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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.

**Blackwell Meadows Community Sports Hub Expansion**

2. Darlington Rugby Football Club (DRFC) plans to expand the Community Sports Hub at Blackwell Meadows which will increase membership of the existing sports clubs and allow expansion of a variety of clubs hosted at the site. The plans include extending current changing room provision, additional 250 car parking spaces, pitch upgrading/external works and alterations to the entrance to the clubhouse which will also ensure that the ground meets FA ground grading Category C.
3. Cabinet granted delegated power to the Director of Economic Growth to negotiate heads of terms and enter into a 25 year lease with DRFC for 3.6 acres of Council owned agricultural grazing land adjacent to DRFC required for a car park.
4. Cabinet also agreed to release Sport England funding, equating to a maximum of £70,000, should an application be successful, to contribute towards the cost of the Community Sports Hub car park extension. At the time of writing the decision on grant funding was still awaited (but may be known for the Council meeting). There is no new budget ask for this that needs to be taken into account within Council budgets in the MTFP.
5. Cabinet also agreed to relax the restrictive covenant on its existing freehold land at Blackwell Meadows in order for DRFC to be able to secure funding to meet part of their share of the cost of the expansion works.

**Economic Strategy Annual Monitoring Report**

6. Cabinet endorsed the Economic Strategy Annual Monitoring Report and the 2015/16 Action Plan which was developed in 2012 by Darlington Partnership and the Council through consultation with employers, business support organisations, trade bodies, education providers, investors and local entrepreneurs.
7. It is important that the Economic Strategy aligns with the Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan and that through working closely with the Local Enterprise Partnership (Tees Valley Unlimited) with businesses and other agencies, the right environment is created to attract business investment and drive growth in jobs and economic output.

8. The proposal for a Tees Valley Combined Authority, focusing on economic development, transport, infrastructure and skills will facilitate further collaboration across the Tees Valley, with increased democratic accountability underpinned by collaboration between the private, public and civil sectors. The Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) sets out ambitions to generate an increase of £1Bn in gross value added and 25,000 new jobs in the Tees Valley.
9. Darlington's Economy is now recovering well from the economic downturn and it is outperforming regional and national growth trends.

### **Bank Top Masterplan**

10. Cabinet endorsed the approach taken by the Council and partners to secure investment in Bank Top Station and in doing so agreed to release £300,000 to develop the Masterplan, subject to final confirmation of funding from the Local Growth Fund, via Tees Valley Unlimited.
11. The Council, in partnership with Tees Valley Unlimited LEP (TVU), have secured Local Growth Fund support for a Vision and Action Plan for Bank Top Station and its surroundings which are recognised as key regional assets and catalysts for economic growth in the Town and wider area.
12. To facilitate the sustained growth of the local economy a Masterplan is required to form the basis for investment to capture the opportunities presented by changes in the rail infrastructure. The Council and TVU have been working in partnership with Network Rail and the Train Operating Company to develop a brief for consultancy support and to ensure buy-in to any proposals.
13. Darlington Station is an important catalyst for continued local and regional economic growth. The proposed improvements will future proof the station for the introduction of higher speed trains (HS2) on the East Coast Main Line and a brief has been developed to procure consultancy support to produce a Masterplan in the form of a Vision and Action Plan that will be completed by December 2015.

### **Marketing Darlington**

14. 'Promoting Darlington as an outstanding business destination in terms of its location, quality of life, skilled workforce and business environment' was a key action within the 'Place' theme in the Economic Strategy 2012 - 2026 and a subsequent direct action this year is to develop the 'Marketing Darlington' brand 'Ingenious Darlington' and adopt use of the Ingenious Darlington branding toolkit.
15. Led by a private sector group of creative thinking local businesses the brand and its toolkit has now been received and work is ongoing on rolling it out, with an emphasis on gaining buy-in and support through use of the brand by the businesses and wider community. A website is being developed that will be a key tool for promoting the brand and making it available for all stakeholders to use. The site includes all brand assets available to download, such as logos and straplines and guidelines on how these assets should be used.

16. The branding will be launched over the summer. Businesses and community groups will be invited to an event where they will find out more about the brand, how we got to where we are and look at ingenious ways in which the brand can be used. Businesses will be encouraged to adopt the brand, to consistently tell the story of the town, in order to 'put the town on the map' and compete more strongly for investment and for business growth.

### **Foundation for Jobs**

17. Springfield Primary pupils in Years One and Four have taken part in 'Primary Engineer' sessions, with an activity based around the Subsea sector.
18. An employability programme in partnership with Darlington Cares and Whessoe Oil and Gas has been run for Year 10 pupils at Hummersknott School. Pupils have prepared a CV and had interview coaching as well as undertaking a mock interview at an outside location with local employers.
19. Computer Coding training sessions for teachers in partnership with Teesside University have concluded with eight teachers from the secondary level schools in Darlington taking part in the ten week course. This will lead to coding clubs and computer science teaching within schools that in the long term will support growth of our digital sector.
20. The Bio science event on 9 July will see 100 pupils from Darlington schools attend an event at Carmel College where they will make plastic from potatoes and biofuel and will feed skills into the businesses that emerge from our new CPI National Biologics Centre.

### **Business Central**

21. Business Central officially opened its doors to businesses on 7 April 2015. Located in the Central Park Enterprise Zone the £6.6 million project was supported with funding from the European Regional Development Fund and the Homes and Communities Agency.
22. Business Central will focus on nurturing established and start-up companies, providing office space and practical help to businesses.
23. In March Business Central signed its first tenant, the award winning PR and social media agency in Harvey and Hugo. More information on the office space and other services available at Business Central can be accessed at [www.businesscentraldarlington.co.uk](http://www.businesscentraldarlington.co.uk).
24. An Open Day for local businesses was held on 19 March 2015 as a marketing event at Business Central. The aim was to show local businesses and business intermediaries the Grade A quality of the building and office space before opening. Subsequent to the event, five new tenants were signed up. Total tenants signed up for Business Central stands at 14 (7 April 2015).

## **Teesside University**

25. Teesside University Board has approved £0.5m funding to support and develop the business case to the National Horizons Centre Project. This funding will enable the University to scope the project further to Royal British Institute of British Architects stage in anticipation of due diligence in October 2015.
26. I am also pleased to report that the University Board has agreed a rebranding of the Darlington Campus, to be known as The Forge. There is a formal launch of the rebranded facilities on 5 June 2015.

## **Teesside Business Awards**

27. Darlington businesses were well represented in the Best of Class at the regional North East Chamber of Commerce Business Awards, which were held at Teesside University on 26 March. I wish to give congratulations to the following businesses for their achievements both in business and being ambassadors for business in Darlington:
  - (a) Nobia Darlington
  - (b) International Fire Training Centre
  - (c) Geonet Solutions
  - (d) Harvey and Hugo Limited
  - (e) Subsea Innovation

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