
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 :-

Introduction of Charging for Pre-Application Planning Advice

2. The Council currently operates a free advisory service to developers regarding whether development proposals require planning permission and the likelihood of such developments being successful. This is an important part of the planning process as it helps to identify any fundamental problems and smooth out any potential difficulties at the earliest stage therefore helping the system to operate more efficiently and the developer to gain a better standard of customer service. A scale of fees has been introduced from March 2013 to partially recover the cost of providing this service which will generate income of £20,000 to £40,000 per year and continue to provide developers with a valuable service that can reduce their costs significantly.

Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy

3. The Council has adopted the Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy for the Borough of Darlington January 2013 which has been reviewed and updated. It outlines how the Council intends to strategically inspect the land within its area for the purpose of identifying land which could legally be defined as 'contaminated land' and is essentially an operation plan that sets out how the Council will meet its statutory duties in respect of contaminated land.

Assets of Community Value

4. At Cabinet earlier this month an operational policy was agreed for dealing with the Community Right to Bid duty placed on local authorities. Certain organisations can nominate land and property to be listed as assets of community value. If nominations are agreed, and the listed asset is later to be disposed of, a time period of up to six months is set aside before disposal can proceed to allow eligible organisations to prepare a bid to take over the asset.
5. Six nominations have been received (from Darlington for Culture). These are in respect of the former Arts Centre, the Civic Theatre, Crown Street Library, Cockerton Library, the Head of Steam Museum and The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts. These nominations have been accepted. Information on this new community right and our processes to implement it will be posted on the Council's web site.

Neighbourhood Planning

6. At Cabinet earlier this month details about the general principles of neighbourhood planning under the Localism Act 2012, and the role of the Council were reported. Neighbourhood planning is a new way for communities to decide the future of their area. Delegated powers for officers to administer the new arrangements were approved, including publishing and consulting at various stages, providing officer support and advice during the plan preparation, appointing an independent examiner and holding a referendum. The Council has recently received an application from Sadberge Parish Council to be granted Neighbourhood Area status, which is the first step in the Neighbourhood Planning process. In line with the regulations, the Council is currently consulting on the application and will make a decision once all responses have been considered.

Trading Standards – Tobacco

7. Trading Standards recently led an operation involving the Police and HMRC at three retail premises in Darlington Town Centre, which resulted in the seizure of a substantial quantity of counterfeit and illicit tobacco. The operation was a result of intelligence received, indicating that the premises were selling counterfeit and illicit tobacco. Trading Standards are investigating these offences.

Economic Strategy

8. Cities Minister Greg Clark has confirmed that the Tees Valley's City Deal bid will now go through to the next stage. The next stage will work towards determining which powers can be transferred to a local level, in order to determine the detail before a final decision can be made.
9. An application has been submitted for European funding for a Business Growth Hub on Central Park supported by the Homes and Communities Agency. A funding decision is anticipated in June 2013 for a £6m project supporting Grade A business accommodation for Start-up's and smaller Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs).
10. The Encouraging Engineering Scheme now in its third year, is aimed at undergraduate students studying a four year Mechanical Engineering Degree at university. Ten undergraduates are currently being supported on the scheme and it is envisaged that two more students will be made bursary offers this year.
11. Following concerted effort by Councillors and Officers, BT has now formally announced the inclusion of Darlington as part of its roll out of high-speed fibre broadband, which will be upgraded by the end of Spring 2014.
12. Work is on-going via Tees Valley Unlimited and the five Tees Valley Authorities with Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) for superfast broadband to be made available in white zones (non developed zones).

13. Two Rural Community Broadband Fund expressions of interest will go forward to a third round bidding process this month. These bids cover rural West Darlington and rural East Darlington.
14. Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners in association with DTZ have concluded research into Darlington's employment land requirements to 2026, along with undertaking a qualitative and quantitative review of existing sites and premises within the Borough. The findings of this work will now be reviewed and an action plan will be developed.
15. The Council are in the process of negotiating a Service Level Agreement with Digital City to provide support to digital businesses within the Borough. This will enable businesses within Darlington to access a whole raft of services including coaching, mentoring, business growth workshops, business snapshot system etc. The activity will be delivered in Darlington by Daniel Kolodziej, digital entrepreneur.
16. Councillors, MPs and officers are working hard to retain the Department for Education in the Town. A decision is expected in April 2013.
17. Tees Valley Unlimited (TVU) has been successful in securing almost £10m under the Regional Growth Fund to assist companies to obtain performance and warranty bonds. The scheme should be up and running from Autumn 2013.
18. Lets Grow – led by UNW, Business and Enterprise Group and Trinity Mirror North East offers grants from £50,000 up to £1.5m to SME's for capital projects leading to job creation/safeguarding. The £30m scheme was formally launched on 26 February 2013.
19. The Council has requested the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to provide Reward Grant Funding to support the Business Growth Hub, the BDUK investment and also the provision of business support for new start businesses through their early years.

Central Park Update

20. Cabinet endorsed a refreshed Master Plan in May 2012, and the Council has been in negotiation with the developer consortium (CKY) to finalise the way forward.
21. Cabinet considered a report in March 2013 which sought a decision on how to proceed with the development, in line with the masterplan and planning consent, in the current circumstances.
22. Relocation of the Council's depot from Vicarage Road, which comprises a significant proportion of the first phase of land to be developed, is crucial to unlocking the long-term development of Central Park, and there is a separate report for consideration on the Council Summons. Subject to the successful relocation of the depot, and the completion of the legal documentation, the development should begin within the next 12 months.

Cinema Consultations

23. Forming part of its consultation, the selected developers for the Feethams leisure scheme, Terrace Hill, have set up a website, Twitter and Facebook pages. The Developer held a reception on 1 February 2013 for Members and key stakeholders and a public exhibition on 2 February. Terrace Hill report that overall the scheme has been well received by the public and stakeholders and that the comments made will be taken into consideration. Comments are still being made on the social media channels it has set up.

Enterprise Coaching Service / Business Start-Up Activity

24. A significant proportion of business start-up provision in Darlington is currently delivered through the Borough Council's Enterprise Coaching Service which is jointly funded through the BAT Legacy and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). ERDF funding stipulates that the project is targeted on the ten most deprived wards in Darlington.
25. Enterprise Coaching is one-to-one coaching to stimulate interest in enterprise amongst people who might not have considered setting up their own business. The aim is to promote enterprise in targeted areas amongst under-represented groups who would usually not consider self-employment.
26. This service is funded through the (ERDF) until 31 March 2013.
27. As of 25 January 2013 the Enterprise Coaching service has helped 203 ERDF-eligible clients to explore and expand their ideas in relation to self employment. These clients have currently raised 58 outputs of which 46 have been claimed under the ERDF Enterprise Coaching project to date. The final claim submission will be made on 31 March 2013.
28. The 203 Enterprise Coaching clients have resulted in the creation of 74 new start businesses (which equates to 36 per cent going on to establish a new business). According to our current records, 60 of these businesses (81 per cent) are still trading, with 11 businesses (15 per cent) no longer trading.
29. A further 211 clients have sought help and advice with regard to exploring self-employment, resulting in a combined total of 414 clients advised, however only 203 of these are eligible for support through ERDF due to the wards where they live. These additional 211 clients established a further 62 new start businesses, leading to a combined total of 136 new start businesses. Accordingly, 136 new start businesses have been established through advising 414 clients (33 per cent of clients have established businesses) and 125 of these businesses (92 per cent) are still trading.
30. We are understandably pleased with the levels of interest in self-employment; the rates of conversion into new start businesses and the numbers of new start businesses sustained. Given that this particular scheme is coming to an end, we

are currently exploring the potential to secure additional funding in order to be able to continue to support new business creation in Darlington.

Town Centre Walkabouts

31. Town Centre walkabouts continue on a regular basis and particular problems are highlighted.

Darlington Cares

32. I am now a member of the Darlington Cares Board which has had two meetings since Council last met. A programme of 80 volunteering opportunities has been developed and circulated to participating employers. The Board is focusing attention on projects which support the community, improve the environment or help children and young people or the elderly. 'EE' (formally Orange) have recently joined with other major employers in Darlington showing interest. As Darlington Cares grows and its programme of activities expands it will enable employers in Darlington to make a significant contribution to Darlington's communities, particularly welcome as public sector resources contract.

Major Planning Applications

33. The Council has recently received a planning application from Everything Everywhere (formerly Orange) for a major re-development of its Darlington site off Lingfield Way.
34. Proposals involve the demolition of four buildings and the extension of the existing Nexus building eastwards towards Lingfield Way involving a contemporary energy efficient design. The proposals also involve the enlargement and reconfiguration of the existing car park and further tree planting within and around the edge of the site.
35. The company's proposals are aimed at consolidating its Darlington call centre/ office operations onto one site with the aim of securing 2,150 jobs in the Town.

Growing Places Fund Round 2

36. Cabinet approved the operation of the Growing Places Fund Round 2 which is an £8.5m loan fund, of money from the Government, managed by Tees Valley Unlimited (TVU), on behalf of the five Boroughs. It supports projects that will create economic growth, job creation and remove barriers to development in the local economy. Some money has already been allocated and £4 million is available to potential projects. The five Tees Valley Chief Executives, as members of the TVU Investment Panel, will initially shortlist projects (in consultation with the Investment Panel) and make recommendations to the Leadership Board for approval. Darlington Borough Council will be eligible to apply for GPF Round 2 funding, which could be used to support the delivery of Darlington's regeneration priorities.

Town Centre Consultations

37. Following the successful public participation and consultation process of last summer leading to the Town Centre Strategy agreed by Cabinet in December a further round of working with residents and businesses is underway. Focussed on bus and coach facilities, car parking, the public realm, the parking regime in Skinnergate and Duke Street and the Indoor Market the Council is seeking views in advance of developing options to feed into the next part of the Strategy. Meetings have been well attended and the options are beginning to be developed. The public will be consulted further prior to any recommendations to Cabinet.

Foundation for Jobs

38. Foundation for Jobs was launched in January 2012. To date the initiative has created 110 apprentices, 125 internships or work experience placements and 1,089 young people at Darlington schools or colleges have had meaningful contact with industry. Funding is now in place to allow a further two years delivery to take the project until 31st March 2015.

Green Economy

39. The Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) annual report will be submitted to the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) in March which will outline the initiatives planned for the forthcoming year and achievements over the last year. Looking forward, we are exploring the potential benefits of a collective switching scheme for energy provision in partnership with Tees Valley colleagues, the feasibility of a District Heating system in the Town Centre, and the commencement of the Warm Up North programme, which is a partnership between Darlington Borough Council and four other regional local authorities to provide Green Deal energy efficiency measures for all domestic and non-domestic public buildings over the next three years. The Warm Up North programme will also have a strong emphasis on education in terms of behaviour change to reduce energy consumption. Over the last year and this year we have successfully secured £50k of Warm Homes Healthy People Funding to provide assistance to some of our most vulnerable fuel poor households ensuring that we have a robust Winter plan in place during periods of the most inclement weather. This scheme has been delivered locally through a voluntary sector partnership led by Age UK Limited in 2012 and will be similarly delivered in this way in 2013.

Meetings

40. I continue to meet regularly with the Council's Business Engagement Team and members of the BID Team.
41. Since the last meeting of Council, I have met with several businesses to continue a strong working relationship with the Council.
42. Two workshops were held with traders on Skinnergate, Duke Street, Post House Wynd and the Yards to discuss the parking and traffic management of Duke Street

and Skinnergate. The events held at Daisies Café and Voodoo Café were well attended and a variety of views expressed. The events were promoted by the Town Centre team in partnership with the BID Rangers. Officers are currently developing plans for consultation based on this engagement.

43. A Town Centre Board meeting took place on 23 January 2013 where verbal feedback is received from traders on current trading issues. Specific issues that were discussed were:- Feedback from Distinct Darlington; Update on Ice Rink; Timetables for Town Centre Regeneration; Footfall Monitoring Update; Town Centre Management Update; Feedback on Christmas Lights Switch-on; Update on Winter Events; 60 Year Celebration of Town Twinning; Market Hall Public Toilets; and Distinct Darlington Ranger Duties.
44. Scalextrics for Schools – A Seminar, Scalextrics for Schools, was held at the Education Village on 12 March 2013. The Seminar included an interactive session involving practical activities and a track layout on a board which is currently being landscaped.

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Economy and Regeneration Portfolio