



Great British Railway HQ
Expression of Interest
From
Darlington Borough Council



Introduction

Darlington is an ambitious place with a diverse and resilient economy grown out of a tradition of technological and entrepreneurial innovation. It is these values that connect Darlington's past, present, and future, and we would very much welcome the opportunity to be the new base for the headquarters of the Great British Railway.

Darlington is the birthplace of the railways with strong, historical links to our nation's railways, making it an ideal location for this base, and choosing Darlington will not only bring many benefits to the town, but to the wider region and neighbouring areas as it will further underline the regions connection with the railways. This will help attract investment and create jobs, both directly and indirectly.

Rail has been a major part of Darlington's economy for over 200 years. Companies based in the town benefit from easy access to the railway industry with a first-class combination of location, supply chain, skilled workforce and training facilities.

Darlington's bid is backed not only by Darlington Borough Council, but also supported by the town's MPs Peter Gibson and Paul Howell, the Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership, the Tees Valley Mayor and many local residents. The local business community are keen supporters of the bid, with direct support from the Darlington Business Club, North-East Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Business.

As Darlington prepares for the 200th anniversary celebrations of the first passenger rail journey, what better opportunity for levelling up than awarding the new home of the Great British Railways to Darlington, and cement the towns status as not just the birthplace of the public railway, but the natural 21st century home of the railway.

Darlington has the infrastructure and connections to deliver this. I truly believe Darlington is the natural home of Great British Railways, where it all began.



Cllr. Heather Scott OBE

Leader of Darlington Borough Council

Context

Darlington – internationally recognised at the birthplace of the public railway – offers a perfect opportunity to locate the new headquarters of the Great British Railway. Darlington's intrinsic association with the railway is undisputed, with the railway at the towns heart for almost 200 years.

But it's not just about reflecting on the past – Darlington is a modern, bustling town with new economies, new industries, and new opportunities emerging.

Darlington is a town in the heart of the Northeast of England, providing unrivalled access North to South, East to West. It benefits from being on the mainline Rail network to London and Edinburgh and is only 6 miles from Teesside International Airport.

There is no doubt, the railway has been at the core of the town's growth and development throughout the years and the announcement of the GBR presents an ideal opportunity to bring forward the next chapter of the railways to benefit both the town and the GBR itself.

Darlington would make an ideal host for GBR, with

- Excellent transport links via road, rail, air and port;
- A wide range of sites and premises providing opportunities across all sectors;
- A cost competitive location within the North East with salary and office costs lower than the UK average;
- A highly skilled local workforce with access to an additional working age population of 1.6 million within an hour's drive time;
- A quality housing offer to suit all budgets within charming rural villages or within the town and surrounding areas;
- Nationally recognised further education and training provision to support the workforce requirements of the future;
- A high quality of life in the heart of the North East.

The Darlington application is supported by not just the local authority, but a wider group of key public and private stakeholders, including the Tees Valley Mayor, Ben Houchen, the local MPs Peter Gibson and Paul Howell, as well as a number of local business and business representative groups.

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|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Tees Valley Combined Authority | • Federation of Small Business |
| • Darlington Borough Council | • Darlington Business Club |
| • NE England Chamber of Commerce | • Darlington College |

Darlington can offer a number of property and/or site solutions, each offering unrivalled connectivity being located within a short-distanced walk to Darlington's East Coast Main Line Station and Darlington town centre.

Tees Valley Combined Authority, in partnership with the Council, Network Rail and LNER, is planning a comprehensive improvement project at Darlington station and the land immediately to the east and west of the existing station, representing an investment of £105m.

These plans will transform the access to create an expanded mainline station through:

- The creation of new travel interchanges and a new multi-storey car park,
- The promotion of sustainable travel through priority enhancements for pedestrians and cyclists,
- The creation of gateway approaches and public realm that reflect the economic ambitions of Darlington and the wider Tees Valley region,
- Linking Central Park and the Town Centre with the station more effectively through an improved environment to attract more visitors and businesses to Darlington and
- Paving the way for improved train services at Darlington as a key east coast mainline station that improves regional and national connectivity.

The project will deliver the biggest transformation of the station area in decades providing modern, pedestrian-friendly travel interchanges for the town and the wider region.

This local investment will be enhanced by the plans outlined in the Integrated Rail Plan for the North and Midlands, and specifically, the plans to upgrade and speed up the East Coast Main Line. Reducing journey times from London to Darlington by up to 15 minutes.

These investment presents a perfect opportunity for GBR to enhance the importance of the railway infrastructure and investment not just to Darlington, but to the whole of the United Kingdom.





**Central
Park**

**Station
Gateway
East**

**Station
Gateway
West**

**Former
Cattle Market
Site**

Google

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There are multiple opportunities in this locality from existing publicly owned buildings and/or development sites, as well as opportunities within public sector rail estate surrounding the railway station. These opportunities include Council-owned development sites at either Central Park or the recently cleared cattle-mart site, which sits adjacent to the railway station.

Central Park provides a preferred option, with publicly owned commercial space available in two locations – Business Central and the new Business Innovation Centre. Both sites are within easy pedestrian reach of the main railway station via a newly constructed footbridge.



Central Park is a prominent mixed use development site, already home to Teesside University, Darlington College, The National Biologics Manufacturing Centre and Business Incubation facilities. The site forms part of a wider regeneration programme. The Central Park area was previously part of the operational railway area developed by GNER. The land had a mix of railway sidings, workshops, cranes and engine sheds.

Darlington will gain many benefits from accommodating the GBR headquarters, including reputational, economic, and social benefits.

As has already been highlighted, Darlington is recognised the world-over as a railway town, and particularly the connection with public railway. Choosing Darlington as the HQ location will offer mutual reputational benefits in promoting Darlington as a twenty-first century railway town and providing a historic legacy on which GBR can build a platform to present the future developments and improvements for rail customers across the country.

The economic benefits are clear in relation to investment, job and career opportunities. A base in Darlington would widen the scope of opportunities for local people and businesses – new jobs, new commercial opportunities, new connections.

Creating a base in Darlington would realise a number of social benefits, not least in relation to training, skills development and attracting talent. It will also support developments taking place at the Railway Heritage Quarter for the bicentenary celebrations due to take place in 2025, and bring together the historic elements of Darlington's railway legacy with a renewed focus for the future of the railway, both locally and nationally, solidifying Darlington as the natural home of the Great British railways.

Finally, creating a hub in Darlington would not only bring new jobs to the town, but it would boost the regional economy and help to support the planned regeneration and future developments in Darlington's town centre.

Darlington's suitability as the location for GBRs national headquarters is obvious.

- A great site location in close proximity to the main line railway station.
- High levels of local, regional and national connectivity
- A 200-year legacy of railways at the heart of the town
- A current eclectic mix of railway related business activities
- An active demonstration of Levelling-up in action
- A clear shared vision for regeneration built on railway foundations – past and present.
- Variety of options for individual site locations and an established reputation for supporting new developments coming to fruition quickly – DFE, Treasury, Amazon, etc.
- Ease of access to London and Edinburgh for staff via rail and locally via road
- Being a part of the Governments financial campus and hub
- Tangible local pride in our railway story, cementing Darlington's rightful place at the heart of the national railway picture



Levelling Up

The Government's Levelling Up White Paper, presents an ambitious, decade-long policy agenda to change the UK's economic geography and narrow the country's regional inequality. The UK is one of the world's most geographically unequal economies, and the Levelling Up policy presents an opportunity to address this with action.

Darlington is fortunate in that it is very much at the forefront of this significant policy agenda, with the new Darlington Economic Campus providing a blueprint for the levelling up agenda, alongside the physical regeneration presented by the Towns Fund. These strategic interventions, alongside other stakeholder actions to address local and national inequalities provide a robust foundation for success.

The Darlington Economic Campus is a pioneering new cross government hub which will bring together people across departments and public organisations to play an active role in the most important economic issues of the day. As part of the Places for Growth programme, the Campus will drive to diversify the way the UK Government makes policy. It will also broaden local opportunities for substantial career pathways and offer exciting prospects across the departments and organisations based at the campus, including HM Treasury, the Department for International Trade, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department For Culture, Media



& Sport, the Office for National Statistics and the Competition and Markets Authority – collectively creating around 1700 new jobs.

Senior staff at the Treasury began working in Darlington in October 2021 as part of plan to decentralise Government and spread senior politicians and officials around the country to gain a better understanding of the issues that affect people outside London. Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP said: "Our campus in Darlington is one of the ways we are delivering on our commitment to level up by opening up job opportunities in the region."

