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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:

**Darlington Local Planning Policy Framework**

2. We have recommended that national planning policy statements and guidance notes in force before the National Planning Policy Framework was issued continue to be used as good practice to support making decisions on planning applications, where the statutory development plan and the Government's new National Planning Policy Framework are silent or provide insufficient detail on the planning matter at issue. We will receive a further update in Autumn 2012 indicating which elements of the Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance notes are useful and relevant and which local planning policy documents the provisions could be accommodated within.

**Developer Contributions**

3. A draft Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (draft SPD) has been prepared, on which consultations, including a housebuilder/developer stakeholder event, took place from 27th June to 18th July. The purpose of the draft SPD is to ensure that the impact of new development on physical, social and green infrastructure is mitigated by the developer. The draft SPD sets out what things the Council will seek planning obligations on over the next year, and how the contributions due will be calculated. The requirements vary across the Borough, to take account of the capacity of existing provision and how the viability of development varies across the Borough.

**Planning for Gypsies and Travellers**

4. A recent consultation on potential sites to meet the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers generated a lot of local interest from both the settled and travelling communities, and I have thanked the Planning Policy team for all their hard work during public consultations on this complex issue. All the consultation responses have now been considered and a report on the consultations and a proposed approach was set out in a report to Cabinet on 10th July.
5. The Council invited planning barristers of Landmark Chambers to facilitate a seminar on the latest policy and thinking on planning issues for Gypsies and Travellers as part of resolving the issues raised under the new national policy. The event on the 2nd July was for officers from this and neighbouring authorities. Work is ongoing to agree the Tees Valley Planning Authorities position on this.

## **Gypsy and Traveller Member Training**

6. Two sessions of Members training on Gypsies and Traveller culture were held on 28th March, attended by 24 members. A further four Members participated in a visit to Gypsy and Traveller sites in County Durham, to gain a better understanding of the issues and options around site management.

## **Central Park – Refreshed Scheme and Consequential Changes to the Development Agreement**

7. We have endorsed the refreshed masterplan for Central Park and the draft Heads of Terms for the Deed of Variation required to vary the Development Agreement and Joint Venture. Delegated powers have also been approved for the Director of Place and the Director of Resources to negotiate the terms and conditions of and for the completion of the Deed of Variation and Joint Venture.

## **Five Lamps Empty Homes Initiative**

8. Five Lamps Organisation, a voluntary sector body located in Thornaby on Tees have successfully applied for funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to secure grant assistance to help recycle up to 35 empty homes in Darlington, a total investment of between £600-£700k with match funding contributions. In the coming weeks, the Council will meet with Five Lamps Organisation to agree where to target empty homes investment and to secure as many local training and employment opportunities through the scheme as possible. The Council's Private Sector Housing Team have already registered interest from 30 private property owners in the scheme which hopefully will address poor housing conditions and bring empty homes back into productive use to meet current affordable homes demand.

## **Economic Strategy**

9. The emerging Economic Strategy was presented to both business representatives and the LSP Executive and Board at which it was received with some enthusiasm. The strategy continues to be refined in response to feedback and is to be considered by Cabinet in the Autumn.

## **Regional Growth Fund**

10. The Council have supported two bids for Regional Growth Funding on 13th June 2012 when bids were submitted. The first is an Arts and Culture project which will seek to secure investment to reinvigorate the Arts Centre as a top class regional venue, Project Vane. The second relates to Durham and Tees Valley airport, and the diversification of use at the airport to secure investment for logistics.

## **Variation to Hackney Carriage Fares**

11. We have considered three applications from members of the trade to review the tariff levied in respect of hackney carriage fares. Following consultation with the licensed trade and

taking into consideration the majority view from those who responded we have approved a tariff structure.

### **Doing Business with the Public Sector: Simplified**

12. This event held on 16 May at Darlington Rugby Club attracted a total of 32 business representatives from a broad range of sectors.
13. The Council's Business Engagement and Procurement teams organised this event in collaboration with the North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC) and the North Eastern Purchasing Organisation (NEPO). The event offered an overview of Quick Quotes, which is the new system for bidding for lower value public sector contracts and also gave an insight into the type of contracts which will be coming on line.
14. Speakers explained 'how to do business with Darlington Borough Council', and provided an overview of the Quick Quotes system. A number of businesses signed up to the Quick Quotes system on the day. Attendees also heard from Darlington Business Club with an overview of their 'Buy Local' campaign - encouraging local residents and businesses to support the local economy.

### **Foundation for Jobs**

15. Foundation for Jobs continues to make steady progress. We now have 47 apprenticeship places which have either started or have been promised under the initiative. In addition around 60 young people have been involved in internship or work experience projects. Recent national evidence of good practice suggests effective links between business and school age children drastically reduce the risk of those youngsters being unemployed at the age of 25. Already around 110 pupils at Darlington schools have been given the chance to engage with business and this is set to double in July when our first major event under the Foundation for Jobs banner takes place. A low carbon engineering event, involving more than 100 year 8 children and at least seven local engineering firms will take place at Lingfield Point on 13 July 2012. Young people who take their GCSE options next year will be given a greater understanding of technology such as electric vehicles and wind turbines. The aim is to inspire their interest in industries where a large number of jobs are set to be created in the North-East in the coming years.

