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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.

**City Deal**

2. The Prime Minister announced on the 13th December 2013 that a City Deal had been agreed with the Tees Valley. The proposals will support the creation of 3,500 jobs in the Tees Valley, unlocking £28million of private investment. Further work is now in train to finalise the City Deal and it is anticipated these will be completed by June 2014.

**Strategic Economic Plan for the Tees Valley**

3. In October 2013, Government requested that the Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership submit its draft Strategic Economic Plan to it by the 19th December 2013, and early thoughts on bids for Local Growth Fund schemes. Darlington's important schemes that support economic growth have been included in that draft submission and feedback is now awaited from Government. Further work is progressing to refine the submission and it is anticipated that a report will be made to Cabinet in March before the final submission is made.

**Local Plan Consultations**

4. As part of the preparation of the Local Plan, consultations were carried out on the Making and Growing Places Preferred Options from 21 June to 9 August 2013. About 350 written responses were received, together with the comments made by the 600 people who attended the public events and meetings. The consultation was widely publicised, and responses were received from members of the public, local interest groups, landowner/developer interests and statutory consultees, among others. The responses covered a variety of planning (and non-planning) issues, although the majority were objections to proposed housing allocations. A summary report of all the responses, and officer comments, was considered by a Special Place Scrutiny Committee on 20 December.
5. Specific actions are proposed to take forward the development of policies for the Local Plan, taking into account the responses to consultations. Additional studies that have been or are being completed since the Preferred Options were drafted also need to be taken into account, along with consideration of any changed circumstances. Because this may well result in policies that are quite different from the draft policies presented in the Preferred Options document, further consultations will need to be programmed prior to finalising the plan for Publication.

## **Gypsy and Traveller Site Extension at Neasham Road**

6. Consideration was given to the outcome of a feasibility study that researched the options for providing a new Gypsy and Traveller site providing up to 20 permanent pitches.
7. Approval was given for the revised HCA grant of £1.8M to be drawn down to enable the Council to proceed with the provision of 20 new pitches and that 20 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches be delivered, by developing an adjacent site to the existing Neasham Road settlement.
8. The position relating to the operation and management of the new site was noted and officers have been instructed to report to a further meeting of Cabinet to determine the preferred management arrangements.
9. We have also approved the awarding of the contract for the investment works in connection with the proposed site extension and refurbishment work to the internal Design and Building Services Departments.

## **Collective Energy Switching Scheme - Darlington's Big Community Switch**

10. Over 650 households registered for Darlington's first round of the Big Community Switch (this level of registration being within the expected registration level of 1 – 3 per cent of Darlington's households). The scheme has been accessed by some of Darlington's vulnerable residents: 85 households who registered receive benefits; 127 households include someone aged 60 and over; 324 include someone with long-term illness or disability; 26 include children under five years; 101 have an annual household income below £13,380 and seven have English as a second language.
11. There were three 'winners' in the auction to supply a range of contracts: Scottish Power, Green Star Energy (formerly Pioneer Energy) and British Gas. In total seven out of ten households who registered for the scheme in Darlington could save on their energy bills if they choose to switch. The highest average potential saving in Darlington was £130 for dual fuel monthly direct debit paper billing customers who registered for the switch online (the final number of households who choose to switch and the overall savings made won't be known until after the end of the acceptance period).
12. Darlington's second round of Darlington's Big Community Switch was launched on 10 December 2013, giving people another opportunity to save money on their energy bills. Householders can register up until midnight on 17 February 2014 (the auction is on 18 February 2014). Businesses and community organisations can also join up to and including 30 March 2014.
13. Darlington Citizens Advice Bureau (01325 256999 (ext 122)) continues to provide excellent support to those registering offline or who need personal help to register. For more information or to register online visit:  
[www.darlington.gov.uk/bigcommunityswitch](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/bigcommunityswitch)

## **Green Fleet Review**

14. The Council has been successful in its application to the Energy Saving Trust's Green Fleet Review. The Review, funded by the Department for Transport offers free impartial and tailored advice on where potential cost savings and carbon saving opportunities can be made across the fleet. Undertaking the Review is another step forward in identifying potential actions to reduce the Council's fuel costs and carbon emissions as per the Council's Carbon Management Programme and Employee Travel Plan.

## **Business Engagement**

15. Along with the Leader of the Council and Senior Council Officers, I continue to undertake proactive business engagement meetings to some of Darlington's larger employers as a means of developing relationships and keeping up to date with future business plans.
16. Over the last quarter collectively, we have engaged with, amongst others, MTE Limited, Mercure Darlington Kings Hotel; Durham Tees Valley Airport; EE; Cummins; the Disclosure and Barring Service; the Department for Education and Newsquest.

## **Economic Strategy Action Planning Event – 15 November 2013**

17. I attended the Economic Strategy Action Planning Event on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2013 at the Teesside University Darlington Campus. The event was attended by approximately 70 delegates, primarily drawn from the private sector representing a good cross section of business sectors from the borough (e.g. Rockcliffe Hall, Shepherd Construction, Marks and Spencer, Sainsbury's, HSBC Bank, Harvey & Hugo).
18. The primary purpose of the event was to feedback to delegates on progress arising out of the Economic Strategy over the last twelve months and to highlight the opportunities arising out of the decision to locate the new National Biologics Manufacturing Centre in Darlington. Workshops then considered how Darlington could be taken to the next level. Key findings arising out of these workshops were:-
  - (a) Raising the profile of Darlington, what is happening here and the opportunities, in order to generate growth.
  - (b) With Tees Valley Unlimited, focussing on plans for growth of key sectors: Biologics, Subsea, Advanced Engineering/Manufacturing, Logistics, and Public Sector/Service Sector.
  - (c) Skills initiatives, working with TVU.
  - (d) SME business growth, again working with TVU.
  - (e) Infrastructure and site development.

19. The input from the workshops will be reflected in the revised Economic Strategy Action Plan.

### **Town Centre Board - 13 November 2013**

20. Agenda items covered at this Board included a presentation on Parking Enforcement; the introduction of the 'FREE After 3' parking promotion; a Winter Events Update and a discussion on the future membership of the Board.
21. In relation to membership of the Board, I am keen to ensure that there is an accurate representation of the Town Centre within the membership. Discussion suggested that additional members should be sought, and in particular to seek to obtain new members representing the banking/financial services sector; the night-time economy and property agents. To this end, approaches have been made to a number of individuals and I am pleased to note that already we have strong interest from at least three people who are likely to join the Board in due course.
22. These potential new members were invited along to the Town Centre Board on 15 January.

### **Tees Valley Catalyst Fund**

23. Businesses based in the Tees Valley can now apply for short-term finance to fund performance and warranty bonds from the £10 million Tees Valley Catalyst Fund.
24. FW Capital manages the Fund on behalf of Tees Valley Unlimited.
25. The Fund effectively provides bonds to finance growth, enabling ambitious Tees Valley businesses to bid for new contracts by providing short-term debt investments from £100,000 to £2 million to:
  - (a) Fund short-term advanced payment guarantees, performance and warranty bonds, and
  - (b) Extend existing bond facilities.
26. Finance provided through the Fund will typically be available for up to 24 months.
27. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and larger businesses can apply for investment from this Fund and must be:
  - (a) Earning revenue;
  - (b) Investment-ready; and
  - (c) Based in the Tees Valley.
28. It is hoped that growing Darlington businesses will be able to take advantage of this Fund in due course.

## **Heritage**

29. The Haughton conservation area character appraisal is in the final draft for consultation planned in the early spring. This will help to secure high quality development in and around Haughton building on the distinctive and valuable character of the village.
30. A report has been commissioned from external consultants to provide the evidence base for the designation of Parkgate as a conservation area complementary to the Heritage Lottery bid for the Civic Theatre.

## **Rail Heritage**

31. In terms of rail heritage a new project manager has been recruited who will be working with partners and stakeholders to try to secure a sustainable future for the Head of Steam. The railway heritage enquiry group has continued to meet and is marshalling resources towards the proposed 2025 celebrations in Darlington of the first passenger railway. Officers have liaised with English Heritage's Programme Manager for the heritage schools project with a view to Darlington joining the second phase of this national project with Railway Heritage at the core of those discussions.

## **Feethams Development**

32. In December, the Planning Applications Committee granted planning permission for a mixed use development at Feethams comprising a multiplex cinema, hotel, restaurants, bars and leisure uses. Redevelopment of this site for leisure use is a long standing priority of the Council since the adoption of the Feethams development brief in 2008. The scheme is expected to generate around 300 new jobs and help deliver important strategic benefits such as opening up opportunities to enhance and enjoy the River Skerne corridor whilst regenerating a prominent gateway location; increasing the cultural offer of the town, the number of visitor attractions and town centre footfall.

## **Central Park**

33. Planning officers are currently holding pre-application discussions regarding the major pharmaceutical-related development at Central Park. The National Biologics and Manufacturing Centre aims to provide suitable facilities and expertise for new pharmaceutical manufacturing processes. A pre-application presentation to Planning Committee Members is due to take place on 22 January.

## **Private Sector Housing: HMO Private Landlord Prosecuted**

34. On the 4th December 2013 a private landlord in Pensbury Street was prosecuted for failing to licence his house in multiple occupation (HMO). The property required a licence from the Council and the landlord had failed to apply for a licence. The property was considered high risk for tenants and also lacked a number of fire precautions, resulting in tenants safety being put at risk. During an earlier inspection by the Private Sector Housing Team the landlord also provided false and

misleading information to evade licensing. The landlord received a fine of £1000 for failing to apply for a licence and £200 for providing false and misleading information to the Council. The magistrates also gave the landlord a strong reprimand for failing in his duties as a landlord. Court costs were imposed of £350.00 + a victim surcharge of £100.

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