
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:

Business Improvement District (BID) Project

2. We are currently within the ballot period of the BID project. Ballot papers were sent out to eligible town centre businesses at the start of the month and businesses have until 30 March to return ballot papers and say whether they want a Business Improvement District or not. For a BID to come in, a majority vote must be obtained by both numbers of businesses and by rateable value.
3. The ballot follows an extensive consultation period, which started with a survey to determine businesses priorities last June, business meetings in autumn and face to face meetings in January and February. The Business Plan was distributed last month. The Business Plan outlines the project and proposals in detail, with a breakdown of the £1.5m (five year) budget and improvement projects that would be implemented.
4. The fully representative Task Group has met regularly and agreed all activities throughout the development of the project. If a 'Yes' vote was returned, the BID company 'Distinct Darlington' would formally launch in July, following a three month set up period.

Falchion Fund

5. The Falchion Fund is a 'soft' loan scheme i.e. an unsecured loan facility, offered at preferential rates to eligible businesses. The minimum loan amount is £3,000 and the maximum is £10,000, over a maximum term of 5 years. The loan is only available to Darlington-based businesses and is funded 50/50 by the BAT (British American Tobacco) Legacy and HSBC Bank.
6. I am pleased to note that there have been increased levels of interest in the Falchion Fund over the past few months, enquiries being received from a diverse range of business sectors. In addition, there has been a noted increase in enquiries from companies looking to set up or grow within the manufacturing and engineering sectors.
7. Presently we have 3 applications to the Fund which are being prepared for submission to the Falchion Fund Panel. There are a further 3 enquiries which may warrant progression to the credit check stage, pending further information being supplied.

Business Start-Up Workshops in Schools

8. The Council's Business Engagement team has recently begun delivering workshops in schools within the Borough. Initial discussions have taken place with Longfield; Education Village and Hummersknott, and confirmed dates agreed with Education Village and Longfield schools.
9. The workshops have been designed to engage both pupils and their guardians. The workshops will act as an introduction to enterprising behaviours and will help individuals to identify their own entrepreneurial skills.
10. The workshops will cover:
 - (a) How enterprising are you?
 - (b) Skills required to run your own business/enterprise
 - (c) Identifying your skills set
 - (d) Development of skills for enterprise
11. It is envisaged that these workshops will be able to be built upon and extended to further schools. The workshops will contribute to the targets outlined in the Foundation for Jobs campaign.
12. An initial workshop was held at Longfield Academy on 23 February, with 30 pupils having taken part. Feedback from school staff and pupils has been very positive, with one of the teachers commenting: *"Pupils were given the opportunity to think differently from how they normally do and were put outside their comfort zone which resulted in them getting a lot more from the activities."* The school has asked that another workshop is convened a different group of pupils.

Schools' Olympic-themed Business Challenge Event – 24 & 25 February

13. A team of budding entrepreneurs from Hummersknott Academy, Darlington triumphed in an Olympic-themed business challenge, held on Friday 24 and Saturday 25 February. 'Omega' developed the concept of 'smart' goggles, to be used as a training aid for Olympic swimmers, which relayed performance and medical information to the user's Coach. Second prize went to 'E-Foot' from Longfield Academy, who developed a trainer for improving performance and third prize was won by 'H2Go', again from Hummersknott, with a wristband that monitored body hydration. The event organised by Darlington Borough Council, sought to develop young peoples' employability and entrepreneurial skills, and to illustrate the importance of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects within the curriculum and also their relevance in a work environment.
14. Seven of Darlington's secondary schools fielded a total of thirteen teams at the event, where 80 Year Nine pupils were given a real-life product development challenge to complete, with the help of STEM Ambassadors and representatives from local firms.
15. At the start of the event on Friday morning, teams were given an overview of emerging 'smart' technologies and the Olympic values. They were tasked with developing a product concept that would assist or improve athlete performance.

16. Each team member was assigned a defined business role and had a specific part to play in ensuring their product could be launched to market. Teams gave an informal presentation about their product to a panel of industry experts, with the top three teams formally pitching their business idea to a Judging Panel; parents and members of the public. 'Omega' were presented with an award for the best product idea.
17. The event, run by the Council and RTC North, forms part of the Darlington Partnership Foundation for Jobs campaign which aims to increase vocational opportunities for young people in Darlington by fostering alliances between employers, schools and public sector providers.

Foundation for Jobs - Update

18. The initiative will run throughout 2012 and beyond and will give young people a better chance of finding work by developing more effective links between schools, colleges, universities and employers to help young people get a better understanding of the world of work and to get better connected with local employers.
19. A Coordinator has been appointed to for an initial 12-month period, commencing in April. Owen McAteer, currently the Business Editor of the Northern Echo will take up the role on a secondment basis.
20. The campaign is gathering real momentum with a number of employers having signed up to the Pledge, to the extent that at least 15 new apprenticeship positions have been created as a direct consequence of the awareness raising activities delivered through the campaign. In addition, 30 pupils have been involved in a workshop focussed on developing their enterprise and employability skills.
21. Specific action plans around the key workstreams of the Campaign, namely: Apprenticeships; Enterprise & Employability Skills; Cadets, and Internships are currently being developed.

Town Centre Fringe

22. The Town Centre Fringe consultation is now underway. The first presentations have been made to Prosperous Darlington and Place Scrutiny. In advance of adoption, the Homes and Communities Agency have indicated the possibility of £10M of funding to the Town Centre Fringe. A programme of public events and targeted workshops are being planned for late March and early April, with specific targeting of hard to reach groups. Funding bids are being made to allow the first stages of river restoration.
23. Place Scrutiny has endorsed the draft plans and have asked for updates on specific matters of pedestrian access, heritage, riverside improvements and district heating, with a view to alleviating fuel poverty. Currently the scheme is generating press interest which is raising the profile of the area.

Prosperous Heritage (Railway Heritage Summit)

24. The Prosperous Heritage (Railway Heritage Summit) is scheduled to take place in April 2012. A wide range of stakeholders have been invited and there has been an enthusiastic response and this event promises to be timely and well attended. Place Scrutiny Committee have fully endorsed the approach to heritage in the Town Centre Fringe masterplan and this offers a key opportunity to make more of the world class heritage assets in the area. The meeting will feature short presentations from Officers, my keynote address and a workshop session exploring the asset base, its potential value and a look to the future of how all parties can collaborate to ensure a sustainable future.

Enterprise Zone – Secretary of State

25. The Council has received confirmation that the Secretary of State does not wish to intervene in the Local Development Order (LDO) for Central Park Enterprise Zone. The simplified planning procedures of the LDO will be complemented by business rates relief of up to £55,000 p.a. for eligible Digital businesses locating onto Central Park. Central Park is a “locally funded” site within the Tees Valley Enterprise Zone which will come into place on 1 April 2012, lasting three years.

Central Park – Masterplan Consultation

26. The Central Park development partners, including the Council, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and the developer consortium have been working collaboratively to refresh the masterplan for Central Park. An opportunity to comment on the masterplan brief and the progress of the masterplan was made available during February; this involved sending a leaflet to over 1400 properties in the immediate surrounding area and the display of information in the entrance of Darlington College reception, along with the publication of details on the Council's webpages. In addition a pre-application meeting of the Planning Applications Committee was held at which Members were able to discuss the masterplan and ask questions of the developers. The Council also discussed the forthcoming masterplan with the College and University as key stakeholders in the site. Comments received as a result of this consultation will be incorporated within the forthcoming masterplan. Officers of the Council are working to ensure the final masterplan to be considered by Cabinet in due course.
27. The developer consortium is intending to take a further round of consultation in connection to the forthcoming planning application for the first phase of development in the coming months.

Darlington Economic Strategy Business Consultation Event

28. The event, at Lingfield Point on 8th March, organised to support the ongoing economic strategy work, formed part of the consultation process. The event featured a key note address from Hugh Morgan Williams OBE, and Chairman of Canford Group plc, and was an opportunity for businesses not already involved in the enquiry group process to contribute to the development of the new economic strategy for the town. The event presented feedback on the work of the enquiry groups and presented the opportunities for economic growth for Darlington in key sectors (advanced manufacturing and engineering; logistics; health and social care; digital and creative media; retail and leisure). A good cross

section of Darlington businesses attended, expressing strong confidence in the opportunities for business growth in Darlington, building on the Borough's existing strengths, and strong enthusiasm for a driving forward a private-sector lead strategy to create the conditions for business growth.

Feethams Cinema Site Timetable

29. The site is formally on the market, with a closing date for bids of 25th April 2012.

Trading Standards - Age Restricted Products

30. Trading Standards regularly take action to reduce sales of age restricted products, notably alcohol and tobacco, to under-age customers. Recent activity has included the following:
- (a) An underage alcohol sales test purchasing operation carried out by Trading Standards, over the Christmas and New Year period, resulted in two sales to an underage volunteer. These offences are currently being investigated.
 - (b) To help traders selling age restricted products, Trading Standards held a training event on 25 January 2012. The training event enabled the 28 people attending to complete "The Fair Trading Award on Age Restricted Products," which is nationally accredited by the Trading Standards Institute. This training helps businesses and their staff understand their legal responsibilities when selling age restricted products, including alcohol and tobacco, and gives practical help on how they can comply.

Environmental Health - Food Hygiene Prosecution

31. Following a history of poor compliance with food hygiene legislation the Council has prosecuted Hein Ngo the owner of Chef Peking, located at 61 Alverton Drive, Faverdale. He pleaded Guilty at Darlington Magistrates Court on 10 January to three food hygiene offences relating to cleanliness of premises, cleanliness of equipment, and lack of food safety system. He was fined a total of £1702.50 to be paid at a rate of £50 per week.

Environmental Health - Implementation of national food hygiene rating scheme

32. Letters were sent to all food businesses in the Council's area in January advising that the national food hygiene rating scheme will replace the existing Tees Valley Food Hygiene Awards Scheme on 1 April 2012.
33. The national Food Hygiene Rating Scheme will apply to all premises in the Borough which supply food directly to the consumer. Businesses will be rated on food hygiene and safety; structure and cleaning; and confidence in management and control systems when the Council's food safety officers carry out their unannounced visits.
34. Information about ratings under the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme will be available to view on the Food Standards Agency website at www.food.gov.uk/ratings and businesses will be encouraged to display stickers and certificates showing the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme rating for their premises. Businesses will be given a rating from 5 (very good) through to 0 (urgent improvement necessary).

35. The Tees Valley Food Hygiene Rating Scheme was set up in 2007 and operated by Darlington, Stockton, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool and Redcar Cleveland councils. Tees Valley authorities are working together to implement the change on the same date. The Food Standards Agency has provided the necessary funding to cover the costs of implementing the scheme. By moving to the national Food Hygiene Rating Scheme, the benefits will be consistency for businesses and clarity for consumers across local authority boundaries.
36. Since the last meeting of Council, I have met with business and attended various meetings including the following :
- (a) Met with Simon Roberson, Regional Partnership Director, BT and local businesses to discuss problems in the area with Broadband.
 - (b) Met with Richard Wimbury, Chairman of Friends of Darlington Railway Centre and Museum, to discuss Heritage in Darlington. It was a cordial and constructive meeting and concluded with the Council agreeing to host the Prosperous Heritage Summit scheduled for April 2012 at the Head of Steam.
 - (c) Attended and gave a welcome and introduction at the Darlington Foundation for Jobs Programme meeting.
 - (d) Darlington Economic Strategy Conference – The Role of Councils in Economic Investment is a North East event hosted by the Association of North East councils and the Local Government Association. It forms part of the LGA's wider national 'Local Growth' campaign which highlights local government's leadership role and contribution in driving economic growth. This event focussed on positive investment in the North East, what the opportunities and barriers to investment are and explore what the right tools, mechanisms and incentives are for economies in this area of the country.
 - (e) Digital Enterprise Zone: discussing with Teesside University and North East Chamber of Commerce the business opportunities this could bring to the Borough.
 - (f) Real Life Entrepreneur Campaign – Federation of Small Businesses.
 - (g) Met with Environment Agency to discuss local and regional issues.
 - (h) Filmed for ANEC promotional DVD on the North East of England economy and the role of councils in economic development.
 - (i) Telehealth and Telecare – I introduced and met with a range of stakeholders to Tees Valley Unlimited to examine how the potential for growth in these sectors can be capitalised upon in the Tees Valley.
 - (j) Met with Tees Valley Unlimited staff to discuss opportunities to progress the skills agenda and links for Darlington initiatives into the wider Tees Valley.

- (k) 19th March – attended the Health and Wellbeing Development Session.
- (l) 21st March – attended the Tees Valley Unlimited ‘budget live’ event with keynote speaker David Smith, Economics Editor at the Sunday Times.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio