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**OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY AND REGENERATION PORTFOLIO**

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

**‘Warm Up North’**

2. Cabinet agreed on 4 June 2013 to join a North East Regional Partnership led by Newcastle City Council to facilitate the delivery of home energy conservation measure linked to Green Deal. The partnership has now been properly constituted and British Gas has been procured as the main sector partner. It is now anticipated that the ‘Warm Up North’ scheme will commence this month with the aim of improving a minimum of 1500 dwellings over a three-year period.

**Central Park**

3. Negotiations with the developers have been completed and Keepmoat Homes will be starting the housing development this month.
4. Keepmoat Homes has sought amendments to the first stage of the residential development to enable it to bring forward a scheme in line with the agreed masterplan. These applications related to the substitution of house types, revisions to the internal junction with Vicarage Road and the matters reserved in relation to the development of the Depot Offices, to ensure the area currently occupied by the Depot offices could be brought forward as part of the first phase of development. These applications were approved mid-June 2013.
5. Keepmoat has commenced the internal junction works which are timed to coincide with the summer holiday period of Darlington College and Teesside University. Residential development, comprising 332 homes, will commence from 31<sup>st</sup> July 2013 when the Council will have successfully freed up and vacated an area of its depot, consolidating it within the remainder of the site or transferring elements to other sites. Works to ensure the date for this initial relocation is currently on-going in earnest and is on track for completion within the agreed timescales.
6. Residential development on Central Park North will be brought forward by Keepmoat in four phases over a maximum of 10 years; the first three phases will also deliver the linear park at the heart of the site.
7. The completion of the legal documentation also frees up the commercial areas of the site for development led by the Council and its remaining partner the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). This will facilitate the delivery of the Business Growth Hub (see below) and other such developments as they emerge.

## **Darlington Business Growth Hub**

8. Following the announcement of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funding on 5 June 2013, the project is now 100 per cent funded. Department for Communities and Local Government Minister Baroness Hanham announced the £3.3m ERDF support on an official visit to Darlington on 13 June 2013. The £6.6m project is financed by ERDF and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The project which will create 3200 square metres of business growth space in 55 units for start-up and small medium enterprises (SME) businesses will now go into the construction and implementation phase. In the meantime, the Council will procure an operator to run and administrate the building to co-ordinate business support and networking facilities. Completion of an operational building is estimated for early 2015.

## **Darlington Local Plan: Making and Growing Places Preferred Options**

9. We have agreed to a draft development plan document containing draft site allocations and development management policies, and for it to be the subject of public and other consultations from mid-June 2013
10. Authorisation has also been given to the Director of Resources to dispose of sites surplus to requirements.

## **Green Economy**

11. This year's annual Green Fair, which took place on 12 May 2013, was a success with over 55 organisations as well as residents attending despite the wet weather. This year's event involved numerous stalls and a packed schedule of activities and interactive workshops with advice provided to help people to look after the environment and save money. Organisations attending included Friends of the Earth, Northumbrian Water, Arriva North East (with its gas bus), Friends of Parks groups and Darlington Bee Keepers Association.

## **Town Centre Brainstorm**

12. A group of retailers met with representatives from the Council; BID and Tees Valley Unlimited to talk through 'what the Town Centre seeks to be in five to ten years' time'. Times are changing and as a consequence of various discussions locally and nationally, I plan to hold this type of discussion on a regular basis. The first session covered issues such as:-
  - (a) What are we missing now or what could we do differently?
  - (b) What will change look like? and
  - (c) What should be done in the medium/long term, to make the most of what might be seen as adverse change to the high street to make it positive for Darlington.

## **Economic Strategy Private Sector Group**

13. The Private Sector Group met on the 6th June at Darlington College. Main focus of the discussion centred around:-
  - (a) Skills (the need for clarity around what is already happening – e.g. City Deal and the interdependencies between ourselves and other parts of Tees Valley and Durham) and also around considering “what does better look like?”;
  - (b) How to promote the ‘What we’ve achieved’ quarterly economic strategy update document. It was agreed that it will be circulated to the Northern Echo, promoted via the Business Club, NECC, Partnership website, Lingfield Point, Interface, DBC website, TVU etc;
  - (c) Purpose of the group – it was agreed that the group would consider an Economic Strategy Theme at each meeting in terms of what we are doing within the scope of the action plan, what impact is it having, whether that is enough, and future direction of activity. It was also agreed that the group is to have an ambassadorial role (supporting inward investment activity) and also a lobbying role.
  - (d) It was agreed that the group would meet quarterly.

## **Town Centre Walkabouts**

14. Town Centre Walkabouts continue with staff from the Business Engagement team, Street Scene and representatives from the Business Improvement District (BID) company, Distinct Darlington. These are proving to be extremely useful in identifying and addressing issues within the town centre.

## **Budget Advisory Panels**

15. Under my portfolio, residents are to be asked their order of importance with regard to the Economy and Regeneration and services to make Darlington a vibrant place to invest and do business regionally, nationally and internationally

## **Business Engagement**

16. Regular Business Engagement meetings continue to take place with Senior Members and Officers engaging with key employers in the town as a means of gathering intelligence, thereby ensuring that we remain close to these organisations and have a better understanding of their needs. Quarterly intelligence sharing meetings are then held in order to discuss any emerging themes.

## **Town Centre Board**

17. I chaired the Town Centre Board on 15 May and it discussed current trends in the town centre, proposed responses from Arriva and officers to the feedback on bus and coach facilities. I heard about the work of the BID and the preparation for the 150 year celebrations of the Darlington market.

## **Darlington Market 150<sup>th</sup> Celebrations**

18. The Darlington Market 150<sup>th</sup> celebrations took place on the weekend of 7 to 9 June. There was an increase of 20,000 people visiting the town centre over these three days. The celebrations centred on the Victorian Covered Market and clock tower and coincided with the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Darlington's town twinning links with Germany, France and Poland, and a number of European dignitaries attended the festivities.

## **Growing Place Funds**

19. The Council has been successful in securing £1.2m funding from the Growing Places Fund to support the re-location of the Council depot from Central Park. The Council has also been informed that subject to due diligence, £1.1m of Growing Places Fund will be made available to support the Department for Education building project. Growing Places Fund is funding administered by Tees Valley Unlimited to support the development of projects that contribute to the Tees Valley Statement of Ambition.

## **Economy Portfolio**

20. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet on 2 July :-
  - (a) Release of Planning Agreement Payment at Skerne Park, to seek approval to release money (£100,000) secured through a planning agreement with Miller Homes in relation to their development at Snipe House Farm as a contribution to improvements in community facilities within the Skerne Park estate;
  - (b) Draft Car Parking Strategy, to seek approval of the draft Car Parking Strategy 2014 – 2026 as the basis for public consultation;
  - (c) Growing Places Fund – Town Centre Public Sector Hub, to seek endorsement to release £1,100,000 of Growing Places Funding to support the delivery of the Department for Education (DfE) building as part of the development of a Public Sector Campus incorporating DfE and the Town Hall; and
  - (d) Central Park – Business Growth Hub, to seek approval to release funding for the construction of Business Growth Hub on Central Park to the Director of Place in consultation with the Director of Resources.

**Councillor Chris McEwan  
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio**