
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.

Collective Energy Switching

2. The Collective Energy Switching scheme, 'Darlington's Big Community Switch' was launched on 19 September 2013. Age UK Darlington, who had initially agreed to facilitate the offline registration element of this, has now withdrawn, however, it has agreed to signpost those interested in the scheme to Darlington Citizens Advice Bureau who had also agreed to facilitate the offline registrants to the scheme.
3. Although the Council was relatively late in joining the scheme, as of 31 October 2013 there were 535 household registrations; 413 of which are online and 122 of which are offline registrations. 285 registrants have stated that their household includes someone with a long term illness or disability, 111 are in a household including someone aged 60 or over, 84 have an annual household income below £13,380, 73 have stated they are in receipt of benefits and 24 have stated their household includes children under 5. Although the scheme is open to all residents, these figures show that the scheme is being accessed by some of the more vulnerable households in the Borough.
4. Subject to formal agreement with iChoosr and Darlington Citizens Advice Bureau, we hope to launch a second round of the scheme on or around 10 December.
5. Further information on the scheme is available at:-

www.darlington.gov.uk/bigcommunityswitch

**Fuel Poverty and Health and Wellbeing –
National Energy Action**

6. The Health and Wellbeing Board were recently successful in securing twelve days of free consultancy advice from national fuel poverty charity National Energy Action (NEA) to work on links between fuel poverty and health and wellbeing.
7. Public Health and Place Programmes and Projects will be working with the NEA to progress this.

This item is also relevant to the Health and Partnerships Portfolio.

Thrifty Living

8. Following on from the Festival of Thrift, the Darlington Partnership Welfare Reform Action Group will be launching a year-long campaign of Thrifty Living. This will ask members of the public for their Thrifty Top Tips and include top tips from Council services and partner organisations. The aim is for tips to go out alongside key Welfare Reform messages in Darlington Together and other communications over the next year. As part of the campaign, a guide to Thrifty Living will be published on the Darlington Partnership website which will include the best of the tips provided by the public as well as signposting to local services. The Darlington Partnership Welfare Reform Action Group will act as an editorial board to ensure that any tips provided are accurate, up to date and on message. As well as supporting residents to make the best use of their money and resources, the Campaign also aims to promote sustainable lifestyles by encouraging people to: cut waste, use energy efficiently and care for their environment; look after their health and wellbeing; buy locally; get involved in their local community and access local services and events.

City Deal

9. Cabinet considered the proposed submission to Government for City Deal status by the Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership.
10. The submission builds on the LEP's Statement of Ambition to develop a world class integrated carbon efficient industrial sector with new complementary 'green' industries. It offers the Government the prospect of a globally important location that will help other advanced manufacturing sectors such as aerospace and automotive to become even more competitive.
11. In accordance with Ambition 2 to develop a more diverse economy it seeks to deal with the shortage of private sector jobs in the economy by establishing a Growth Hub that will signpost companies to specialist advice/expertise to help their businesses grow. It will also specifically accelerate growth for those companies that display the attributes of a high growth company.

Heritage Campus

12. The community led Railway Heritage Enquiry Group has continued to meet to translate the rich heritage of the area to attract jobs, growth and additional visitors and spend to Darlington. Alongside the need to develop a new business model for the Museum through sponsorship, stakeholder involvement and a revised business plan the overall concept of the Heritage Campus will make the most of the opportunity to change the fortunes of one of Darlington's most deprived wards.
13. The Heritage Campus is closely related to the community led desire to celebrate the birth of passenger railways in 2025, with a programme of events, improved infrastructure and visitor facilities and a lasting legacy afterwards to create a sustainable future for these key assets. The Council is working with the community as a partner to bring this to fruition and links are being made with neighbouring

authorities that are linked by this common bond around the Darlington and Stockton Railway and also with the National Railway Museum.

High Street Innovation Fund

14. The High Street Innovation Fund (HSIF) has two main aims – to offer financial incentives to businesses to occupy vacant town centre premises and to improve the appearance of the vacant units most in need.
15. Of the £100,000 allocation received, only £5,000 remains to be committed.
16. Satisfying the Government's main guidance criteria, the bulk of the funding has been used to offer financial incentives to new businesses occupying vacant premises.
17. It is very pleasing to report that the fund is helping 26 new businesses to open in previously vacant town centre properties.
18. The HSIF funding has also enabled visual improvements to be carried out on some of the vacant units most in need. This has included cleaning, painting and the fitting of attractive window vinyls. The 3D 'virtual shops' seen at units in Queen Street, Northgate and Skinnergate not only make the units and the street look better, but also allow potential occupiers the chance to see how the unit could be used.

Central Park Acquisitions and Disposals

19. Cabinet considered the acquisition of further land at Central Park in order to facilitate the development of the commercial quarter adjoining Yarm Road. Officers are now pursuing these negotiations. However, Members should note that the Business Growth Hub and the National Biologics Manufacturing Centre are not reliant on these acquisitions.

Garden Street

20. Officers have been in discussion with the Lateral Property Group regarding its proposals for a retail development on land between Garden Street and St Cuthbert's Way which includes land in the Council's ownership. The proposal would include a new food store with some 4,500 square metres of floor space and two smaller retail units fronting onto Northgate. A planning application is expected to be made shortly and ahead of this a pre-application meeting was recently held with Members of the Planning Committee where developers were able to explain their proposals to regenerate this area and respond to questions. An exhibition of their proposals was presented to the public by the developer on 23 October.

Trading Standards External Inspection

21. In October the Food Standards Agency conducted a two day audit of the feed stuffs role undertaken by Trading Standards. This served to raise the profile of this work, which plays a key part in protecting the quality of feed stuffs going to animals that

eventually become part of the food chain. The audit provided several useful recommendations that will help the Council maintain this work as an effective component of Trading Standards. These included providing more detail of actions to be taken within the service plan, and monitoring training and competencies.

CCTV

22. The CCTV function has benefitted from an agreement with the Police Authority to contribute £25,000 funding in this and the next financial year in recognition of the valuable role CCTV plays in deterring and detecting crime.

Darlington Green Infrastructure Strategy 2013-2026

23. Cabinet approved this new Strategy, its supporting Action Plan and A Guide to Darlington's Green Infrastructure (for those interested in promoting green infrastructure in the Borough) on 1 October. It has been written with and for key delivery partners; Friends Groups, allotment associations, community groups, developers and statutory organisations that are expected to help deliver the Strategy to 2026.

Foundation for Jobs

24. Since April this year Foundation for Jobs (FFJ) and its partners have delivered 108 new apprenticeship places (231 overall since April 2012), 76 internship places (202 overall) and enabled 634 school aged pupils to build closer links with industry (1784 overall).
25. In September Foundation for Jobs was heavily involved in the planning and delivery of a joint SEMTA/ North-East local authorities event to give secondary level teachers a better understanding of the opportunities for their pupils in engineering. Six of Darlington's schools signed up to take part. FFJ has been working with the Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form as it launches its Engineering Scholarship programme, to encourage its students to consider engineering as a career.
26. This year's Low Carbon Engineering Event took place at Faverdale on 11 October with six of the seven Darlington secondary schools attending (around 85 year nine pupils) to take part in a series of practical activities aimed at inspiring interest in STEM subjects.
27. Work on this year's Virgin Money Make £5 Grow projects with three of the Darlington primary schools has started with sessions at Northwood Primary, delivered by a member of Virgin Money staff and FFJ staff. Northwood will be completed by Christmas with Firthmoor running from mid-January to mid-March and Rydal Academy from mid-April to mid-June. The secondary schools, including Polam Hall, were invited to this year's suspension bridge building challenge, delivered by FFJ and The Institution of Civil Engineers Bridge at Darlington College from 4 to 15 November.

Housing Strategy Monitoring – Update

28. The Monitoring Report was considered by Place Scrutiny Committee on 17 October and by Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee on 5 November. Cabinet Members also considered the report on 5 November.
29. Members welcomed the good progress made on implementing the Housing Strategy and agreed the revised Priority Action Plan including the new actions relating to a joint Planning and Housing Position Statement on Older Persons' Accommodation and mitigating the adverse impacts of the introduction of Universal Credit. In particular actions to reduce the long term empty properties from 933 to 700 was highlighted.

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Economy and Regeneration Portfolio