
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:

Albert Hill Skip Hire, Dodsworth Street, Darlington

2. Following a multi-agency inspection of Albert Hill Skip Hire, Dodsworth Street in July, a number of statutory notices have been served on the Company.
3. Environmental Health has served an Abatement Notice under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 requiring the removal of putrescible and mixed household waste from the site within 3 months. Development Management has served a Planning Enforcement Notice requiring that no more waste be imported on to the site from 11 September until mounds on the site have been brought down to 3 metres, and this to be done within 8 weeks. The Health and Safety Executive and Environment Agency have also served notices on the Company.
4. These actions demonstrate that the Council and our partner agencies take very seriously the environmental problems experienced by residents and linked to the activities of this business. Albert Hill Skip Hire Ltd has the right to appeal any of the enforcement notices, but failure to comply with them could lead to prosecutions.

E. coli Outbreak

5. Environmental Health have worked with the Health Protection Agency and neighbouring local authorities to investigate an outbreak of E. coli O157 food poisoning. During June and July six confirmed cases were reported by Darlington and North Yorkshire residents. Several potential sources were investigated including a Darlington butcher's. No enforcement action has been taken but advice from Environmental Health has been acted on by the business to remove any risk to the public.

Prosecution of Illegal Tattooist

6. Tattooing is an activity that requires the operator and the premises to be registered with the Council. Following the investigation by Environmental Health Officers of a complaint from a member of the public Joseph Vasarhelyi pleaded guilty to not having registered with the Council as a Tattooist and was fined £35 and the council was awarded costs of £200.

Prosecution of Caterer for Hygiene Offences

7. Abubakor Raju, Director of Shapla Indian Ltd, appeared at Darlington magistrates court on Wednesday August 17 charged with two counts of not maintaining clean premises and equipment at Shapla, 192 Northgate. The officers also found safety issues with the gas supply to the premises and this led to it being closed.
Mr Raju pleaded guilty to two charges under the Food Hygiene Regulations 2006. Since the offences Shapla has changed hands but remains closed whilst the gas safety issues are addressed.

Gas safety campaign focusing on catering premises

8. Visits by Environmental Health Officers to catering premises will now include particular attention to gas safety. Recent inspections of businesses throughout the Borough revealed various dangerous situations. In each case officers have liaised with engineers from GasSafe to ensure that the installations have been taken out of use, effectively closing the premises, whilst remedial action takes place.

Carbon Monoxide (CO) Detectors Save Lives

9. Nearly 600 CO detectors will be installed in peoples' homes, building on a scheme that has already installed almost 500 detectors. The Private Sector Housing Team working in partnership with the council's Home Improvement Agency Handyperson's scheme have installed nearly 500 CO detectors for free over the last 2 years. The detectors are being fitted in the homes of the over 55's and disabled householders in Darlington. In addition to these free installations, Private Sector Housing Officers will give a detector to vulnerable householders who are at significant risk because their heating appliances are old or are in poor condition. Several people lose their lives needlessly every year due to carbon monoxide poisoning and having an alarm will prevent loss of life.

DFAM

10. A pre-application presentation was given to Members of the Planning Committee by Persimmon Homes. The company are in partnership with the Durham Farmers Auction Market with the intention that their proposed development of some 490 dwellings on land to the west of Neasham Road will help finance the redevelopment of the MART site on land at Humbleton Farm. Members were able to question the developers about the scale and characteristics of the proposed development in this location. The developers are now considering the feedback they received.

Business Improvement District (BID)

11. The first formal stage in the BID consultation process was the 'Business Improvement Survey', which took place in July and August. Businesses within the proposed BID area were invited to complete a survey which asked businesses to state how important they rated all aspects of town centre activity, particularly in relation to marketing and events, environment, safety/security and accessibility. They were also asked to state what improvements they would like to see in the town centre.

12. An excellent response rate of 25% was achieved – the average for this type of survey is around 7-10%. Of the responses, 40% came from national/multiples and 60% from independents. The breakdown of respondents was: 63% retail, 11% food and drink, 7.5% office/commercial and the rest from ‘other’ sectors.
13. The BID Task Group has been established and had its first meeting in July. Made up of some of the key individuals from the BID area, and representing all sectors, the group is responsible for steering the activities of the BID project to the voting stage. The Group works closely with Mo Aswat from The Mosaic Partnership.
14. The Task Group is chaired by Terri-Anne Rigg, Manager of Marks & Spencer; the Vice-Chair is Nicola Reading, proprietor of Bliss Gifts and Chair of Darlington Town Centre Traders’ Association. The Council is represented by myself and the Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Leisure and Local Environment, Councillor Wallis. The Council will be major levy payer within a proposed BID, and the members will represent the Council's and its priorities within the BID projects and Business Plan development, which is a major part of the Task Group's remit.

Flexible Support Fund and Innovation Fund

15. Two new support funds through DWP have been announced and we are working with the other Tees Valley Authorities to prepare proposals to bid for monies. The funding is to prepare and assist unemployed individuals into employment and to assist 14 to 18 year olds to stay in education or entre jobs with training. We will report back if the bids are successful.

Economic Assessment/Economic Strategy

16. A “Draft” Economic Assessment Summary document has been produced, which is based on the Local Economic Assessment (a data gathering exercise to provide an economic evidence base for the council). Work is now ongoing with respect to the development of an Economic Strategy. In August presentations on the process to be adopted to develop the strategy (maximising business engagement and participation in the process) were presented at Prosperous Darlington Business Group and Prosperous Theme Group. The proposed process and level of engagement received support.

TVU Partnership Business Plan Framework

17. TVU are currently in the process of developing their business plan for 2011 – 2015. Stakeholder events to discuss the draft document and its identified objectives and priority activities are being held with key partners/stakeholders. It will be important to ensure that our economic strategy “dovetails” where appropriate with wider economic strategies and action plans.

Tees Valley Enterprise Zone

18. The Government has formally announced that Tees Valley has been successful in securing Enterprise Zone (EZ) for a number of key sites across the 5 Boroughs. The sites fall into three categories:

- (a) Formal EZ sites that will attract business rates relief and will operate a relaxed planning regime
 - (b) Formal EZ sites that will attract enhanced capital allowances
 - (c) “Locally funded” sites, funded by business rates generated by the formal EZ scheme that will attract business rates relief using and where possible will operate relaxed planning regulations
19. Category a) and b) sites form part of the formal EZ scheme and comprise sites that are considered key to the delivery of Tees Valley Statement of Ambition Priority One. Category c) sites are a local initiative that will focus on Tees Valley Statement of Ambition Priority Two and will stimulate Digital Industries. Central Park is one of four Digital Industries sites
20. A task and finish group has been established, chaired and facilitated by Tees Valley Unlimited with representatives from the five Tees Valley authorities that will work up the EZ scheme including governance, operational procedures and financial management arrangements. The group will report back to TVU in December with a view to reporting to Local Authorities in January 2012 in order to ensure that approval processes are adhered to and that the formal EZ scheme is launched on 1 April 2012. The EZ benefits will be limited to companies established within the first years after 1 April 2012. Financial benefits include the retention of the additional business rates (within the LEP) for 25 years. I have met with specialists in this field from Teesside University and Tees Valley Unlimited to discuss the Digital Agenda in Health Care.

Broadband, Telemarketing and Digital Industries

21. Complementary and in support of the EZ, two meetings have taken place between the Council and key stakeholders to investigate the feasibility of establishing / growing digital industries in Darlington. One key line of enquiry has been an examination of the Tele-care / Tele-health industry for which TVU has produced some initial scoping information as well as contact with potential partners. There is also ongoing work to examine the broadband needs of local businesses experiencing low bandwidth / connection speeds for which I have taken a lead in contacting BT to facilitate discussions. Tees Valley has also been allocated £770k from Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) to support the rollout of superfast broadband to areas for which it is not commercially viable to invest in infrastructure.

Meeting with Regional Sustainability Co-ordinator

22. Shruti Jain, Regional Sustainability Co-ordinator for Sustaine met with me and the Sustainable Development Officer on Friday 2nd September to discuss the role of Sustaine in the region and to determine any synergies and areas for joint working in delivering the sustainability agenda in Darlington. Sustaine is the independent champion body for sustainable development working across North East which provides a ‘support and challenge’ role to all organisations around the principles of sustainable development.

NI186 - CO2 emissions per capita

23. The latest figures released by DECC indicate that carbon emissions in Darlington are continuing to decrease. There has been a 16% reduction in CO2 emissions per capita over the last 4 years. This dataset, previously called National Indicator 186 under the National Indicator set, measures end-user carbon dioxide emissions in the local area from the

industrial, domestic and transport sector. This dataset relies on a draw-down of information from the National Inventory of Greenhouse Gas emissions.

24. Local and regional bodies have an important role in promoting energy efficiency and reducing carbon emissions. There is therefore significant demand for local data, which can be hard to obtain. This dataset is an attempt to provide data from national sources at a more local level to support local efforts.
25. Since the last meeting of Council, I have attended the following meetings :
 - (a) 22 July - I took the opportunity to visit the offices of the Citizens Advice Bureau and meet with Neeraj Sharma, Manager of the Bureau to talk through the relationship the Council has with this sector.
 - (b) 20 August – I was asked by the Chair of the Traders Association to judge the Town Crier National Championship competition. This prestigious event was staged in Darlington and hosted by our own Town Crier, Peter Stemmer. The winner of the competition was Nuneaton’s Town Crier, Paul Gough and the event concluded with a celebratory awards dinner for all those involved.
 - (c) 5 September – I Spent time with the Manager of the Cornmill Centre to view the development plans for centre which will introduce Debenhams to the Town. This major development will occupy the current Northern Echo building and create new jobs which are a major boost for the Town during difficult trading times. The Town Centre Board continues to monitor and support business activity.
 - (d) I continue to visit Darlington Businesses Leaders to monitor, support and understand their role in the jobs market and any development/opportunities for growth, including a recent visit to Mech Tool, one of four companies taking part in Encouraging Young Engineering Project which gives job opportunities to young people. Similarly, I visited Cummins who are key participants in ‘Encouraging Engineering’ scheme.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio