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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.

**Tees Valley Unlimited Business Plan**

2. We endorsed the Tees Valley Unlimited Business Plan which will support the objectives and priority actions for driving forward the delivery of the Tees Valley Statement. The Tees Valley Unlimited is a partnership between the five Tees Valley Local Authorities, regional regeneration agencies and business leaders, established to help drive forward the future development of the Tees Valley economy.

**Economic Strategy**

3. Work is progressing in taking stock of the economic conditions and opportunities. The business sector enquiry groups are into their second and third round of discussions and a view of national and international markets has been commissioned. The Place Scrutiny Committee reviewed progress and emerging issues on the 5th January. It is anticipated a refreshed Economic Strategy will be finalised in May 2012.

**Business Engagement and Education**

4. Progress continues with regard to addressing the skills agenda in Darlington, bringing together businesses and local employers, seeking to raise the aspirations of young people and make them aware of local employment opportunities. I chaired a meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2011 and am pleased to note that there is a real sense of ownership in taking this agenda forward. A number of exciting developments in this regard will be announced early this year.

**Darlington Foundation for Jobs – Inaugural Meeting, 12 January 2012**

5. The Foundation for Jobs Programme is an initiative that will shortly be launched and will comprise of a range of activities which will directly increase vocational opportunities for young people in Darlington. It is a Darlington Partnership initiative which capitalises on the Partnership's strong networks to stimulate Darlington's employers to sign up to Foundation commitments and to foster alliances with schools and other public sector providers. A core aim of the Foundation will be to generate as much publicity as possible which promotes job-seekers, employers and agencies providing vocational support.
6. I attended the inaugural meeting of the Foundation that took place at the Darlington campus of Teesside University on 12 January. Representatives from the private, public and third

sectors came together to better understand the problem and scale of youth unemployment in the town. Attendees were encouraged to sign-up in support of the initiative and further announcements in respect of the specific content of the Programme will be revealed imminently.

### **Darlington Town Centre Retail Awards – 14 December 2011**

7. Entries for the Town Centre Retail Awards reached record levels, with an almost 150 per cent increase. There were 41 finalists in line for one of the twelve awards which were presented at the Oscar-style event on 14 December. Darlington Town Centre Management co-ordinated the event and are delighted with the calibre of nominees and support for the event, which celebrated all that is great about retail, leisure and the service sector in Darlington Town Centre. The full list of winners and their awards is:

Tangles - Hair Salon  
Cocoon Health and Beauty - Service Provider  
Guru - Customer Service  
John Perks of Shelter Trading - Retail Person  
Cooks & Kitchens - Home-ware Supplier  
Boudoir - Independent Retailer  
Leggs - Fashion Retailer  
New Look - National Retailer  
Voodoo Café & Cantina - Hospitality Experience  
Jackson's the Butchers - Market Stall  
Body Shop - Best Green Business  
Anna Caygill of Dolly Mama - Shooting Star

### **Art in the Yards – Phase IV**

8. Good progress is being made on this project. Four artists from Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College have been selected to produce artworks for Mechanics' Yard. A new business to the town centre, The Keys, which takes over from Retro on Skinnergate, will host artworks on the Mechanics' Yard side of their building. Long established business at the High Row end of the yard, The Quaker House, are having artwork to grace their new courtyard area, courtesy of the Binns, House of Fraser building which faces onto the courtyard. Works will be completed in Spring 2012. The Art in the Yards project is all about improving the landscape of the historic town centre and increasing footfall to businesses located there.

### **Darlington Town Centre Business Improvement District (BID) 2012-2017**

9. We gave our support to the proposal to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) for Darlington Town Centre with effect from 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 2012, for which a ballot is taking place from 1<sup>st</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2012 and approved any minor changes that may be required to the BID Proposal and Business Plan prior to its finalisation. The purpose of the BID is to provide a financially sustainable model to improve the appearance, safety/security and access of and to the Town Centre.

Regular BID Task Group meetings that oversee the development of the project are currently being held. The main focus for this period has been on consulting businesses about the

scheme, predominantly on a one to one basis; and working together to produce the Business Plan/Proposal. All eligible businesses in the BID area will soon be receiving a copy of the document. The Business Plan includes details of what a BID is, how it would operate in Darlington, what the proposed improvement projects are, what they will cost and how they will be managed.

Following the distribution of the Business Plan, and campaign period next month, there will be a month long postal ballot of businesses to determine if they choose to vote 'yes' or 'no' for the project.

#### **Decision on former landfill sites**

10. The site investigation work and subsequent risk assessment carried out at four former landfill sites funded by DEFRA (Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) under the Contaminated Land Capital Grants Programme has now been completed. The outcome being that the former landfill sites known as Shearwater Landfill, Summerhouse Landfill and Highside (Heighington) Landfill are not "Contaminated Land" as defined under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Site investigation works under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 have not been undertaken at the former Skipbridge Landfill site as land contamination will now be considered through the planning process. The stakeholders have been advised of the outcome and further information is available on the Council's website.

#### **Food Standards Agency Food Hygiene Rating Scheme**

11. Darlington Borough Council is now committed to launching the Food Standards Agency's Food Hygiene Rating Scheme on 1st April 2012. A contract has been signed between the Council and the Food Standards Agency. The Food Standards Agency is paying a grant of £7,287.50 to cover the Council's implementation costs. All Councils in the North East will be implementing FHRS from 1st April 2012.

#### **Trading Standards: Product Safety Testing**

12. Following the submission of a successful bid to the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), Darlington's Trading Standards have run a project purchasing and testing toys and cosmetics for safety. Any products found unsafe will be followed up with a view to removing them from sale and contacting the home authority of the manufacturer/distributor. BIS provided £10,000 to purchase and test the products.

#### **Update re Carbon Management Plan**

13. The CM Board met on 7th December. Reasonable progress is being made against the 25 per cent reduction target. Analysis of energy consumption data indicates that reductions are being made in all areas, including operational buildings, street lighting, schools, fleet vehicle fuel usage and employee mileage. Further analysis will be undertaken at the end of March 2012 for the financial year 2011/2012.

The main actions to note are:-

- (a) The installation of the Solar PV array at the Town Hall, which will save 4.2 tonnes per annum.
- (b) Pipe lagging at Crown Street Library which will save 14.3 tonnes per annum.
- (c) Town Centre street lighting replacement programme which will save 52 tonnes per annum.
- (d) Installation of video conferencing facilities in the Town Hall for use by employees – savings to be quantified.

### **Carbon Reduction Commitment update**

- 14. The league tables have been released for the first year of the CRC Scheme. The table ranks organisations in order of their performance against the Early Action Matrix. The Council's position is 1177 from 2104 participants (mid-table) with a weighted score of 922.5. Early actions include installation of Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) which the Council undertook early in 2010 and certification with the Carbon Trust, which could have added further points. However, a detailed review of the Carbon Trust standard in 2010, and its requirements, recommended that certification was not pursued. The main reason being the £6000 fee required to achieve accreditation, at a time when efficiency savings were being sought.
- 15. At this time schools are still included in the Council's baseline for the scheme. A consultation by DECC looking at 4 different options for energy use from Academies closed in September 2011, the outcome of which is yet to be published.

### **Meetings**

- 16. Since the last meeting of Council, I have attended :
  - (a) Various meetings with local businesses, including Nifco UK to discuss the Skills Agenda – by engaging with local businesses, schools, BIS, DTI we hope to develop a regional joined up approach to close the skills gap and support businesses in the region and we have introduced a Skills Task and Finish Group.
  - (b) On 17<sup>th</sup> January the Carbon Trust Energy Efficient Breakfast meeting for local businesses in Darlington in partnership with the Council. Those who attended the meeting received training and materials to enable them to manage and monitor energy use; identify and implement key energy reduction opportunities; conduct a walk around survey to identify further opportunities; and implement actions identified within the session.
  - (c) On the 18th January I chaired a special meeting of the Town Centre Board and other town centre businesses with the Bank of England to review and discuss the economy and town centre.

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