
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.

Haughton-le-Skerne Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan

2. Cabinet approved the Haughton-le-Skerne Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan, including the proposed boundary addition, in order to provide a document to assist in the preservation and enhancement of the Haughton-le-Skerne Conservation Area, in accordance with Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
3. Darlington has 16 Conservation Areas designated between 1968 and 1997; the Haughton-le-Skerne Conservation Area was designated on 26 March 1968, making it was one of the first. The Character Appraisal for Haughton-le-Skerne is the ninth in the programme of Conservation Area Character Appraisals.
4. Defining the 'special interest' of an area is the main purpose of a Character Appraisal and is gained from the area's character and appearance but other senses and experiences, local environmental conditions and historical associations can be drawn on.
5. Potential boundary additions are considered when a Character Appraisal and Management Plan are drafted. The local Residents' Association proposed a boundary addition along Stockton Road on the basis that it formed part of the original village and therefore was worthy of inclusion. Historic maps evidence this to be the case, so the boundary addition was proposed as part of public engagement on the document.

Local Growth Fund Delegations and Release of Funding

6. Cabinet was advised of the award of £90.3m of Local Growth Funding (LGF) to Tees Valley and approved the delegation of decision-making in respect of LGF to Tees Valley Unlimited. It also approved the necessary delegated powers to proceed with projects when funding became available and noted the relevant delegated power to enter into appropriate funding agreement with Stockton Borough Council.
7. LGF is funding from Central Government that must be used to deliver capital projects across the Tees Valley including transport projects, innovation builds/developments, further education establishments and opening up sites to

enable development.

8. The Council has been successful in securing conditional LGF funding to support the delivery of two of its strategic priorities:
 - (a) Central Park - £2.2m has been conditionally secured to install key enabling infrastructure on Central Park; and
 - (b) Bank Top Station - £300,000 has been conditionally secured to undertake feasibility work in relation to improving the station and the areas surrounding the station.
9. TVU Leadership Board does not currently have the necessary powers to agree the allocation of funds to individual projects to enable Stockton Borough Council, as the Accountable Body, to enter into contracts with sponsors. It is therefore necessary to get the approval of the five Tees Valley Local Authorities.

Business Central

10. A Centre Manager for Business Central in Darlington has now been appointed. This exciting new facility is a partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency, Darlington Borough Council and North Eastern Business Innovation Centre (the manager's agent). The Centre Manager took up her role on 5 January and brought with her a wealth of experience within the facilities management, marketing and business development fields.

Town Centre Board

11. At the 12 November meeting of the Town Centre Board, Members were asked to discuss the future role of the Board, in particular to consider how the Board could adopt a more strategic approach to helping to achieve a strong and vibrant Town Centre.
12. The Board also received a presentation and were asked to comment on the emerging Town Centre Business Plan, developed following the Town Centre Conference earlier in the year.
13. Key points arising from discussion at the meeting were:
 - (a) A request that feedback from the Town Centre Board is regularly considered by Cabinet;
 - (b) Suggestion that Town Centre Board meetings take place four times per year rather than present arrangement with six meetings per year;
 - (c) Agreement that Membership of the Board should remain open and transparent, possible future membership to represent cinema and hotel at Feethams;
 - (d) Agreement that there was a need to collectively strengthen the positive communication on the Town Centre and that that communication should be a

standard item on the Board agenda; and

- (e) Opportunity to promote Town Centre shops and businesses to the Civil Servants moving to Feethams (Bishopsgate House) this year. Distinct Darlington to coordinate providing information/retail offers to distribute to Civil Service staff.

14. The meeting was well attended by Town Centre businesses, plus representatives from Distinct Darlington, the Cornmill Centre and Arriva.

Fuel Poverty Statistics

15. Updated fuel poverty statistics (2012) have been extracted and compiled:

% of households in Fuel Poverty/ Offgas (DECC, 2012)				% of Excess Winter Deaths (ONS,2012/13)
	10% indicator	Low Income High Cost (LIHC) indicator	Offgas	Excess Winter Mortality (EWM) Index
Darlington	17.6%	11.8%	3.11%	18.5%
NE	17.8%	11.6%	3.91%	20.6%
England	14.0%	10.4%	10.01%	19.8%

16. Northgate, Bank Top, Central, Heighington and Coniscliffe, North Road and Park East Wards have Lower Super Output Areas with the highest levels of fuel poverty in the Borough.

Darlington's Big Community Switch

17. The fourth round of Darlington's Big Community Switch was launched on 9 December 2014.

18. As of 19 January, there have been 166 household registrations (86 online and 80 offline).

19. The deadline for household registration is midnight 2 February 2015.

20. For further information visit: www.darlington.gov.uk/bigcommunityswitch

Home Energy Page

21. The Home Energy page on the Council's webpage has been updated: www.darlington.gov.uk/home-energy

22. Updates include information on getting cheaper heating oil and liquid propane gas (LPG) and free connections to the mains gas network for eligible residents.

Town Centre Training

23. Funded through the Tees Valley workforce Skills project the Council is organising a series of ten seminars based on improving knowledge and management of primarily retail businesses. The seminars will be delivered by Bsupplied, a management and training businesses located in Sunderland and operating throughout the North East of England. The first seminar was held 14 January and they have continued weekly. The topics covered include: Attracting new customers, Customer loyalty, Business values, Merchandising, Buying/Purchasing, Product Ranging, Stock management, Shrinkage and Security.

Red Hall

24. To complement the Red Hall Capital regeneration Project an Employability Project has been developed. The Project contains a number of initiatives which aim to provide a range of activities and services which will address barriers to employment such as Debt Management, whilst also providing individuals with the necessary support and skills to prepare them for the world of work and assist them in finding and securing employment. At the same time we will work towards ensuring we have initiatives to develop the demand side which will provide the employment opportunities for Red Hall residents.
25. We recently secured funding through the County Durham Community Foundation (CDDF) to run the project for the coming 12 months.

MINT/Tractivity CRM

26. The Tractivity CRM system went live on 5 December. A number of staff within the Economic Growth Team have received training on the system, with further training being delivered this month. As part of the implementation of the system it has been integrated with just over 5,000 businesses identified through the MINT database.

Foundation for Jobs

27. In December Foundation for Jobs completed its latest Make £5 Grow project in partnership with Virgin Money involving some 54 Year five and six pupils at Red Hall Primary School, who produced products which they then sold at a profit running into hundreds of pounds at venues including Lingfield Point and The Student Loans Company.
28. In early December Foundation for Jobs facilitated a visit to Year 9 and 10 engineering GCSE students at Darlington School of Mathematics and Science (DSMS) by Darchem Engineering's apprentice of the year to discuss career routes. This was followed by the same class visiting Darchem Engineering on 17 December to get a better feel on how what they were learning in class translated into real life roles.
29. In December a group of young people from St Aidan's Academy, interested in careers in Construction, were taken to the Wilmott Dixon business hub site for a

tour and discussion on potential job roles.

30. A final draft of the second Foundation for Jobs Evaluation report has been completed by Teesside University and will be officially released in February.
31. Computer coding training for teachers facilitated by Foundation for Jobs and delivered by Teesside University began on 14 January and will run for 10 weeks. At the end of the training the teachers from the Darlington schools taking part will be asked to deliver sessions or coding clubs within Darlington secondary schools. A lack of qualified coders is seen as a potential issue to the further growth of the Tees Valley digital economy.
32. The Foundation for Jobs subsea engineering event, where young people from Darlington secondary schools will spend sessions building mini ROV (underwater robot) kits developed by a division of the US Navy will take place 6 to 12 February at Darlington College. These kits mimic the technology and scientific principles used by the real thing. Subsea engineering is a growth area for Darlington, the surrounding Tees Valley and all the firms use ROV technology. Local firms, either based in Darlington or within commuting distance, include Deep Ocean, Modus, Tekmar, Subsea Innovation, Reef and Forum, amongst others. It is hoped the sessions will outline the number of roles and job functions these firms, which are facing skills gaps, require. Some of the firms will also attend an open event for school pupils on 12 February

Investment Activity

33. Darlington is continuing to witness significant new Investment activity, with projects at Central Park Business Central and National Biologics Centre on track to finish in the next six months, the new Department for Education Office opening at the end of this month and work now underway on the new build phase of the Cinema and Leisure complex. At the former Torrington site on Yarm Road, Magnet opened their new showroom in December and work is rapidly progressing on opening the site up for further development.
34. The rate of housing development has also picked across the Borough with sites at Central Park, West Park, Lingfield Point, the former Hopetown House and Mowden all moving forward with new completions.

Christmas Period

35. The Council ran a proactive media campaign in the run up to Christmas, with promotions on the festive lights switch on, Small Business Saturday, Festive Fun with Market traders and the car parking offers in Council car parks. Evidence from footfall counts shows that counts were 1.6 per cent higher during December and that parking ticket sales were five per cent up on December 2013. Members of the Town Centre Board including Distinct Darlington are currently working on a Town Centre communications plan, the aim being to engage businesses in working together to promote positive messages and new stories on the Town Centre.

Darlington Outdoor Market Trade Update 2014

36. Trading conditions remained very challenging during the first quarter of 2014. From Easter forward traders have reported a positive increase in growth and footfall. This can be attributed to the location of traders on Northgate and the mild weather during the year. Events provided by markets, events team and Distinct Darlington have all had a positive impact on shoppers experience as well as trading figures. There appears to be an air of positivity this year certainly up on previous years. However, it is still vital to sustain and promote continual growth within the town centre that a full calendar of events is maintained. The outdoor market continues to strive to attract new diverse traders, with the imminent arrival of two large stalls at the end of this month.

**Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio**