

Heritage Champions in action



Historic England

NAME OF CHAMPION	Cllr Chris McEwan
LOCAL AUTHORITY	Darlington Borough Council

Introduction

Darlington has a long and illustrious past, first recorded in the Domesday Book. With responsibility for the Economy and Regeneration at Darlington Borough Council, Cllr Chris McEwan is a passionate advocate of the historic environment and has for a number of years sought to bring this to the centre of the future of the town. This is reflected in an Experience Darlington Strategy, the emerging Local Plan and the selection of Stockton and Darlington Railway as a new Heritage Action Zone in 2018.



**Cllr Chris McEwan, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Economy & Regeneration, Darlington Borough Council, on Darlington's High Row, just outside the town's covered market (which used to be the Town Hall).
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Impact of the activity

Drawing on industrial and economic partnerships and with the support of experts and the community, Cllr McEwan has been at the centre of the development of the 'Experience Darlington Strategy'.

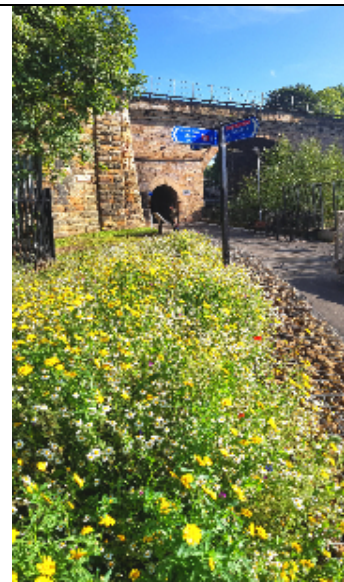
Experience Darlington was based on over four years of community engagement and the input of enthusiasts and experts that was facilitated through the Railway Heritage Enquiry Group, established by Chris. Making the connections between, place, culture, location and the wider regional context the historic environment has been a key factor in the development of the strategy.

Darlington Borough Council's emerging new Local Plan, led by Chris, also recognises the importance of heritage to attract investment and as the basis for a distinctive place. Its strong heritage component is informed by a series of built heritage workshops organised during the first half of 2017, which have helped to develop a positive strategy for the maintenance and use of heritage assets over the Plan period.

The first workshop agreed the themes to be discussed in more detail over subsequent months, including heritage led regeneration, energy efficiency and heritage retrofit in traditional properties, archaeology, and the protection, enhancement and promotion of Darlington's locally distinctive heritage assets. The second workshop focused on particular heritage assets such as the Stockton & Darlington Railway and the town's Quaker heritage. In a third workshop, discussion focused on what the group considered to be Darlington's landmarks and what makes Darlington special. Finally, discussions in July 2017 helped to develop a suite of draft heritage policies.



North Station Road, Darlington
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Skerne Bridge

Looking to the future

In 2018 the [Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Action Zone](#) will help to restore some of the historic features of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. The Railway, which is 26 miles long, operated from 1825 to 1863 and was the world's first public railway to use steam locomotives. This Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) will focus on the story of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, including the role Darlington played as the leader of the rail revolution and will entail the restoration of bridges and old railway buildings along the line with the aim of boosting tourism and creating jobs. The HAZ will be a partnership of three neighbouring authorities and will be a key strand in the development of the Tees Valley City of Culture bid for 2025, which coincides with the bicentenary of the railway.

Key learning points

- Communities should be at the centre of policy and strategy development;
- The stories behind assets are as important as the assets themselves;
- The historic environment teaches us valuable lessons, relevant for today, which in this case includes the story of innovation in Darlington being played out in a contemporary setting;
- Partnerships and buy-in are hard won, but pay the greatest dividends;
- A clear vision helps everyone understand the significance and value of assets;
- It's not just about designated heritage, it's about the whole place; and
- The economic value of the historic environment needs to be better understood and clearly articulated. The historic environment needs to be championed.

Contact for further information

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