### **Flexible Support Funding**

16. Tees Valley Unlimited and the five Local Authorities have secured more than £800,000 through the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to help tackle youth unemployment across the sub region. The monies will be divided equally between the 5 authorities.
17. The Flexible Support Fund grant will encourage the recruitment of individuals including new Apprenticeships. The Fund will provide an Up Skilling Grant of up to £1,500 to an employer for either employing a young person in an apprenticeship or providing a job with training towards the equivalent of an NVQ2. Each authority will offer 80 Up Skilling Grants.

18. 80 per cent of the individuals employed must be between 18 and 24 years old and claiming either Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) or Employment Support Allowance (ESA). Individuals will be eligible from 'day one' and up to 6 months' unemployed.
19. Where possible, these monies will be used to encourage employers to take on apprentices, which in turn will link in to the achievement of Foundation for Jobs targets.

### **Trading Standards**

20. Trading Standards received £10,000 from the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) for a product safety market surveillance project, following a successful bid for funding. The project involved testing toys from the cheaper end of the market and cosmetic products from a local importer to see if they complied with safety standards and regulations. Results showed a high level of failure for non-compliance with labelling requirements and a significant failure rate for non-compliance with the relevant safety standard. A number of toys deemed unsafe have now been removed from sale and the items recalled, Trading Standards are working with suppliers to ensure that the toys and cosmetic products tested are labelled correctly, to ensure that they meet safety regulations. Another bid will be submitted to BIS for future product safety market surveillance projects.

### **Olympic Torch Relay**

21. On Sunday 17th June Darlington welcomed the Olympic Torch Relay. It was of course recognised as a very successful event but what was not obvious was the detailed planning that supported the event. In addition to planning for the event itself the Council also planned and prepared for dealing with any emergency that might have occurred in connection with the event. This work was done in partnership with other emergency responders such as the police and the Fire and Rescue Service. As it happened the event ran very smoothly but it is reassuring to know that had there been problems both the Council and other agencies were prepared and on stand-by to deal with them.

### **Delivering Housing**

22. On the 22nd June Darlington hosted a high profile seminar involving David Curtis of the HCA and Alison Thain, Chief Executive of Fabrick and Chair of the Tees Valley LEP Housing and Regeneration Panel, along with 40 invited companies, stakeholders and businesses to explore how Darlington takes forward practical delivery of its housing strategy. The output of this will be pulled together for further consideration. This will feed into how the Council might approach our housing challenges.

### **Town Centre Regeneration**

23. Cabinet has considered offers from developers and decided on a preferred bidder for a new cinema and hotel development on part of the Feethams site. Officers are now negotiating with the preferred bidder and once that is complete we will be able to make further announcements. This is an important step in bringing new and additional activity to the Town Centre.

24. However we now need to consider other town centre regeneration options. Residents and businesses in Darlington have the chance to air their views on potential development options in the town centre.
25. Darlington Borough Council has been approached by a developer with proposals for a 4,000sq metre supermarket development on a site to the North of the town centre. There are many different options, issues and opportunities that arise on various sites as a result of this.
26. The Council is keen to hear from local people and businesses and is in the process of setting up an on-line forum allowing people to make their views heard on Saturday 23 June. An article published in Darlington Together explained the broad issues. Alongside this, a special webpage has been developed offering more information on the proposals. A series of public consultation events will also be held early next month. Public engagement events took place on 2, 6 and 7 July and the closing date for comments is Friday 3 August 2012.

## **Heritage**

27. I met with Carol Pyrah (Planning Director – North East) and Martin Lowe (Historic Buildings Inspector) from English Heritage – where a number of matters were discussed to make the most of Darlington’s rich heritage as a key to unlock economic development, inform place-making and increase public engagement.
28. I attended and hosted the second meeting of the railway heritage group on the 22 June where the Railway Heritage Enquiry Group, under the auspices of the Darlington Partnership and chaired by Chris Lloyd of the Northern Echo was inaugurated. The meeting was a great success and the various groups and individuals in attendance have begun to explore the potential under the headings of Spaces and Places, Working Together and Boosting the Visitor Economy. There was much common ground between delegates and the next meeting in July should see significant progress made in terms of short term wins and long term strategic thinking, towards the two hundredth anniversary of the S&D Railway in 2025.
29. Since the last meeting of Council, I have attended :
  - (a) BID Task Group, including the appointment of BID Manager, Alexandra Swan.
  - (b) Economic Strategy Meeting with Jamie Webb from Four Seasons Healthcare (Head Office based in Darlington).
  - (c) I chaired the Foundation for Jobs Steering Group on 30<sup>th</sup> June – the meeting reviewed progress to date in respect of the individual workstreams and also considered an Apprenticeship Charter – to which all apprenticeship training providers in Darlington will be encouraged to sign up to.
  - (d) Housing Retrofit Project Briefing on 29<sup>th</sup> June – discussion with project providers on the opportunities for Darlington from this regional project.
  - (e) On 6<sup>th</sup> July a visit to Darlington Job Centre to meet with Jonathan Fay, Darlington Jobseeker Opportunity Manager to discuss recruitment opportunities, in particular, Foundation for Jobs and what the Local Authority can do that is transformational in respect of youth unemployment.

(f) I met with Business Editor of the Northern Echo on Wednesday 20 June.

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