borough Council's Heritage & Culture fund budget, alongside an Arts Council England Project Funding award. 5 days of activity were supported, 1 participatory session + 47 performances were delivered in Darlington with 135 artists delivering the project, 16 new works were commissioned, with 683 audience members and 11 participants. In 2024/25 within the Last Train Home project Tracks Darlington organised:
 - * a small internship scheme where they took on a couple of local students to give them paid work experience at events
 - * a zine to pair with the festival which contained commissioned work by local artists (visual artists & writers)
 - * a recording of some of the live performances
 - * photography of live sessions with local artists in Darlington Hippodrome to promote the festival but also provide fantastic free content for them to promote themselves beyond Last Train Home 2024
- Creative Darlington budget supported Orchestra's Live programme in 2024/25, alongside Durham Music Service and Darlington Hippodrome, Manchester Camerata, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. The programme included 6 workshop sessions, engaged 38 participants and engaged 652 audience members.

- Creative Darlington supported Broken Scar Productions postproduction and screening of a short film exploring Arthur Wharton's later life entitled "A Light That Never Fades", which was screened to a full house (including people who had travelled from Manchester for the occasion) at The Forum Music Studios on Wednesday 22nd January 2025. The film cast included Derek Griffiths in the role of Arthur Wharton. Mike Tweddle from Broken Scar Productions worked with Ishy Dinn as a script consultant. The Arthur Wharton Foundation and Mike attended a Trailblazers awards night run by the Black Footballers Partnership at the Houses of Parliament in October 2024 to introduce the film which runs for approximately 20 minutes in length (sitting within the short film category of film festivals). The film was commissioned by the Arthur Wharton Foundation, with support from the National Heritage Lottery Fund in addition to Creative Darlington budget, which also supported live entertainment at the Forum Music Centre to accompany its screening there.
- Creative Darlington allocated budget in 2024/25 to support illustrator Brian Lee's work with Care Experienced Young People around the Children and Young People's Plan.
- Creative Darlington supported Blue Cabin CiO's This Is The Place programme which offers engagement activity around music to Care Experienced children aged 5 and under, and the adults in their lives. This programme is also supported by Lottery funding (through Youth Music).
- Creative Darlington budget supported the Circe's Island writing programme, led by Lizzie Lovejoy, which secured Arts Council England Project funding, and supported a series of writing for well-being workshops at Darlington Library, and other venues.

6. Manage access to the Borough Art Collection and support the return of parts of this to Darlington Library and manage the exhibition programme there.

- In 2024/25 Creative Darlington returned 409 works from Darlington Borough Art Collection which had been moved to Central House from Darlington Library during the restoration of the latter. We have prioritised the return of the more expensive works from Darlington Borough Art Collection from Central House, and those of a scale that can be accommodated within the available storage space there (reduced from three and a half rooms pre restoration to one and a half rooms post restoration). Alternative safe and secure storage space is required for the remaining works which are held at Central House.
- Creative Darlington also addressed requests to borrow works from the Borough Art Collection for exhibition elsewhere during the year, and for the use of images from Darlington Borough Art Collection within publications.
- Eleven exhibitions were programmed in Darlington Library Art Gallery during in 2024/25 of which ten opened in 2024/25. There were 34,655 visits to Darlington Library Art Gallery between 29 March 2024 and 10 April 2025. A high percentage of Art Gallery visitors who completed questionnaires in this period strongly agreed that holding exhibitions in Darlington Library is a good idea.

- Group exhibitions by the Community Arts Project and Darlington Society of Arts were held in 2024/25 alongside a variety of solo exhibitions, including one by Sophie Seita within the Darlington Pride Weekender 2024. Two of the exhibitions shared at Darlington Library in 2024/25 were supported by Arts Council England Lottery Project funding.

7. Maintain positive working relationship with Darlington for Culture, other Darlington and Tees Valley enterprises, networks and organisations to develop creative programmes in Darlington.

- During 2024/25 Creative Darlington worked positively with Darlington for Culture, particularly in assessing applications to their Small Grants programme, and making recommendations to their grants panel, who took the decision on whether to offer grant support or not, and who administered grants where offered. Modest Creative Darlington budget was allocated as a contribution to support the Small Grants programme in 2024/25.
- Darlington Culture Volunteers supported the stewarding of particular exhibitions, Matt Denham's Hot Contents, which explored environmental issues through film and audio recordings produced through engagement sessions with particular groups in Darlington and Tees Valley.
- Creative Darlington worked positively within various Tees Valley programmes, including the Clore Tees Valley programme (which supports the development of leadership skills in the creative sector, giving a PechaKucha presentation to freelancers on creative sector opportunities in Darlington at the conclusion of the programme in November 2024.
- We supported promotion of the Tees Valley Combined Authority's Artist of the Year programmes in 2024 and 2025, providing references for applicants on request, and promoting these opportunities through Creative Darlington networks.
- We supported promotion of the Tees Valley Freelancers Network activity through Creative Darlington networks and ETCH events in Darlington borough co-ordinated by Enterprise Made Simple.
- In 2024/25 Creative Darlington allocated budget to The Forum Music Studios' Young Blood programme <https://theforumonline.co.uk/young-blood/> which offered young people opportunities to develop their practical experience in programming, promoting and managing events.

BUDGET ADMINISTERED

- 1) DBC funding - revenue and capital £124,010 (£122,270 to the Heritage & Culture Fund/Creative Darlington budget + £1,740 for Art Collection insurance)
- 2) Other – Arts Council England Project Funding second instalment of Your Library Story creative programme grant

DBC RESOURCES CONTRIBUTED e.g. finance, employees, accommodation, other assets

Finance

1) DBC funding – revenue and capital £124,010

Staffing (FTE)

1) Creative Darlington Manager – 1.0

Accommodation

Not applicable

Other assets

None

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS OUTSTANDING ACTIONS, IF ANY, FROM PARTNERSHIP TOOLKIT QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1) Provide evidence of DBC risks being considered throughout the year – Risk assessment was on the agenda of the single Creative Darlington board meeting held in 2024/25 at Hopetown Darlington on 23 September 2024.

ISSUES OF CONCERN, IF ANY e.g. finance, staffing etc

- Demand normally outstrips the available Creative Darlington programme budget and careful budget management is required. Many of the commitments Darlington Borough Council makes to external parties to support work addressing priorities within Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022 – 2026 are conditional to their securing Lottery funding, which is difficult to predict and there is considerable demand on Lottery funding currently. Some of the Creative Darlington budget will be required to commission an updated valuation of the Borough Art Collection in 2025/26.
- Considerable time was dedicated in 2024/25 to returning most of the Borough Art Collection works held at Central House to Darlington Library, however there is insufficient space to house the 126 works remaining at Central House in the 1.5 rooms available for its storage in Darlington Library (it was previously held in 3.5 rooms but 2 of these are now offices following the restoration).
- Darlington's current cultural strategy runs until 31 March 2026 and an updated Culture Strategy will be developed with support from Creative Darlington and other parties in 2025/26.

ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS ISSUES OF CONCERN (including responsible officer and timescales)

- The vision and priorities within Darlington Cultural Strategy 2022 – 2026 are used to inform the prioritisation of limited Heritage & Culture fund programme budget.
- I have contacted colleagues managing Darlington Borough Council cultural venues and understand there is no unallocated storage space within these. I have advised senior colleagues at Darlington Borough Council of the locations in which Darlington Borough Art Collection is currently held. Considerable capital match would be required from Darlington Borough Council as leverage

for any fundraising application to support the creation of additional storage space. Darlington Borough Council will address the storage issue.

- An action plan to refresh Darlington Culture Strategy for the period from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2020 has been developed.


IS THE PARTNERSHIP TO CONTINUE?

YES

OBJECTIVES FOR NEXT YEAR

- Contribute to the Action Plan for Darlington Cultural Strategy in 2025/26.
- Contribute to the creative exploration of Darlington's railway heritage by commissioning or supporting the development of proposals.
- Contribute to the S&DR Bicentenary Festival programme where appropriate, within available resources.
- Further develop the theatre town momentum including strategic engagement with Darlington Hippodrome and Theatre Hullabaloo.
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Completed By Lead Officer:

Name Stephen Wiper
Post Creative Darlington Manager
Date 15 June 2025


Received By Assistant Director/Director: **Name** _____
Post _____
Date _____