
OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY AND REGENERATION PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Economy and Regeneration Portfolio.

Town Centre Public Sector Hub

2. Detailed design work for the Public Sector Hub and DfE Offices has now been completed to a stage to facilitate the submission of a planning application (16 August 2013). The archaeological evaluation trenches produced remains of significance, specifically in relation to the Bishop's Palace. The Council, together with our consultant team, have agreed an Archaeological Mitigation Strategy, resulting in the car parking been closed from 23rd September to enable further architectural excavation works to take place. The excavation will last 8 to 12 weeks following which the development will commence. Some works to the Town Hall, to ensure there are appropriately accessible emergency exits, may be required and options have been considered and will be implemented appropriately. The pedestrian route along Leadyard, from Leadyard Bridge to the front of the Town Hall will remain open throughout the build. Cycle access along the road between the Town Hall and St. Cuthbert's Church also remains open. Replacement disabled parking bays have been reprovided in the area between St. Cuthbert's and the Town Hall.
3. The parties are scheduled to enter into the Full Agreement for Lease and Lease in September 2013.
4. TVU have confirmed the Council's application for Growing Places Fund has been approved. Cabinet agreed to the release of £1,100,000 of Growing Places funding to support the delivery of the development. The Director of Resources has been authorised to agree the terms of any loan conditions on behalf of the Council and the Assistant Director Resources had been authorised to put in place the legal agreement between the Council and Stockton Borough Council as an accountable body. This project will enhance the environmental, social and economic well-being of the Borough

Release of Planning Agreement Payment – Skerne Park

5. Cabinet agreed in principle to the release of £100,000 submitted by Miller Homes as part of a Section 106 Planning Agreement for community facilities at Skerne Park. The planning agreement dates from 2007 and following recent consultation with residents and various groups a range of appropriate uses have now been identified for the money. The proposals comprise the appointment of a temporary project worker, a security fence for the football pitch and a replacement door to the

Skerne Park Community Centre building. The project has been delayed by the requirement to renew governance arrangements at the Community Centre and as this has been achieved the necessary arrangements are in place to make progress. There is a requirement to ensure that the money is spent by December 2013.

Collective Energy Switching

6. Rising energy costs are increasing fuel poverty and affecting economic growth so by switching energy suppliers we can save money, however, this is a complex process with multiple suppliers and tariffs to choose from.
7. Cabinet have approved entering into a direct contract with iChoosr, a Collective Energy Switching provider, to deliver a Collective Energy Switching Scheme on a one-year trial/pilot basis with a view to undertaking a review to explore longer-term options.
8. By entering into this contract with iChoosr, the Council can immediately support residents and organisations through a switching process to secure cheaper energy. The Council's role will be to promote and communicate the Scheme to local residents, encouraging registration, using its trusted brand, networks and local approach.
9. The Scheme is web based, however, for those residents who are offline, a paper registration process can be made available and we will be working with Darlington Citizens Advice Bureau and Age UK Darlington HE-AT (Health and Energy Affordability Team) to support delivery of this element of the scheme. Supported switching options for SMEs and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations are also available
10. Residents interested in participating can either register up to and including 15 October 2013 with their current energy bill details either online (details on the Council's website), or offline with support from Darlington Citizens Advice Bureau and Age UK Darlington. On 16 October 2013 energy suppliers will be invited to participate in a reverse energy auction to get the lowest bid possible. The winning supplier(s) with the cheapest tariff in the auction gets to offer this to the people who have registered in order for them to have the opportunity to sign up to a new energy contract. The registration is free and there is no obligation to switch. Residents can decide whether the winning offer is interesting enough for them to decide to switch.

Making and Growing Places Preferred Options Consultation

11. An extensive consultation exercise was carried out between 21 June and 9 August on the Council's emerging Local Plan. The Making and Growing Places Preferred Options document, which includes proposed new development sites to meet the housing, employment, retail, leisure and community needs of the Borough to 2026, has attracted a lot of interest. The drop-in sessions were generally well attended, particularly in areas where new housing sites have been proposed. As well as comments made at the events, officers have also received over 250 written responses, including petitions, in the main, highlighting a range of

concerns/objections to the proposed housing sites. The Council now has the task of analysing all the responses and considering whether the plan should be amended in light of the responses received.

Business Engagement

12. The annual refresh of the Business Information Guide has recently been completed by the Business Engagement team. The Guide – produced in electronic PDF format – serves as a handy reference guide for businesses, detailing business support services available through the Council and partner organisations.
13. The online Vacant Sites and Premises Register has been comprehensively overhauled and is now accessible to businesses and individuals looking to identify suitable premises for business start-up and expansion. The Register is accessible at www.darlington.gov.uk/business
14. The success of the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP), a series of workshops delivered in partnership with Teesside University over the last 12 months, has led to the University committing to a further year of delivery, which is great news for Darlington businesses. Covering a diverse range of subjects, EDP has included: Social Media for Businesses; Press Releases; Marketing on a Shoe String and Presentational Techniques.
15. A ‘Meet the Buyer’ event took place on 24 September in conjunction with Keepmoat Homes, who recently commenced initial works on their residential development at Central Park, which will ultimately comprise of 332 homes. The event was aimed at construction and associated trades, with a view to raising awareness of supply chain opportunities for local businesses.
16. In addition, in conjunction with Darlington Business Club, a ‘Buy Local’ event is scheduled to take place in October.

Darlington Flexible Routeway

17. The Darlington Flexible Routeway, funded through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Flexible Support Fund has come to an end. From August 2012 to May 2013, this provided employers with an ‘Up Skilling Grant’ of up to £1,500 to encourage the recruitment of a young person in an apprenticeship or providing employment with training towards the equivalent of a NVQ2 qualification.
18. 55 companies received money through the scheme, which resulted in 31 apprenticeships being created and 30 jobs being created (some employers took on more than one employee or apprentice).
19. An additional subsidy has recently been made available through the Foundation for Jobs campaign, which can provide funding up to a maximum of £1,500. To obtain the maximum grant available businesses will need to take on employees from specific target groups, which include young people leaving care and individuals living in specified wards.

Foundation for Jobs

20. The targets for the second year of the campaign (2013-14) have been signed off by the Steering Group. These include a 25 per cent increase in numerical targets e.g. the creation of an additional 125 apprenticeships (1st year target 100); 125 internships (previously 100); 1,250 young people to have had meaningful contact with industry (1,000). In addition, new targets have been agreed which focus on increasing the number of companies actively engaged in the campaign; increasing engagement with primary schools; capturing the number of 'Likes' and 'Followers' in respect of Social Media aspects and the number of unique visitors to the campaign's website.
21. A new dedicated website has recently been launched and is accessible at www.foundationforjobs.co.uk
22. A Low Carbon event (showcasing opportunities in the sector and raising awareness of the importance of STEM subjects) – similar in format to the event held in Summer 2012, is currently in the final stages of planning and will be held on 11 October. It is hoped that all of Darlington's secondary schools will be able to attend.

High Street Innovation Fund (HSIF)

23. Good progress is being made in the rollout of funding received from government to improve and help occupy vacant units in the town centre. The funding has helped around 20 new businesses move into vacant properties in all parts of the town centre. There has been a particular impact at Bondgate, at the part beyond the St. Augustine's Way roundabout. Six new businesses have recently received funding and occupied previously vacant premises, in an area with a relatively high vacancy rate, which is very pleasing.
24. A breakthrough has also been made by obtaining permission from relevant parties to carry out cosmetic improvements to some priority units in Northgate and Skinnergate. The High Street funding has enabled the units to be cleaned, painted and fitted with attractive window vinyls; which has really uplifted the appearance of these units and the town centre.

Tees Valley Workforce Skills

25. Hartlepool Borough Council on behalf of the five Tees Valley local authorities and Tees Valley Unlimited, has been successful in securing European Social Fund (ESF) monies through the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) to deliver a programme focussed on upskilling employed individuals aged 19+. The project will cover the whole of the Tees Valley, with a focus on identified priority sectors and their supply chains. Scheduled to commence in September, the project will run until July 2015. The aim is to proactively engage with employers to identify skills issues; determine potential solutions and identify funding and delivery options.

Darlington Business Growth Hub

26. Cabinet agreed to release £3.3m European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funding and £3m Home and Community Agencies (HCA) Funding subject to the Directors of Place and Resources being satisfied with the conditions on the funding offers and on the terms of the lease to be offered by HCA to the Council in respect of the Business Growth Hub. The Council are now to undertake a competitive tender process and award a contract for the construction and associated infrastructure work on the Business Growth Hub including all fees. The Assistant Director of Resources has been authorised to complete all the necessary legal agreements and documentation.

The National Biologics Manufacturing Centre

27. A new £38m government flagship centre, which specialises in trialling and promoting the manufacture of life-saving medicines, such as antibodies and vaccines, is to be built in Darlington. The National Biologics Manufacturing Centre (NBMC) is being funded through investment announced as part of the Government's Strategy for UK Life Sciences. Darlington was chosen due to its location – being close to existing centres of manufacturing and also its good transport links with the rest of the UK. This represents a coup for the whole North East area as only ten such National Centres will be announced and built in the UK based on the 'Catapult' Sector initiative by Government to lead on innovation based growth. As those centres will be strategically allocated around the UK this will be the only Centre of this national importance coming to the North East area. Darlington beat off high level competitors in the UK such as Cambridge, Science City Newcastle, the former Pfizer laboratories in Thanet Kent, Edinburgh and Merseyside. The North East density of manufacturing and research competence in the medical and biological sector will be further strengthened making vicinity to the new centre a key locational investment factor for new and expanding enterprises in those growth sectors.

Central Park

28. Following legal completion on Central Park in June 2013, Keepmoat Homes commenced works to create the internal junction with Vicarage Road; these initial highway works were completed in August. Phase 1A of the residential development which comprised part of the Council's Depot has been vacated and was transferred to Keepmoat Homes on 31 July 2013, in line with the Sale Agreement. Preparation work for the residential development, including the demolition of the former Joiner Shop and Stores areas and the remediation of the site are underway. It is anticipated that residential development will commence September/October with the Sales Complex being delivered before the end of the Year and officially opened early in the new year.
29. A land assembly strategy for the south of the site, which is required to deliver the Yarm Road junction and the wider masterplan is being developed by the Council in line with the Homes and Community Agency. The acquisitions will be funded through the land receipt generated from the Sale of Central Park North – Residential, to Keepmoat Homes.

30. The Highways Team are also progressing the detailed design for the Yarm Road junction, which should be delivered before any further development, beyond that already proposed for Central Park South (ie over and above the Business Growth Hub and National Biologics Manufacturing Centre), can go ahead.

Heritage

31. After a year of detailed and participatory discussions with the local community, railway heritage groups and stakeholders, significant progress has been made in creating the conditions for the celebration and investment in Darlington's key unique railway, industrial and Quaker historic assets. The Railway Heritage Enquiry Group continues to be the forum for the visioning process alongside the exciting and demanding task of harnessing these assets for economic growth and jobs, centred around the Head of Steam Railway Museum site on North Road. The group is also beginning to make plans for 2025, the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of passenger railways, to include events leading up to this, the identification and funding for key infrastructure and the creating of a lasting legacy putting Darlington on the map in a global context, stimulating tourism and visitor spend and dwell time.

Northumbrian Water 2015-20

32. Northumbrian Water (NW) is committed to providing water and sewerage to its customers at the right price and is currently in the process of refreshing its plans to deliver those services.
33. Following consultation with customers and stakeholders and the Water Group, an independent group made of a wide range of representatives, the NW business plan is due to be published in December 2013 and will describe its strategy for 2015-20.
34. Two options have been identified namely, improvements to be achieved within the cost of inflation and further improvements for a small additional cost. Further details are available on www.nwplanningforthefuture.co.uk

Darlington Cares

35. Established in October 2012 and supported by the Council, Darlington Cares is a partnership of leading employers committed to making Darlington a better place through employee-volunteering. In early 2012, businesses in the private sector, supported by Teesside University and Darlington Borough Council, came together to talk about corporate social responsibility and employee volunteering, with the view to coordinating resources to address Darlington's community needs, particularly in areas of disadvantage.
36. Darlington Cares continues to deliver a programme focused on four key areas of need: community, environment, children and young people and older people. Our activities range from team style challenges through to donation appeals and annual programmes.

Economy Strategy

37. Economic Strategy Implementation Group Meeting was held on 6th August – the purpose of the meeting is to review progress to date against the action plan.
38. Economic Strategy Board meeting was held on the 30th August – the purpose of the meeting is to provide strategic context to the delivery of the action plan, and approve key decisions.
39. A annual monitoring report is being produced to consider progress made with respect to the economic strategy action plan, identify new actions, and revise/amend/delete others where appropriate.

**Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio**