

---

**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.

**Central Park – Business Growth Hub**

2. We have given approval for the necessary steps to be taken to enable officers to set up contracts and other legal documentation in respect of the proposed Business Growth Hub on Central Park (formerly known as the Innovation Centre).
3. Plans have been developed over the past four years to create business incubation accommodation for new and growing Small to Medium Sized Enterprise businesses (SME's) in Darlington supported by funding from One North East, the former Regional Development Agency (RDA) and a detailed feasibility study was undertaken in 2010.
4. The Business Growth Hub will be located on Central Park within one of the sites covered by the Tees Valley Enterprise Zone and the sectoral focus of the Central Park Enterprise Zone is digital and as such any digital businesses based within the area identified will benefit from the Business Rate Relief.
5. The project has been developed as a result of an identified need and the key aims of this project will be to support SME's, create a Business Growth space, encourage innovation, entrepreneurship and collaboration, regenerate an under-used area and kick start Enterprise Zone development.

**Darlington Town Centre Fringe Masterplan**

6. We have agreed to support the Town Centre Fringe Masterplan and the associated Conservation Management Plan following consultation which took place between March and May 2012.
7. The Town Centre Fringe is identified in the adopted Local Plan Core Strategy as a sustainable strategic location where development and regeneration activity will be concentrated over the next 15 years.
8. Situated between Darlington Town Centre and Central Park, the Town Centre Fringe is a key opportunity to improve linkages between these locations and improve access to and from some of the most deprived wards in the Borough to jobs, services and leisure opportunities.

## **Careers and Opportunities Event - 16th May 2013**

9. The event will give young people the chance to get information and advice on a wide range of careers and find out about education, training and employment opportunities from schools, colleges, universities, employers and apprenticeship providers.
10. Local and Regional businesses, some with national and international connections will be at the event. Main employment areas represented will include engineering, the care sector and the hospitality trade. The businesses will be on hand to offer information and advice. Business start-up information and advice will also be available for those who are considering self-employment.
11. Alongside these, there will be a training providers' area with information on all the providers in the area, apprenticeships information and how and when to sign up for courses.

## **Funding**

12. The five local authorities within the Tees Valley and Durham County Council; and supported by Tees Valley Unlimited have submitted an application to the Job Centre Plus Flexible Support Fund. The Project will:
  - (a) Provide mentoring support to assist 400 Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claimants to enter into employment by March 2013. Of this, 80 per cent must be JSA claimants between the ages of 18 to 24 years.
  - (b) Engage with a minimum of 500 local employers across the Tees Valley to provide business support solutions to help companies create jobs and apprenticeships for young people. This element is particularly focused on small to medium sized enterprises.

## **The Prepare2Progress**

13. This is a pilot project, funded through the National Apprenticeship Service which will involve Young Care leavers who are not in Education, Employment or Training. The aim of the project is to offer a training and development programme that will support young people by building confidence, increasing optimism, identifying and breaking down barriers with the ultimate purpose of securing an Apprenticeship.
14. The project will also work with businesses to provide work experience places, work mentors and apprenticeships.

## **Empty Homes Bid Purchase and Repair**

15. The Council have supported a bid for Empty Homes funding by Coast and Country to deliver 20 long term empty homes back into use in Darlington over the next two years. The funding is available under the Homes and Communities Agency Empty Homes scheme. The scheme aims to increase the supply of affordable homes for local people and also engage with local people and local suppliers to sustain,

create and provide training and employment opportunities for local people through the construction and refurbishment process. The outcome of the bid should be known by June 2013 and will build upon the positive relationships developed between property owners, private landlords and the Empty Homes Officer who is part of the Private Sector Housing Team.

### **Water Quality Events Notified to the Council from Northumbrian Water Limited**

16. On 10 March at 15:08 residents living in the South Park, Firth Moor, Eastbourne and Red Hall areas reported to NWL that they had no water. Investigations identified a burst on the 18" cast iron water main. This main supplies approximately 13,000 properties in the centre and south east of Darlington. Water supply was restored to all customers by 21:30 and the main repaired by 00:45 on 11 March. The burst caused flooding to gardens and properties on Parkside located closest to the burst water main and Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service pumped the water away. Bottled water was delivered by NWL to 16 customers who had been included on the NWL at risk register as vulnerable customers

### **Food Safety Prosecutions**

17. Stephanie Glancey the Food Business Operator trading as Nightingale Fisheries, Nightingale Avenue was pleaded guilty at the Magistrates Court on 5 March 2013 to one offence and not guilty to four offences. The case was adjourned to 1 May 2013.
18. Philip Armstrong the Food Business Operator trading as the Copper Beech pleaded guilty at the Magistrates Court on 3 April 2013 to the charge of "Placing unsafe food on the market contrary to General Food Regulations 2004, Regulation 4". Mr Armstrong was fined £300 and ordered to pay £1500 in costs and £15 victim surcharge. This case related to 31 cases of Salmonella infection linked to the preparation or consumption of food at the Copper Beech in June 2012. Mr Armstrong fully co-operated with the investigation and implemented all of the recommendations to improve food safety.
19. Regab Benmran, the Food Business Operator trading as the Pizza Box, 145 North Road answered seven charges at the Magistrates Court on 10 April 2013. Two charges were withdrawn and a guilty plea was entered for the remaining five. Mr Benomran was ordered to pay a total fine of £330 plus Council costs of £350 and a victim surcharge of £15.

### **Green Economy**

20. The Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) further report was submitted to the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and published on the Council's website on 26 March 2013. The report sets out the energy conservation measures that the Council considers practicable, cost effective and likely to result in significant improvement in the energy efficiency of residential accommodation in the Borough. The report is available at:  
<http://www.darlington.gov.uk/Housing/documents.htm>

21. Fuel Poverty is now a workstream under the Darlington Partnership's 'One Darlington' Welfare Reform Agenda with the Green Economy Officer and Member with Portfolio for Economy and Regeneration as Strategic Leads. Potential work will include investigation of a Collective Switching Scheme for Darlington residents to support them to reduce their energy bills and development of top tips to help residents save energy and money.
22. The lights on Darlington's Market Clock were switched off at 8.30pm for an hour on 23 March 2013 to mark World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) Earth Hour 2013, raising awareness about energy use and Climate Change. Further information is available at:  
<http://www.darlington.gov.uk/Generic/News/NewsArchive/mar13/Lights+Off+for+the+Earth.htm>
23. This year's Darlington Green Fair is to take place on 12 May 2013, from 11a.m. – 4 p.m., South Park, Darlington.

### **City Deal**

24. Tees Valley is one of 20 areas shortlisted to negotiate a City Deal. City Deal comprises a core package that is available to all City Deal areas and based around a "Growth Hub" Model. Tees Valley is seeking to secure a bespoke package of local powers and tools with an emphasis on securing a Single Investment Fund, which would provide Tees Valley with local decision-making powers and enable better co-ordination and targeting of funding streams as well as some freedoms and flexibilities. The City Deal covers a broad range of activities including skills, employability and inward investment as well as access to funding that is only available to City Deal areas. The broader scope of a local package would seek a decision-making role of strategic economic regeneration funding streams including transport and infrastructure. Negotiations will continue to take place over Summer 2013.

### **Planning Applications**

25. The Government sets targets to ensure that planning applications are dealt with in a timely manner. There are three broad categories of application target, namely major applications – 60 per cent decided within 13 weeks, minor applications – 65 per cent within 8 weeks and other (including householder applications) – 80 per cent within 8 weeks. In the year 2012/13 the Development Management Team met and marginally exceeded these targets achieving 65 per cent, 68 per cent and 83 per cent respectively.
26. Planning permission has recently been granted to Everything Everywhere (EE) to consolidate operations on its Lingfield Way site. The proposals involve a 2 storey extension to the existing Nexus building, the demolition of redundant buildings and the expansion of car parking on the site. This will enable the company to consolidate their Darlington operation with a view to safeguarding more than 2000 jobs in the Town.

### **Albert Hill Skip Hire**

27. The company's head, Mr. Shepherd remains in custody at present awaiting sentencing (expected in early May) for previous environmental crimes. A date for a Planning Inquiry is awaited with respect to an appeal previously lodged by Mr. Shepherd against an enforcement notice served by the Council requiring the site to be cleared. The Development Management team will continue to work in close partnership with other regulatory agencies such as the Environment Agency and Police to tackle any breaches of regulations that may occur in the future.

### **Carlbury Landslip**

28. A landslip was identified on the A67 at Low Carlbury between High Coniscliffe and Piercebridge in February 2013 and officers are continuing to manage the impacts.
29. Around 20 businesses were visited in the area of the landslip, to update them on the situation and to determine impacts. The businesses were grateful that Council staff had taken the time to visit them. Generally there were no major issues raised, however requests were made, and are being addressed, in relation to signage displaying 'open for business' messages and for information from NWL in terms of the water supply. The visits also provided an opportunity to establish some individual business support requirements which are being addressed within the Business Engagement team.

### **Head of Steam**

30. Work continues to develop a community led initiative to celebrate and protect Darlington's unique railway heritage. A short hiatus is on account of a business model being developed for the railway heritage enquiry group to be able to make funding bids and deliver community led projects. The group is due to meet again in May and to date the achievements include a commitment from local schools to ensure that every child has the opportunity to visit the Railway Museum.

### **Darlington Cares**

31. Darlington Cares is a partnership of the Town's leading employers committed to making Darlington a better place through employee volunteering.
32. Darlington Cares is working with local charities and community projects to build an engaging and co-ordinated volunteering framework that addresses Darlington's community needs, particularly in areas of disadvantage.

**Councillor Chris McEwan**  
**Economy and Regeneration Portfolio**