

# CREATIVE DARLINGTON

## Investing in a Creative Community

An Arts Vision for Darlington  
Darlington Arts Enquiry Group

## Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to Creative Darlington. They include:

### Darlington Arts Enquiry Group

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Richard Alty, Director of Place, Darlington Borough Council	Mike Crawshaw, Head of Cultural Services, Darlington Borough Council
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Alison MacKay, Director Humantics CIC	Tim Stahl, Darlington for Culture
Sharon Paterson, Associate Dean, School of Arts & Media, Teesside University	Steve Harker, Cabinet Member for Health and Leisure, Darlington Borough Council
Jill Morgan, Teesside University	Stephen Wiper, Arts Council Regional Officer
Rebecca McGarvey, Darlington Arts Academy	Geoff Oldham, Darlington Arts Academy
Rachel French, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art	Darrien Wright, Dance Wright Studio
Doff Pollard, Tees Valley Rural Community Council	Richard Grassick, Darlington Media Group
Jill Adamson, National Association of Youth Theatres	Mhora Samuel, Theatres Trust
Paul Harman, Darlington for Culture / Member, Darlington Borough Council	Phil Dixon, Darlington Media Group
Tim Fisher, Principal, QE 6 <sup>th</sup> Form College	

### Public and Stakeholder Engagement

The Enquiry Group's Voices and Views consultation programme collected information and opinions across the community to inform the development of this vision and of options for arts venues and governance.

- 1,349 local people completed questionnaires about their participation in the arts and their ideas and preferences for the future
- 109 people participated in focus group discussions about their arts participation and interests
- 23 local artists contributed through targeted discussion and questionnaires
- 10 organisations supported the consultation by staging discussions, publicising surveys or hosting web surveys; 3 arts organisations provided creative facilitation of discussion at consultation events
- Following the development of the vision and venues/governance options, 63 people attended focus group discussions in a second phase of engagement to provide their views on the vision and the venues and governance options.
- 5 local business leaders participated in discussion to advise the Enquiry Group on approaches to investing in the arts as sponsors and philanthropists

### Darlington Borough Council Support Team

Helen Ellison, Lynda Winstanley, Lyndsey Middleton, Peter Roberts, John Simpson, Tim Crawshaw, David Plews Joanne Scott, , Mike Cleasby, Owen Wilson, Ann Wallis & Russell Wallis of Globe Consulting

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Prepared by Darlington Arts Enquiry Group, July 2011

Darlington Arts Enquiry Group is an independent group of arts, business, third sector and Council representatives set up to explore and make recommendations on the future of the arts in Darlington.

## ‘Art is a place we go to make sense of our lives’

From the Pitman Painters by Lee Hall; performed at Darlington Civic Theatre, July 2011

### Ten reasons why the arts matter in Darlington

- The arts bring people together in shared enjoyment and celebration
- They are capable of giving voice and identity to everyone in the community, including the vulnerable and the disadvantaged
- The arts provide directly jobs, income and wealth generation
- And they help to build a quality of life that attracts investment and jobs in the wider local economy
- A vibrant local arts scene encourages talented and enterprising local young people to stay on after education and contribute to the community
- The arts develop the thinking, imagination and understanding in young people’s education that spins off into other areas, like science and business...
- ...and they can stimulate the creativity, daring and enterprise that has helped to make Darlington a world leader in engineering and design technologies
- The arts contribute to social cohesion, mental health, happiness and well-being
- The arts make our everyday experiences special and help us to see and understand the world and ourselves in new ways
- The arts help us to reach our full potential as creative human beings

### Creative Darlington

Darlington is a place that changed the world through creative endeavour. The ethos of enterprise, innovation and social philanthropy that created our historic legacy – what poet Bill Herbert captured as ‘Caring Sharing Daring’ in his arts strategy for West Park – is as vital to the future as the past, and the arts have a central role in carrying it forward. Art can galvanise every aspect of community life, and is of central importance in making the place that is Creative Darlington.

This vision is a framework for investing in the future of Darlington through the arts. We are challenged by the loss of public funding to be that creative community in unlocking new ways to support, experience and enjoy the arts. In doing so we will be investing in the future of our young people, in social inclusion and community cohesion, as well as in painting, theatre, dance, music, digital arts and all the other forms of expression and entertainment that contribute so much to Darlington’s quality of place and life.

## A Vision for the Arts in Darlington

Looking forward to 2020 and beyond:

Darlington will be a place where art happens, where the arts matter and where the arts and creativity are central to Darlington's future identity and economic success

Four approaches to working with people through the arts, harnessed and working together will generate progress towards the vision:

- **INSPIRE** people to engage with and enjoy the arts, whether as participants in creative activity or as audience
- **GROW** and retain audiences, talent, enthusiasm, creativity and production in Darlington
- **CELEBRATE** together through high quality arts activities
- **ACHIEVE** excellence and specialist practice for which Darlington is recognised and respected, and which helps to attract further interest and investment in inspiring, growing and celebrating the arts.

These approaches are underpinned by the principles that the arts belong to and should be available to everyone, that they should bring people together and that they should champion inclusion and social cohesion. These are core principles of the Arts Council's 10-year strategy, *Achieving Great Art for Everyone*, and of *One Darlington : Perfectly Placed*, the overall plan for Darlington. The arts have a part to play in upholding these principles and contributing to these wider plans.

Making sure that the arts are part of the common wealth of the community, however, does not mean accepting the commonplace. Artistic excellence, by which we mean striving to be the best of which we are collectively capable, as well as being inviting and inclusive will inspire people and help to grow the community of arts practitioners and audience.

Excellence is also vital in attracting recognition, respect and investment from outside the borough, helping to drive the future development of the arts as well as wider regeneration.

Inclusion and excellence will be rooted in two distinct but interdependent aspects of arts development and programming:

- Encouraging a **BROAD AND DIVERSE ARTS OFFER**, responding inclusively to the wide-ranging interests and needs across the borough.

- Reinforcing the SPECIALIST PRACTICE in Children and Young People's Arts, with emphasis on the performing arts; this specialism will be a beacon, as it is now, attracting national recognition to the arts in Darlington.

These two dimensions are not new. They are about building on existing strengths. The current arts offer is itself a considerable asset, with especially notable provision in visual and public arts and in festivals. A particular feature is the wide range of third sector arts organisations that contribute richness and diversity to the arts scene in Darlington. This is further reinforced by the arts and cultural offerings in school, college, community and faith settings.

The specialist practice in children and young people's performing arts is well established and nationally recognised. Theatre Hullabaloo, based at Darlington Arts Centre, is funded by the Arts Council as a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) and is the sole funded specialist provider of theatre for children and young people in the region. The National Association of Youth Theatres (NAYT) is located alongside Theatre Hullabaloo at the Arts Centre. The Arts Centre's ArtsSpark young people's theatre programme is the NAYT Associate Venue for the North East. The Forum Music Centre, Darlington Arts Academy, Steam Shed (an outreach project of Chicken Shed, the London-based inclusive theatre project) and the performing arts department at Queen Elizabeth 6<sup>th</sup> Form College are prominent amongst a wide range of local organisations reinforcing the current arts provision for children and young people.

These two aspects – the broad, diverse arts offer and the children and young people's specialism – are totally interdependent and neither is more important than the other. The broad dimension is the seedbed of inclusion and of the rich diversity of arts provision that contributes so much to Darlington's quality of life. Specialist practice in children and young people's arts gives a cutting edge to the ambition of investing in the future through the arts. It can be the engine of the inspire-grow-celebrate-achieve development cycle. And it is a strong proposition for attracting investment that can spin-off into other areas of the arts from companies wanting to invest as stakeholders in Darlington's future through their corporate social responsibility programmes.

However, simply providing these two interlocking strands of arts programming will not achieve a fully rounded expression of the Creative Darlington vision. That requires Darlington to be a creative place in which artists, arts producers and creative businesses can flourish. There are many artists and creative professionals living in Darlington but the current tendency is for them to find their creative communities of support and collaboration elsewhere.

Two linked development trajectories are required. Firstly we need a regeneration-led approach to the development of a stronger creative sector within the local economy, providing appropriate artists work spaces and creating fertile conditions for the start-up and development of creative businesses, attracting established artists and creative producers to live and work here, and encouraging talented young locals to stay and develop their careers. The second trajectory is to embed arts and culture at the heart of the borough's regeneration and development, positioning the creative sector so that it can both guide and benefit from investment programmes. The assessment of the economic, social and environmental sustainability of proposals for built development (a statutory requirement of the planning process) should consider how development can contribute to achieving the Creative Darlington vision. This positioning of arts and culture as a key consideration in the borough's future development will also expose the sector to wider investment opportunities, such as the corporate social responsibility programmes of businesses.

## From Vision to Reality

This vision is not a prescriptive plan. Its purpose is to create fertile conditions for the arts to flourish from the ground up through diverse initiatives, organisations and projects. The action plan at the end of this document is focused on creating these conditions. The plan is currently high level and generic until decisions have been made on arts venues/buildings and governance options. The plan will be developed in detail in the light of the chosen options.

Diversity is well established, with organisations such as Darlington Arts Academy, the Forum, Darlington Media Group, Darlington Operatic Society, Darlington Orchestra, the Community Carnival, Stagecoach, Dance Wright Studio and the Rhythm and Blues and Folk Clubs just a few amongst the many that make up a vibrant local arts scene.

The Civic Theatre, Head of Steam Museum, Darlington Libraries, schools, colleges and community and faith groups will contribute to a greater or lesser extent to turning the vision into reality.

The vision, and the governance structures that are created to deliver the vision, must support and enable arts practitioners to do what they do, contributing through their independent purposes, programmes and activities to the overall development of a sustainable arts offer.

However, diverse and independent activity is unlikely to add up to progress towards the vision spontaneously. The four approaches – Inspiring, Growing, Celebrating, Achieving, each

leading to the next in a self-reinforcing cycle of arts development - are intended as signposts to orientate individual pieces towards a collective endeavour whilst avoiding the imposed straitjacket of a top-down plan.

Turning the Inspire-Grow-Celebrate-Achieve concept into a practical framework for sustained development will require support, co-ordination and prioritisation across arts organisations. This must be light-touch, encouraging and enabling, and proposals for providing this strategic support are set out below.

## Key Requirements and Principles

Some of the Enquiry Group's focus has been on the relatively short-term but pivotal challenge of developing viable options for the provision and running of the buildings/venues and governance or organisational arrangements needed to support the future arts offer, culminating in recommendations to Darlington Partnership on the preferred options.

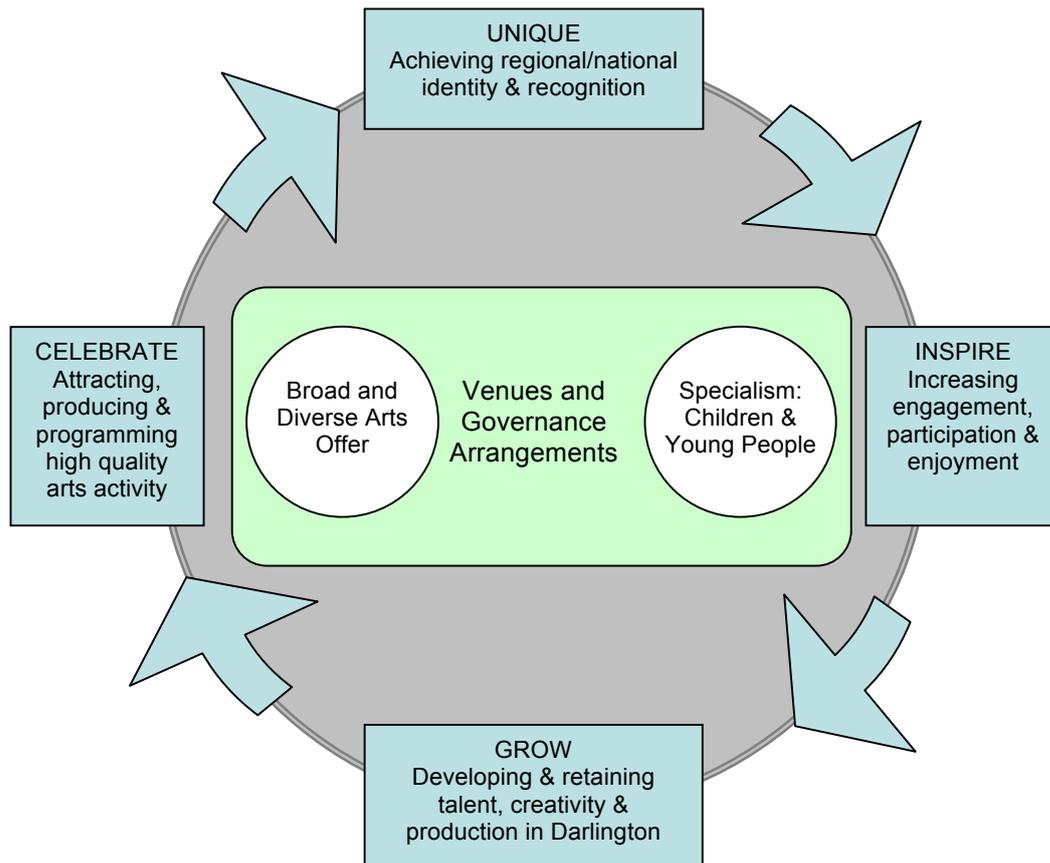
The development of the vision, combined with the findings of the Voices and Views programme, has thrown up three key requirements that the buildings and governance options should fulfil if they are to fully support the delivery of the vision. These requirements do not predetermine the recommendations, but they are foundation stones that should be built into the options. They are:

- **Arts hub** – whether a single building or closely co-located facilities, it is important buildings solutions bring different art forms and arts providers together in close proximity. This requirement is a key driver of the inspire-grow-celebrate-achieve cycle of arts development.
- **Children and young people's theatre** - the specialist practice in children and young people's arts, placing strong emphasis on the performing arts, requires a modern performance and rehearsal facility to support high quality production and reinforce Darlington's national profile.
- **Strategic function** – ensuring that arts programmes add-up to progress towards the vision requires guidance, co-ordination and support across the local arts scene. Arts governance arrangements should include this strategic function to deliver all or most of the activities outlined in the next section and translate the Inspire-Grow-Celebrate-Achieve arts cycle into effective action.

The Enquiry Group has established the following core principles that the arts governance organisation(s) to be created to act on this vision should uphold:

- Ensure that the arts are fair and inclusive, and that the duties on service providers set out in equalities legislation are fulfilled;
- Be generalist in its approach, encouraging and supporting all arts sectors rather than focusing on specific art forms or audiences;
- Ensure a commitment to the free expression of the experiences and voices of individuals and communities; the approach should
- Be responsive to Darlington and able to encourage work that is sensitive to local people and place; and
- Foster collaborative working and creative partnerships, including with corporate and philanthropic sponsors and donors.

The diagram below shows how the various components of the vision sit together:



## The Strategic Function

The strategic function will drive the cycle of development illustrated above. The Enquiry Group has identified the need for a range of activities, summarised below, that will be needed to do this and to support a sustainable arts offer. The strategic function, which could be provided in a variety of ways, will have the challenging responsibility for ensuring these activities and their outputs and outcomes are delivered, whilst working in enabling and collaborative ways with arts practitioner organisations, respecting their diversity and independence, rather than imposing demands on them.

The strategic function will work with arts organisations and other partners around the following activities:

- **Vision & strategy development for the arts** - responsible in partnership with others in the sector for the 'ownership' and refreshing of the vision and for the delivery of its core values and objectives.
- **The Moving Spotlight** – collaborating and co-ordinating the regular spotlight on particular art forms or communities.

- **Fundraising** - leading on the development and delivery of a fundraising strategy for the arts in Darlington, embracing sponsorship, philanthropy and grant support.
- **External partnerships and collaboration** – improving the arts offer and creative outcomes for Darlington by encouraging collaboration with the Arts Council funded National Portfolio Organisations in the region, such as MIMA, Stockton International Riverside Festival, Gala Durham and Dance City; with the Bridge Delivery Organisation for Children and Young People in the region (Sage Gateshead); with Teesside University (a leader in digital media and arts) and Darlington College; and with potential sponsors and philanthropic supporters, including through the agency of County Durham Community Foundation.
- **Regeneration and creative industries** – supporting regeneration, education and training and business support agencies to maximise the potential of the arts to provide direct employment, attract inward investment, and encourage creative business start-ups; generally encourage the development of a creative community that supports artists’ production, attracts creative professionals to base themselves here and retains home grown young talent in Darlington.
- **Community arts engagement** – identifying ways in which arts provision can respond to and represent the voices, interests and needs of local communities.
- **Public engagement** – working with partners across the community to utilise the communicative potential of the arts to support effective community engagement and participation.
- **Information exchange** - provide a point of contact, advice and support, and receive and cascade information on arts related matters, including utilising the web to facilitate these activities.
- **Partnership working** - collaboration has always been a core value underpinning Arts development and delivery in Darlington, and is a priority for Arts Council England in its funding programmes; collaboration is essential to progress in the current climate of constraint and limited resources.
- **Capacity building in the Third Sector** - it is important that the needs and ambitions of the Third Sector arts organisations are articulated and listened to; the strategic function can provide and broker capacity building support.

- **Marketing** - identified through the consultation process as something that Third Sector organisations feel they would like support to develop, with emphasis on opportunities for joint marketing.
- **Audience Development** – the existing expertise in this area can be developed, and extended to others through mentoring, to support a lively, innovative arts offer. This includes research into ‘audience’ characteristics and behaviour, and developing new approaches that encourage people to not only enjoy accessible and entertaining arts activities, but also experiment with the new. A new Friends scheme could build engagement and loyalty and support the fundraising strategy.
- **Advocacy** - ensuring that the value of the arts is recognised, both for their own sake and for their wider social and economic benefits, and that people are encouraged to act as formal or informal ambassadors for the arts.
- **Engaging people in the arts** - a key component of the strategic function that will benefit from a strategic approach embracing key public and third sector partners, and particularly important in developing the focus on Children’s and Young People’s arts.
- **Facilitation of an Arts Forum** - there are many examples nationally of forums or networks that are focused on collaboration in the arts or wider cultural activities; a forum can connect the arts into the Darlington Partnership led delivery framework for One Darlington : Perfectly Placed.
- **Visual arts programming and development** – developing better opportunities for local artists to exhibit work and supporting the development of an artists’ network and affordable artist workspaces.
- **Public Art strategic planning and delivery** - public art contributes to the built and natural environment in Darlington and there are opportunities to continue to work with a range of partners to develop this further.
- **Programming of events** - including professional and community productions across a range of arts and community venues.
- **Technical support** - developing an offer to independent arts organisations and other groups around technical expertise, equipment and resources, and venue booking and support.

This is a very wide ranging and substantial agenda. Priorities and ways of developing and delivering the strategic function are dependent on decisions yet to be taken as this vision is being prepared on future governance arrangements for the arts in Darlington.

For the time-being the Council's Arts Team will continue to deliver and progress some of this agenda on a transitional basis, particularly around ongoing programming and marketing. The Council has also made a commitment of £100,000 per annum to support the strategic development of the arts. This is likely to be used to provide staff to perform the strategic function and to create a fund to commission others to drive forward the development of various arts sectors.

Questions of employment and accountability of staff delivering the strategic function are dependent on future arts governance arrangements. A number of existing organisations, such as Darlington for Culture, Theatre Hullabaloo, Darlington Arts Academy, Humantics and other third sector and private sector arts providers are likely to be involved in those arrangements, and options could include the formation of a partnership steering group or a Darlington Arts Development Trust.

The details of the location and operation of the strategic function will be determined once the governance structures are established, with the Council continuing to work with the other the arts organisations and partners to provide a transitional service.