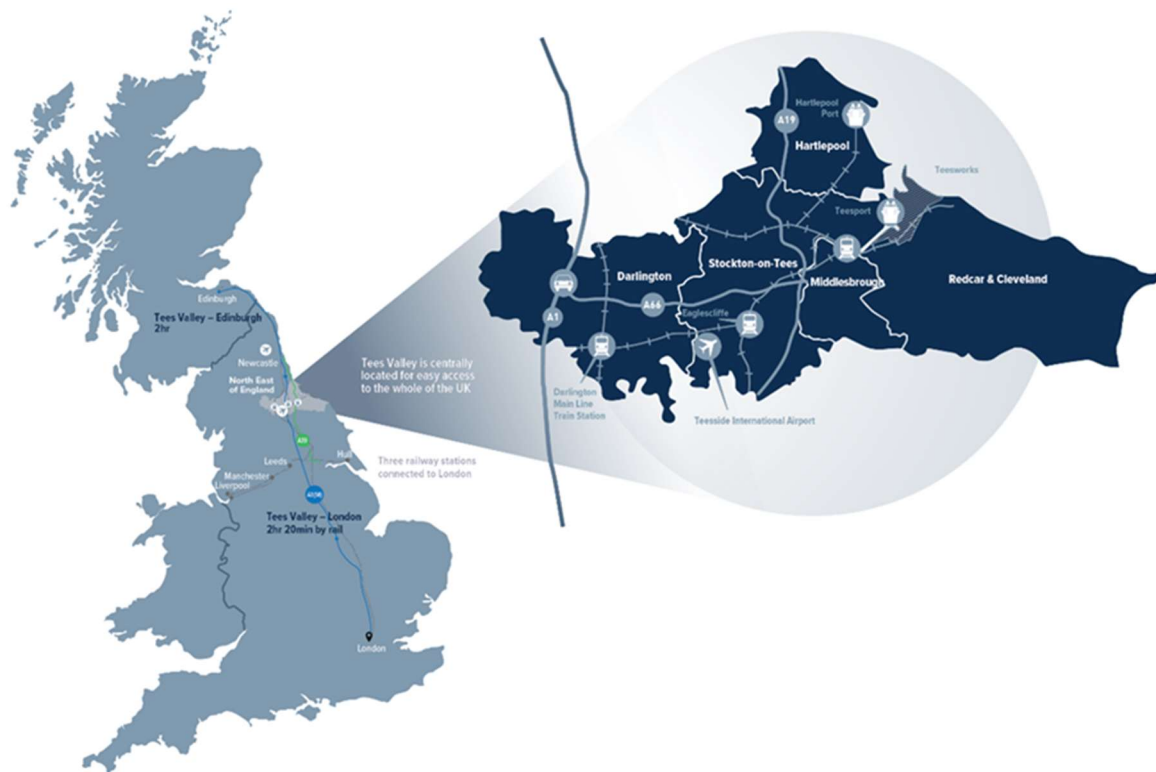
Darlington is one of the first towns to be awarded its share of the Towns Fund, part of the government's plan for levelling up the UK economy. The £23.3m investment will be spent on projects to revitalise and improve the town. The projects will complement and extend current regeneration schemes including North Road, the area between the town centre and the Head of Steam Museum, and Victoria Road, including around the train station and the cattle market.

A key driver of Levelling Up is to reduce both regional economic disparities and the concentration of political and economic power from the capital. Darlington is at the forefront of this national policy agenda – paving the way for both capital and talent investments in the local economy.

The immediate levelling up opportunities could be a greater variety of jobs for local people, increased spend in the local area, increased focus on the railway heritage and greater focus on the new 1825-2025 Rail Heritage visitor attraction both locally, nationally, and internationally, thus boosting the economy of the town and creating further opportunities for business and residents.



Connected and easy to get to



Darlington's central location means it is perfectly placed as a preferred location choice. Situated on the east coast between London and Edinburgh there is easy access to the whole of the UK via the strategic road and rail networks.

Darlington's railway station is part of the main East Coast Rail Network and provides rapid and regular connections southwards to London (twice an hour direct to Kings Cross taking less than 2.5 hours) and northwards to Edinburgh in a little over two hours. There are also direct connections to Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham (and the South-West) through TransPennine Express and Cross-Country services.

Teesside International Airport lies 6 miles from the centre of Darlington and connects Darlington to both the UK and Europe. Newcastle International Airport and Leeds Bradford International Airport are both within 60 miles of Darlington and provide further commercial and air freight capacity.

Darlington offers fast and direct north-south and east-west road connections via the A1(M) and A66, as well as being served by an urban road network connecting it into the Tees Valley. The A66 cross Pennine route, running south of the Town Centre, provides a dual carriageway link to Middlesbrough and Teesport to the east, as well as the A19 north/south trunk road.

Teesside International Airport is only a 12-minute drive from Central Park. The airport offers daily connections to London in less than an hour. It also connects Tees Valley to more than 200 global destinations through hubs at Schiphol and Heathrow.

The sites mentioned are easily accessible by rail, car, cycling, walking and strong bus networks. This ensures no-one is disadvantaged. Support can also be accessed from the Lets Go Team at Tees Valley Combined Authority to implement sustainable transport options, accessible by all.

Darlington Council work closely with key transport stakeholders, and for example, use our links with Arriva to continuously review bus timetables, including adapting services to support local businesses (eg. Amazon). Also, we actively promote car sharing, cycling etc to support sustainable transport options.



Opportunities for Great British Railways

Darlington is synonymous with the railways. Darlington's railway heritage and modern-day reputation will provide a strong foundation on which to engage with customers, the private sector and the wider transport industry. However, we recognise that reputation alone is not enough. The Council, the Tees Valley Mayor, local MPs, and other key stakeholders are committed to work together to facilitate the establishment and growth of key relationships within the local area. We have strong relationships with local businesses and encourage them to support and implement developments and improvements in Darlington. Using expert knowledge and experience, the partnership can facilitate a wide range of connections to ensure that GBR are successfully engaged and the shared vision for Great Britain's railway can be realised.

There are a range of opportunities for working with the rail industry from a local base.

In the immediate locality, there's an OEM and a range of rail supply-chain firms. Most notably, Hitachi Newton Aycliffe, just 6 miles from Darlington train station, manufactures and assembles railway rolling stock, employ almost a 1000 people, and has created a supply-chain of over 1.400 individual suppliers. This has enabled a number of local suppliers to enter the global rail market.

Darlington is home to Henry Williams Limited. Founded in 1883, Henry Williams Limited is one of Britain's oldest railway-based companies. In 1911, industrial pioneer Henry Williams paced the floor of his engineering works in Darlington, overseeing the manufacture of switch levers, points, cranks and joints that would help make Britain's railways the envy of the world. Over a century later, Howard Dilley paces the same workshop floor, his ears protected from the thundering beat of a forge hammer, newly installed at a cost of £600,000. Henry Williams Limited has been a major engineering supplier to the UK's railway network since 1883 and is based in Darlington.

As well as direct connections to private enterprise, Darlington can help GBR connect with local business organisations and representative groups, as well as academic and learning institutions.

Altogether, Darlington can facilitate the development of these relations between GBR and the wider supply and support infrastructure.

In Darlington, as with many towns, we are seeking for more investment to take full advantage of its inherent strengths. Darlington Borough Council recognises that we have several challenges, including: the lowest workplace and residence-based earnings in the Tees Valley, a high proportion of young people not in work, education, or training (NEETs) whilst local graduates often leave the Borough to find “good jobs”. In response, the local aim is for people to go far, but stay local.

The investment associated with the Great British Railways will be a real game changer for the town and the region. To ensure this is fully realised the Council and Tees Valley Combined Authority are passionate about developing more than just a transactional relationship. We want to develop a long-term, sustainable, and productive relationship which achieves the social benefits of this exciting project and encourages clean and inclusive growth across the region.

We are confident that the locating of Great British Railways will trigger the much-needed local multiplier effect with the creation of direct additional jobs associated with the location and a huge stimulus in the number of local jobs because of the increased demand for locally produced goods and services.

Great British Railways could benefit from these links through the opportunities the improvements to the station will bring, which means greater use and therefore more customer engagement. Darlington as a key railway linked location will increase awareness of visitor attractions, improved retail offering, which again will mean increased railway engagement and use.

The proposed site locations are adjacent to the main line railway station.

This central location gives visibility and prominence to the GBR position, thus helping to increase profile and attract top talent. Its central location combined with the railway heritage in Darlington will allow GBR to form strong relationships within the town and wider region.

Recently, plans to transform Darlington railway station were approved by Darlington Borough Council, with a scheme aiming to improve the frequency and reliability of services as well as connectivity along the East Coast Main Line and across the region. The plans include a new entrance, station building, concourse, multi-storey car park and upgrade to integrated transport links and cycle facilities.

These plans present a major opportunity to improve the experience of the railway, providing a modern customer focussed environment, with a range of facilities to encourage sustainable transport options. The physical close proximity of the location will enhance GBR’s image, association, and connection with the future of the railways.



Railway heritage & links to the network

The importance of the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR) cannot be understated. Railways across the world have their genesis here in the first public railway to use steam locomotives, dating back almost 200 years. Opening on 27th September 1825, the line connected collieries near Shildon with Darlington and Stockton in Country Durham.

The Stockton & Darlington Railway Company was formed in 1818. Edward Pease, a prominent woollen manufacturer from Darlington, was the main financial backer of the railway and as such held considerable influence over its development. He, together with his Quaker banking friends and family, had the capital to take forward the vision of a permanent transport infrastructure capable of being extended across the country. For these reasons, Edward Pease is often referred to as “the father of the railways”.

The S&DR paved the way for all that followed. It brought together the components of the modern railway. The S&DR provided a model. Others would then take inspiration, and the passenger railways would then spread across the globe.

It was clear to the promoters of the S&DR that this was the start of a national network. When the Croft Branch line was formally opened in 1829, it was speculated that one day the railway would allow travellers to lunch in Darlington and take an opera in London the same evening. Such a vision was met with considerable mirth at the time, but the Croft Branch was to have a role in making that national network a reality when part of it became what remains to this day, the east coast mainline.

When the S&DR was being designed and built, there was no model of a successful railway to copy. No one had yet invented the railway station or signals and other aspects of what we now think of as defining a railway. The S&DR Company had the vision to use the technology that had been evolving over many years and adapt it for a bigger more ambitious purpose. This set it apart from other early railways. It was to be the role of the S&DR to bring several technical innovations together in one place and through hard work and perseverance prove that it could be made to work. In the process the modern railway was invented.

These historical events that have cemented Darlington's global identity as the birthplace of the railways.

It is easy to see how GBR can connect with this legacy and railway milestone. No other place in the world can showcase the place where the modern railway was born.

However, Darlington's railway heritage is much more than the events of 27th September 1825.

Over the following decades, as railways spread across the world, the Stockton and Darlington railway also expanded its network of tracks across the NE of England reaching as far as Barnard Castle, Redcar, Cumbria and Weardale. It was amalgamated with the North East Railway in 1863.

Darlington's association with the railways expanded with the development of the North Road Railway workshops, Faverdale wagon works, the Stooferdale Paint and Boiler shop and the Hopetown Carriage works. In addition, Stephenson and Hawthorn locomotive builders designed and built locomotives for the overseas market.

As well as manufacturing, Darlington was the base for the mechanical design and commercial hub for the North-Eastern Railway at the grandiose Stooferdale offices, now home to RailPen, the Railway Pensions Company.

By the turn of the century, the railways were truly embedded in Darlington's economic and social well-being. At their peak, these railway plants employed 7,000 of Darlington's 80,000 population.

But it could not last forever.

In 1966, the Darlington North Road workshops finally closed – having built nearly 3,000 locomotives in its 102-year lifetime.

Many predicted this was the end of the line for Darlington's connection with the railways...



But, in 1995, Darlington's association with the railways was once again fired up with the arrival of the A1 Steam Locomotive Trust, and the ambitious plans of building a steam locomotive from scratch, with no recovered/restored parts, a feat never achieved in the preservation movement before, and not completed in Britain for a main line locomotive since 1960. Finally, in August, 2008, Tornado moved in steam for the first time, the culmination of thirteen years hard work. Darlington's connection with the railways was once again alive and tangible, and continues to this day with the latest locomotive, the Prince of Wales, due for completion soon.

Darlington remains a location of choice for those in the rail industry, and GBR would benefit from the many locational advantages identified by those before them.

On the 27th September 2025 the world will mark the bicentenary of the railway that got the world on track. Here lies a great opportunity for GBR to be part of this global railway celebration.

The Stockton & Darlington Railway was just one way the town had a massive impact on the world, that can still be felt to this day. Local people are rightly proud of this heritage.



The creation of Darlington's Rail Heritage Quarter will become a major part of the region's S&DR 200th anniversary celebrations. These exciting plans show the scale of ambition to make it a top-quality attraction, which will be a huge draw for rail enthusiasts, history buffs and families alike. This is urban regeneration and heritage celebration at its very best. Darlington has long been known for its engineering excellence both past and present and this fabulous innovative project will help showcase the town's proud history.

The Rail Heritage Quarter is a major project that will invest in the town's rail legacy ahead of the 2025 celebrations to create a national visitor destination in Darlington. Heritage and cultural regeneration are now recognised as a key ingredient in economic growth and the Railway Heritage Quarter will complement the economic growth ambition of the borough.

Essential improvements will be carried out on several significantly historic buildings on the site, linking them together to create a cluster of attractions including the Skerne Railway Bridge, built for the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825, and one of only seven Grade I listed railway bridges in England. Digital and technological investment will bring history to life and plans include a new immersive ride experience the likes of which are only seen at theme parks.

The new GBR headquarters would highlight the legacy of Darlington's railway heritage to both current and future generations.

Value for Money

It's simple to see why people choose Darlington – it offers a fantastic quality of life which is second to none!

From a business perspective, Darlington offers excellent transport links via road, rail, air and port, a cost competitive location with salary and office costs lower than the UK average; and a highly skilled local workforce.

It is these attributes and more that have encouraged major public and private enterprises to invest in Darlington. The significant investment announced by HM Treasury to create the new “Darlington Economic Campus” demonstrates how Darlington can provide a “value-for-money” location – and builds on the earlier developments established by the Department for Education and the Student Loans Company.

And it's not just the public sector that are realising the benefits of Darlington's location. Recent investments by Cummins Engine, Redde Northgate and Capita illustrate the effectiveness of Darlington as a value for money business location, providing financial efficiency in both the short and longer terms.

From an individual perspective, Darlington offers a quality housing offer to suit all budgets, has nationally recognised further education and training provision, and provides a high quality of life in the heart of the north of England.

Darlington boasts some of the best urban housing in the country, with a mixture of high-quality Victorian town houses, residential apartments and detached and semi-detached housing within easy walking distance of the town centre. As a popular housing market, Darlington has something to offer everyone either within close proximity to the town or within charming rural villages set amidst glorious countryside.

Quality of life is good here because people get more for their money. In Darlington, you can work in a location with a dynamic and growing economy and live in picturesque countryside with all the benefits of rural living. No need to choose between your career and quality of life

The locations identified as a potential base for the GBR in Darlington provide an opportunity to dovetail with on-going investment plans and capitalise on the station improvement works. Alongside the regeneration of the station, the wider infrastructure improvements will complement the overall vision for the railways of the future, and present the GBR as part of that dynamic and progressive railway services of the future. Many of the developments proposed for Darlington station are now fully funded, so choosing Darlington would present an opportunity to associate and integrate with the developments at the same time as minimising costs for a flagship location

The Council, working with a wide range of other stakeholders, are keen to maximise the public value of all our investments. At a strategic level, the Council are keen to promote and develop the towns reputation as a centre for industry, commerce and governance, which would be enhanced by the regeneration benefits the GBR HQ could bring. The reputational value of Darlington's assets is second to none.

At a more practical level, the Council are keen to maximise public value whether possible, using procurement and social value frameworks to ensure wider benefits are realised, whether that be in terms of investing in local training and skills, aspiring young people into the world of work, or developing initiatives based around environmental improvement or supporting Climate Emergency goals.

There is also potential to work with local colleges and training providers on skills for the future, resulting in high quality jobs in the local area, lessening the need for extensive travelling, and developing a strong skills base in Darlington. Already, HM Treasury are working with Darlington College and Teesside University to develop local skills and talent, truly levelling up which the Great British Railway HQ could benefit from.

As a catalyst for new investment, opportunities for new jobs and new careers are vitally important, and will present pathways for people into the world of work. By providing these diverse opportunities, both directly and indirectly, many economic and social challenges can be addressed, such as increasing prosperity, reducing deprivation, and promoting identity. For example, Darlington College has secured almost £600,000 to create a business hub for professional qualifications and a hi-tech training centre for the advanced manufacturing and automation/robotics sector. Both areas will be pivotal in the upskilling of the workforce for local employers.

Public Support

Darlington's bid is backed not only by Darlington Borough Council, but also supported by the town's MPs Peter Gibson and Paul Howell, the Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership, the Tees Valley Mayor, Teesside University and Darlington College. The local business community are keen supporters of the bid, with direct support from the Darlington Business Club, Tees Valley Combined Authority North East England Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Business.

The railways have been central to the economic and cultural life of Darlington people for 200 years. The birthplace of the railways is celebrated, and organisations such as the A1 Locomotive Trust, the Darlington Railway Preservation Society, and the Friends of Stockton & Darlington Railway provide regular activities to maintain interest and engagement with local communities. Local people are rightly proud of their railway heritage, and they are excited that pride could be rewarded and cemented with Great British Railway being cited here, in Darlington, where it all began.

