
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:-
 - (a) **Albert Hill Skip Hire Ltd** - The Environment Agency has successfully prosecuted Albert Hill Skip Hire Limited and Raymond Anthony Shepherd, both of which were found guilty by Teesside Crown Court of five separate offences under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2007 and 2010 and the Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1999. Officers from the Council's Environmental Health and Planning Section gave evidence in court to support the Environment Agency's case.
 - (b) Three offences related to operating a regulated facility not authorised by an environmental permit between 10 July 2008 and 30 April 2009 on land known as the Old Steel Yard, Dodsworth Street, Darlington and between 10 July 2008 and 26 May 2010 at Whessoe Road, Darlington. Two offences related to a breach of environmental permit condition between 10 September 2009 and 3 August 2010 at the Old Steel Yard, Dodsworth Street, Darlington in that non-hazardous waste that was not specified waste was stored on a permeable surface without a sealed drainage system.
 - (c) The Planning Inspectorate has dismissed an appeal made by Albert Hill Skip Hire Ltd against a Notice of Revocation of the Environmental Permit and Requirement to Take Steps covering operations at The Old Steel Yard, Dodsworth Street, Darlington. The Planning Inspectorate affirmed that the step to be taken is to remove all waste from the site within 3 months from the 20 August 2012 the date of the decision.
 - (d) **Darlington Housing Strategy 2012-2017** - Cabinet approved the Darlington Housing Strategy 2012-2017 which will replace the existing Housing Strategy which expires this year. The revised Strategy reflects the recent changes in the national and local housing landscape, including the implications of the welfare returns and will provide a clear set of objections and actions across a broad housing agenda. The Housing Strategy 2012-2017 is available on the Council's Website at the following link:
<http://www.darlington.gov.uk/Living/Planning+and+Building+Control/Planning+Services/Planning+Policy/DarlingtonHousingStrategy.htm>
 - (e) **Design and Heritage Champion** – I am now the Council's Heritage Champion. Heritage Champions are the means by which English Heritage seek to promote the role of historic environment as a valuable asset in its own right and also as an important component in economic regeneration. Since accepting the role I have had regular meetings with officers to discuss both live issues and emerging strategy and also met with the Regional Director of English Heritage to discuss partnership working, funding opportunities and to stress the importance of the historic environment in Darlington's

regeneration aspirations. This role has also stimulated the formulation of the Railway Heritage Enquiry Group that seeks to promote the important rail heritage of the Town as an economy and tourism opportunity as well as being an important part of the Darlington story as we look towards economic wellbeing in the future.

- (f) **Private Sector Housing Work** – Year two project funding for the Northgate Housing Support Worker was received in August and it will ensure that the project will run until completion on 31 December 2012. Good progress is also being made by the Empty Property Officer on a number of initiatives to reduce empty properties. Grant funding has also been received by our empty property project partner. The Five Lamps organisation, a registered charity based in Thornaby, will deliver up to 30 new homes from long term empty properties throughout Darlington. This project will run for three years and is primarily focussed on reducing long term empty properties and increasing the number of new homes for those in housing need.
- (g) **Visit to Bignall Group** – The Bignall Group has its offices in Darlington but its manufacturing operation in Shildon. John Bignall is keen to explore how a manufacturing and engineering forum might assist business opportunities in both Durham and Darlington as a response the Economic Strategy. I initiated a meeting with the Bignall Group and Shaun Stuart of South Durham Engineering Forum to explore the idea of an engineering and manufacturing forum that would benefit Darlington businesses.
- (h) **Town Centre Chewing Gum Removal** – Street Scene continues to remove chewing gum within the town centre as part of its annual programme. Removal for 2012 commenced in May and is still ongoing to date. So far numerous locations through the town centre have been cleansed as follows:

The Yards – w/c 7 May 2012
Skinnergate – w/c 21 May 2012
Blackwellgate – w/c 25 June 2012
High Row – w/c 2 July 2012
Bondgate – w/c 23 July 2012

Work is ongoing and expected to be completed on schedule by the end of September 2012.

- (i) **Town Centre Fringe Flood Alleviation** - The Town Centre Fringe proposal includes an area adjacent to the River Skerne that is currently in a flood risk zone. The Council and the Environment Agency have been working together to submit a bid to the Government for Flood Defence Grant in Aid (FDGiA) that would reduce the flood risk. The bid, submitted in July, could attract funding in 2016/17 and 2017/18 of £760,000 or more. The bid can be refined on an annual basis and the stronger the bid the better the chance of securing funding. To help resource continued work to improve the bid for next year the Northumbria Regional Flood and Coastal Committee has awarded the Council £50,000 this year from its local levy.
- (j) **BID** – We continue to work closely with retailers involved - The BID company, Distinct Darlington continues to develop. The BID Manager, Alex Swan has begun implementing projects from the Business Plan, with direction from the BID Board, of

which I am a member. Businesses have now received the first year levy demands, which has created income to carry out the first wave of projects this month, including the appointment of the team of Town Centre Rangers, the creation of a new website and the official launch event for the company. The BID has also been working with partners and business colleagues to develop events and marketing initiatives to boost footfall over the Christmas period.

- (k) **Love Your Local Market - 8 July 2012** - Despite being up against the British Grand Prix and the Men's Final at Wimbledon, the event attracted a wealth of interest – there were large increases in footfall, in particular, High Row, which was up 33% on the previous 3 weeks and Northgate, which was up 16% compared with the 3 previous Sundays. This event was as a direct response to the Mary Portas Review of the High Street, which suggested a National Market Day be held each year. Organised by the Economic Regeneration team in conjunction with Markets, the event attracted over 60 stallholders.
- (l) **Foundation for Jobs** – An event focussed on showcasing the employment opportunities available in low carbon engineering was held on 13 July and supported by 6 of Darlington's secondary schools with 90, Year 8 students attending. A series of participative activities were delivered by some of the North East's leading engineering companies, including Nissan, Cummins and Thorn Lighting. An 'Apprentice'-style challenge was set – 2 teams of Business Studies students from Education Village developed products which they sold at the 'Love Your Local Market' event on 8 July. An initial training session has been delivered to prepare 5 young people selected for interview for apprenticeships, to ensure that they were confident and well-prepared for interview, addressing some of the concerns that local firms have raised previously. 2 of those trained were subsequently successful at interview and commenced employment on 10 September.
- (m) **Hitachi** - The £4.5 billion deal for new Intercity Express trains was finally announced by Government. Under the deal, Agility Trains, a consortium led by Hitachi of Japan, will build 596 rail carriages at a new factory in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham. The first trains will enter service on the Greater Western Main Line in 2017 and on the East Coast Main Line by 2018. Agility was announced as preferred bidder for the Intercity Express Programme (IEP) in early 2009, but after a series of delays it has taken more than three years for the deal to be finalised. The project, to replace the Intercity 125 trains, will not only create new jobs but safeguard thousands more. A total of 730 skilled jobs will be created at Newton Aycliffe with a further 200 created during construction of the factory itself, where Hitachi will assemble a fleet of 92 complete trains. Whilst the factory itself will be located in County Durham, there are obvious potential benefits for local businesses in respect of supply chain opportunities and also potential employment opportunities for local residents.
- (n) **Business Information Guide** – The Council has published this month a fresh Business Information Guide. This is the fourth annual refresh of this guide. It is a key information tool providing businesses with details of business support provision available from Darlington Borough Council and other partner organisations. Due to the changes in government funding and the business support landscape, this has resulted in many changes being made within this version of the guide.

- (o) **Town Centre Regeneration** – The Council has engaged with businesses and residents in relation to regeneration and development issues facing the future of the Town Centre.

The consultation events undertaken have been widely publicised in the press and through Darlington Together magazine. In addition about 2000 leaflets were distributed around the town specifically in the Covered Market, in shops, the Library and Council Contact Centre.

The key consultation tool developed was the ‘Regeneration Game’ where the public were asked to plan the Town Centre with officers around the table with a view to gaining consensus with other workshop participants. This ‘Planning for Real’ type of tool identifies the key characteristics of the Town Centre in terms of uses and the key opportunity sites available. A series of laminated cards with to-scale car parking, buildings and the size of a small food store were used to allow options to be considered and the discussion to take place.

Some key themes that have been identified from the initial consultation events include:-

- (i) The need for greenspace close to and within the Town Centre.
- (ii) A desire for more leisure in the Town Centre.
- (iii) The importance of cherishing Darlington’s historic character.
- (iv) The importance of the markets and Covered Market building.
- (v) The need to improve the current bus facilities.
- (vi) A recognition of the need to balance the offer between different parts of the Town Centre in terms of footfall and land use.
- (vii) Informed views on the options and challenges the Council has as landowner and the potential regeneration benefits that could be secured.
- (viii) The importance of the emerging Parking Strategy in securing accessible and attractive parking option to support the Town Centre.
- (ix) The value of office uses in the Town Centre adding vitality and economic benefits.

2. Since the last meeting of Council I have :-

- (a) Met with Play Co-ordinator from Groundwork to discuss the work they are doing;
- (b) Undertaken a Town Centre Walkabout to gain a general assessment and address any areas of concern;
- (c) Taken the opportunity to undertake Town Centre retailer visits;
- (D) Visited Hurworth Academy to discuss the skills agenda;

Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio