
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.

Local Plan Consultation on Housing

2. As part of preparing the Local Plan, consultations were carried out on the Draft Revised Housing Proposals from 23 May to 4 July 2014. The consultation was widely publicised generating about 750 written responses, as well as comments from about 400 people who attended drop-in events and meetings. Responses were received from the members of the public, local interest groups, landowner/developer interests and statutory consultees.
3. Not unexpectedly, there has been strong local opposition to development on the proposed allocated housing sites. Although the reasons vary in detail between sites, there are common threads around the potential impact on local traffic, access difficulties, impact on the local amenity of adjacent properties, impact on biodiversity levels, likely flooding and surface water drainage issues, loss of recreational open space, loss of views and impact on property values (although the latter two are not planning reasons) and availability of more appropriate alternatives. Local residents also generally support the use of brownfield land for new housing before using green fields and questioned the impact of new housing on the capacity of local services.
4. Officer responses to the issues raised and ongoing actions were considered by a Special Place Scrutiny Committee on 2 October. Account will be taken of the consultation responses in finalising the draft Local Plan.
5. It was anticipated that the Draft Submission document would be considered by Cabinet at the meeting on 2 December 2014, with a view to starting the formal six week consultation period, during which the Council invites representations on the draft plan, early in the new year. However, it is clear that some parts of the evidence base remain outstanding and further work is required before the Local Plan can be reported to Cabinet. In particular, some additional proposed commercial opportunities have recently arisen, and following consideration and discussion with the Highways Agency, this has resulted in a need for detailed traffic modelling work to supplement the existing study we have completed. This needs to be undertaken to fully understand the likely impacts on parts of the local and strategic (motorway) highway network. This will inform any necessary mitigation works that may be required. Other outstanding work relates to the future of education, health and sports facility provision. Officers will also be finalising the housing allocation policies in light of the work carried out since the consultation and

the further evidence mentioned above.

6. As a consequence, in particular following the need to carry out additional traffic modelling, we now expect the Submission Draft Plan to be reported to Cabinet next summer.

Feethams Leisure Scheme

7. On 22 September Terrace Hill started work on the Feethams Leisure scheme. The enabling works are underway and is intended to remediate the site in preparation for the construction of the scheme. The programme is for a 65 week build period and it is anticipated that the scheme will open in the Spring of 2016.
8. This scheme will bring to Darlington a nine screen Vue Cinema, a variety of restaurants and an 80 bed hotel, revitalising this quarter of the Town Centre. An estimated 500 new jobs will be created as a result of this scheme.
9. A programme of engagement with local schools and colleges is proposed as the building progresses, highlighting the opportunities for work in the construction industry. This is allied to a proactive approach secured through the land deal to ensure that local businesses are employed in the construction of the scheme and training and apprenticeships are made available to local young people.

Riverside Park

10. Cabinet was informed that the Riverside Park project funded by grant from HCA was an objective of the Feethams Brief, the Town Centre Fringe masterplan and the Borough's Green Infrastructure Strategy. The Riverside Park will not only address an open space shortage and flood management issues for the Town Centre, but would also create a high quality frontage for the Department for Education Offices and Feethams Leisure development, increasing the viability and vitality of these developments together with the Town Centre.
11. To ensure that the delivery of the Riverside Project can progress quickly once the area becomes available and the land receipt has been paid in full, it is proposed to undertake the feasibility works and subsequently the design and planning elements components of the project now. In order to achieve this, Cabinet agreed the release of £50,000 of the Feethams Leisure Development land receipt, to take the project up to and through to planning stage, including a feasibility exercise to consider how the brief can be delivered for the budget available.

Homes and Community Association (HCA) Housing Bid

12. Officers are working on three further possible sites for affordable housing bids to the HCA in response to its recently announced Continuous Market Engagement Scheme.

Housing Summary

13. In the six month period from 1 April to end of September 164 dwellings were completed. Almost half were affordable housing and just over half were private housing. Given that new house sales and completions tend to tail off over the second half of the financial year, the forecast completions for the whole year are expected to be in the region of 280-300 dwellings. If that happens, it would confirm that the housing market in the Borough continues to improve.

North West Growth Zone

14. The Council continues to work in partnership with Bussey and Armstrong on a joint Masterplan for the North West growth area of the town. Initial community consultation was undertaken on 26 and 27 August and it is projected that a second round of consultation will take place late February 2015 following the conclusions of essential traffic assessment works and other survey work. The conclusions of the surveys will identify both the constraints of the development site, but, equally the opportunities to enhance the quality of the environment through provision of quality functional open space, retention of key wildlife corridors, increased educational provision, new quality housing to meet local housing need, and safe and attractive sustainable corridors to enhance the accessibility of key services and shops for local people. The community will remain central and essential to the design and development process and their views and comments will help inform the evolving Masterplan for the wider North West area of the town. It is anticipated that the first phases of development will commence in 2016.

Skills and Employability

15. The Tees Valley Jobs and Skills Investment Scheme which is funded through the Regional Growth Fund can contribute up to 50 per cent of the salary costs of a new post. As of July 2014, 73 jobs had been created and five safe-guarded in Darlington, the value of wage subsidy approved is £583,403. There are a further 19 applications from Darlington in the pipeline with a subsidy value of £345,076k.
16. The Red Hall Employability Project has been developed to complement the physical regeneration work. To date we have had 21 clients accessing the project and assistance has been given with CV writing, Job Searching and Interview Techniques. As of 21 October two clients have gone into employment, one into a Traineeship and two have gone into training.

MINT Database and Tractivity CRM System

17. The Council has recently procured licences for MINT database and Tractivity CRM System. The license agreements allow for the use of MINT data by the Economy Team that gives access to a database which contains information on over 5.5m companies within the UK, including unincorporated businesses. The data can be searched by various different geographic levels (national/regional/individual authority/NUTS3 areas etc.). Specifically for Darlington, this will provide detailed information on businesses within the Borough, the sectors within which they

operate, key financial information, corporate structures, comprehensive information on company's official directors, full contact details etc.

18. The Tractivity CRM system will enable appropriate and timely targeting of businesses to support the creation of new businesses and jobs as set out in the Economic strategy. The Tractivity System can fully integrate with the MINT database which has been approved for procurement which means that company intelligence and contact information can be pulled directly into Tractivity including company's financial reports, business intelligence and director/key information can be accessed by all Tractivity users.

Foundation for Jobs

19. Foundation for Jobs (FFJ) has now worked with more than 3,600 young people since its launch. Since the start of Year 3 (from April 2013) the campaign has been involved in the creation of 114 apprenticeships, 110 internships or work experience places and facilitated links between 309 Darlington school pupils and industry.
20. The annual FFJ Low Carbon Engineering Event took place at Lingfield Point on 9 October with 140 year nine pupils (the highest number to date) from seven Darlington schools attending. Eight organisations supported the event including AMEC and Whessoe Oil and Gas who had not been involved in the event in previous years.
21. Firms and organisations which have offered consistent support to FFJ including Cummins Engines, Darlington College, Skills Academy for Sustainable Manufacturing and Innovation (SASMI), Regional Technology Centre for the North East and Cumbria (RTC North), South West Durham Training and The Engineering Development Trust also attended with inspiring activities.
22. We were also able to involve students from the Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form, who are planning engineering careers, in running activities at the event alongside firms, giving them valuable contacts for their future careers.
23. The FFJ/Institution of Civil Engineers bridge activity returned to Darlington College from 7 November. All secondary schools, students at Darlington College as well as some primary schools were invited to attend sessions with around 200 pupils participating.
24. Our Make £5 Grow project in partnership with Virgin Money is presently running with a class of 50 pupils at Red Hall Primary School.
25. FFJ assisted with a recent robotics day at Hurworth School by providing an apprentice and graduate from Modus and also video of robots at work backing up what they were saying.

Gladman Appeal

26. Following an appeal by developers, Officers defended the Council's decision to refuse planning permission for 250 dwellings on land at Sadberge Road, Middleton

St. George at a Public Inquiry, which commenced on 11 November. The outcome of the Inquiry is anticipated in the New Year.

Collective Energy Switching

27. Cabinet gave approval for this Council to enter into a contract with iChoosr, through the Local Government Association (LGA) Framework Agreement, to deliver Collective Energy Switching up to 31 March 2017, following the end of the trial of 'Darlington's Big Community Switch' which was very positive with over 300 households switching suppliers and saving, on average, £201.
28. Following the end of the trial period options have been considered as to how to continue Collective Energy Switching in the future and it has been concluded that the most appropriate way forward is to continue to use iChoosr up until 31 March 2017. In order to facilitate this arrangement it is proposed that the Council enter into a temporary arrangement with Darlington Citizens Advice Bureau up to the end of the current Strategic Grant funding period which will provide an opportunity to review and integrate Darlington's collective energy switching project into a broader review of all contracted DCAB services post 31 March 2015.
29. Further provision of a Collective Energy Switching Scheme will support tenants and residents to minimise their energy costs and reduce the impact of fuel poverty on health and wellbeing. It will also support Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations to thrive and grow through reduction of their operational costs.
30. It is important that the Council moves quickly forward with this project to ensure that tenants and residents affected by fuel poverty continue to have the opportunity to benefit from cheaper energy bills this Winter onwards.

Land at Former Eastbourne School

31. Cabinet gave approval for the disposal of additional land at the former Eastbourne School site.
32. Eight square metres to be added to one of the Affordable Housing plots and 62 square metres to extend the Adopted Highway.
33. The disposal was required to ensure delivery of the Affordable Housing and was considered beneficial in supporting the economic, social and environmental objective of the redevelopment.
34. In order to receive Grant Funding from the Homes and Communities Agency construction of the Affordable Housing must be completed by 31 March 2015 therefore work on site has already commenced and a planning application for use of the additional land is in preparation.

Trading Standards

35. A very successful Electric Blanket testing campaign was organised by Trading Standards in partnership with Age UK Darlington. The event was run over two days in September, with over 90 electric blankets tested. 30 electric blankets were found to be unsafe and were taken out of use and their owners were offered a free replacement blanket. Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service was also on hand to offer fire safety advice.
36. Paul Golding of Darlington was prosecuted by Trading Standards and sentenced to eight months at Teesside Crown Court on 3 October 2014 for four offences under the Fraud Act. He failed to carry out building work or refund the money taken and also failed to give the necessary cancellation rights that were required to be given. He has previously been convicted of similar offences by Trading Standards and was on a suspended sentence from the Crown Court for offences committed in Stockton.
37. Darlington Trading Standards recently participated in a regional operation targeting illicit and counterfeit tobacco. Acting on intelligence, six premises were inspected in Darlington by Trading Standards, assisted by tobacco sniffer dogs. The dogs found a substantial quantity of illicit and counterfeit tobacco at two premises. The tobacco was concealed in various locations about the premises and would have been extremely difficult to find without the use of the sniffer dogs. Over 35,000 cigarettes and 500 packs of hand rolling tobacco, which were illicit or counterfeit, were seized.

Distinct Darlington Board

38. I attended the Distinct Darlington Board on Wednesday 5 November where the Board were given updates on the development of the Town Centre phone app, a review of the role of the BID Rangers, and updates/discussion held on trading activity in the Town, opportunities and issues. A discussion on scope for future BID events programme was also held.

Town Centre Board

39. I chaired the Town Centre Board on Wednesday 12 November, a role I have held for over five years. Membership has been augmented to acquire a wider and more strategic view and a key outcome was to consider the role and purpose of the Board in helping to shape and catalyse interventions that support and develop the Town Centre in future years.

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Economy and Regeneration Portfolio