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# Darlington Pedestrian Heart – Case Study

## The overview

The Pedestrian Heart Project has transformed the centre of Darlington by creating a series of new public spaces and public art initiatives. The last streetscape improvements in Darlington took place over 100 years ago and there was a pressing need to make changes.

The Darlington Pedestrian Heart Project therefore aimed to: reinforce the distinctiveness of Darlington; act as an icon for the renaissance of Darlington as a shopping, living and working destination; create a hub for the economic health of the town centre; improve access and quality of life for all; and create inviting and safe spaces.

In November 2004, the council gave formal approval for the Pedestrian Heart project. The following year it appointed a consultant team, led by Gillespies, which undertook an extensive consultation with key stakeholders to resolve vehicular access into the town centre and allow the creation of improved pedestrian-focussed spaces.

Darlington's new Pedestrian Heart features a central space for events with bold swathes of plantings, high quality granite surfacing throughout with unique 'bar code' planters all supplied by Hardscape, seating areas, a water feature, also supplied by Hardscape and a focal market area.

The area takes its inspiration from the unique character and impressive history of the place, while providing a streetscape that caters for modern day living. The look and feel of the central space needed to be addressed, but there was also a need for it to reflect the usage patterns of today and to create a place fitting for the next 100 years.



**Project:** Darlington Pedestrian Heart  
**Client:** Darlington Borough Council and One NorthEast  
**Landscape architects:** Gillespies  
**Contractor:** Birse Civils Ltd.  
**Budget:** £9.2m

**Site size:** 1.7ha of public realm improvements spread over the six main streets within the retail core

**Work schedule:** Consultation and funding approved 2004, main public realm works May 2005–July 2007

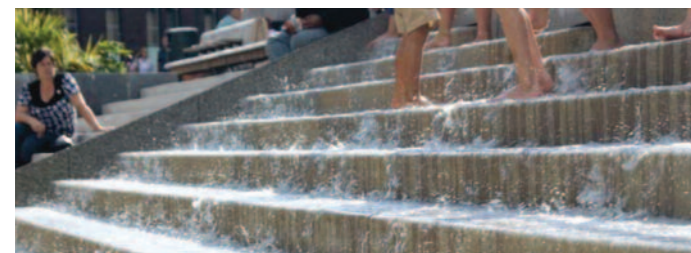
**Suppliers:** Hardscape: Royal White and Shiraz polished granite slabs and specials (bar code planters)

**WE-EF:** Lighting columns and lanterns

**Street Design:** Seating

**Broxap:** Bollards, cycle racks, litter bins

**Mac-Solutions:** Rising Bollards



“The new design provides a series of **linked spaces** where **performers and markets** liven up the shopping **experience**”



## The detail

A simple line of steps reflects a change in street level in the central space (High Row) and a cascade water feature runs down the steps in the main street. Two ramps were integrated into the steps at High Row with handrails to provide disabled access at key points. Following further consultation with the Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) another ramp was considered necessary, linking the DAD mobility centre (and Market Place) with High Row. Although this breaks up the sweep of steps at this prominent location it was perceived as necessary for access at this point.

The choice of flagstone materials across most of the site allows a smooth wheelchair transition, while flush kerbs allow easier road crossing. A series of 'back-to-back' seating along High Row creates a vantage point looking over the town and in the other direction to busy High Row. Much effort went into the seating design. In dialogue with groups representing the elderly, designs were conceived which meet the needs for arms and backs for elderly people, as well as benches for the young to lounge on.

Throughout the project there has been emphasis on the inclusion of artist-designed lighting concepts. Artist Michael Pinsky, as part of the design team, has produced 'Life Pulse' which uses lighting columns that have been adapted to detect people's pulse rates and create rhythmic patterns of light based on these. This alludes to the new Pedestrian Heart for Darlington. Pinsky also had the idea of incorporating bar codes into the design to represent the modern equivalent of a market, which was what High Row was used for before 1904. There are bar codes on all the planters, uplit at night, and the water feature. The new design provides a series of linked spaces where musicians, street theatre, magicians and markets now enliven the shopping experience.

There is evidence of an increased use of the town centre since the scheme finished, and longer dwell times, which was a key economic objective.