
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.

Town Centre Training

2. Funded through the Tees Valley Workforce Skills project the Council has organised a series of ten seminars based on improving knowledge and management of primarily retail businesses. The seminars are delivered by B-Supplied, a management and training business located in Sunderland and operating throughout the North East of England. The first seminar was 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. An average of 15 businesses have attended each seminar.

Town Centre 'App'

3. Distinct Darlington have launched an 'App' which will act as a go-to guide to Darlington Town Centre and everything it has to offer. The 'App' will feature an A-Z guide complete with contact details and directions, an events calendar, up to date news and travel information and exclusive promotions. You can also top-up your parking on the go using this app encouraging visitors to stay in Darlington for longer. To locate the 'App' search for 'Distinct Darlington' in your App store or play store.

Red Hall

4. 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 to 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.
5. The Council recently secured funding through the County Durham Community Foundation to run the project for the coming twelve months. Morrison Trust will be providing staff to run the Job Club and there is to be a Flexible Fund to cover the cost of training etc to improve an individual's chance to secure employment.

Cinema and Leisure Development

6. The Employability and Skills Officer is working with Terrace Hill and Barr Construction to implement their Training and Recruitment Plan. This will include recruitment of five apprenticeships, eight work experience placements and work with Darlington's Employability Providers Network to recruit potential employees. Barr will also support outreach work with schools / colleges to enable students to better understand work in the construction sector.

The Keys

7. Through a partnership involving Job Centre Plus and private sector training and recruitment company, Amacus, The Keys on Skinnergate has employed 17 previously unemployed individuals. This recruitment was a result of a Sector Based Academy (Training) taking place in November 2014.

Invest in Darlington Website

8. To support the Economy Team in raising the profile of Darlington as 'an excellent place for business investment and growth' and to ensure that we maximise opportunities to attract inward investment from our key growth sectors an 'Invest in Darlington' website is being created. The site will provide a general business case for promoting the advantages of locating in Darlington, present key information required for investment decisions, promote our existing sector strengths and the priority sectors for the Borough that we are keen to attract. It will also provide information on our priority investment sites, along with the broader availability of sites and premises within the Borough, supply information on the support that we and our partners are able to provide businesses considering, or choosing, to relocate/set up in the Borough. Cool Blue has been appointed as graphic designer and the Web site is scheduled to be live from April 2015.

Business Central

9. A Centre Manager was appointed in late January. The North East Business Innovation Centre (BIC) took over management of the facility the first week in March with the aim of the first tenants moving in early April.
10. To engage with the local business community, alongside the Council, Darlington Business Club and Tees Valley Business Club, the centre has been promoted to Darlington businesses throughout March via informal events and through local media.

Foundation for Jobs (FFJ)

11. The FFJ Subsea Week took place from 9 to 12 February and involved 107 pupils from six schools in Darlington and the Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form. Groups attended half-day sessions where they built mini subsea ROV kits.
12. Computer coding training with eight teachers from Darlington secondary schools is currently taking place with weekly sessions being run until Easter in partnership

with Teesside University and Digital City.

13. An employability scheme, developed in partnership with Darlington Cares and Whessoe Oil and Gas, has started at Hummersknott School for 24 students from Year 10.
14. The annual hovercraft building day for schools took place on 5 March at the Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form and was attended by 120 children.

Darlington's Key Economic Indicators Update

15. Employment rate is now 73.5 per cent with a pre-recession rate of 71.1 per cent. This is above the national average of 71.9 per cent and Tees Valley average of 66.5 per cent.
16. Unemployment rate is currently 8 per cent with a pre-recession rate of 5.3 per cent, the national average is 7.7 per cent.
17. There are currently 2,060 people claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), 816 less than the previous year.
18. Youth unemployment is at 5.6 per cent of 18-24 year olds claiming JSA, nationally this figure is 5 per cent.
19. In last twelve months we have seen housing growth pick up with around 400 new housing completions expected in 2014/15.

Planning

20. Following the Inspector's decision to grant planning permission at Sadberge Road, Middleton St George, officers are commissioning work to understand what the full objectively assessed housing needs are, and are carrying out concurrent work to update and review its evidence on housing land supply in the light of the Inspector's comments. A landscape character assessment and strategic housing market assessment are also being commissioned to ensure that this information is as up to date as possible, should the objective needs assessment work find that the housing requirements of the Borough are higher than are currently being planned for in the emerging Making and Growing Places Development Plan Document.
21. An officer also attended a meeting with the Planning Minister, the local MP and a delegate from Middleton St George to discuss the main issues arising from the Gladman Appeal decision, including the implications for the emerging Neighbourhood Plan and further housing proposals in the area.

Feethams

22. Following the completion of the building at the end of last year, the Department for Education completed its relocation to Bishopsgate House in February 2015. The Collaboration Space and other shared facilities were made available to Council staff in February.

23. The Feethams Leisure scheme, after successfully remediating the site before Christmas, continues to move on apace. The piling was completed mid-February and the foundations are due to be completed at the end of this month. The steelwork should be visible above ground soon afterwards. The project remains on target for a completion date in the first quarter of 2016. Allied to this development it is anticipated that the new Riverside Park will be constructed, following the completion of the multi-storey car park (MSCP), to coincide with the opening of the scheme with completion planned for the summer of 2016.
24. The MSCP has commenced with site preparation and ground works nearing completion. The Bus and Coach Passenger Waiting Facilities Improvements to Feethams are progressing on schedule and will be completed in April 2016.

Central Park

25. Business Central was completed in February and handed over to the operator North East BIC in March. Opening is scheduled for early April. Interest in the office accommodation is picking up with 18 live enquires from businesses from Darlington, the Tees Valley and further afield. Works on the National Biologics Centre continues with completion scheduled for July 2015.
26. The Enabling Infrastructure Project at Central Park, which will open up Central Park South through junction improvements at Yarm Road and continue through the site, is currently subject to due diligence by Tees Valley Unlimited. Planning and design works continue to enable works to commence on site in Spring 2015, for completion by March 2016.

Landlord Prosecuted For Cold Home

27. A private landlord who failed to provide a mother and her three young children with adequate heating over the winter period was prosecuted in January. Legal action was taken, following a complaint made to the Private Sector Housing Team, but the landlord still failed to repair and renew the broken heating. Repairs were carried out by the Council and the heating was reinstated at the property.
28. A case was subsequently taken to Darlington Magistrates Court where the landlord, Kieron Munnelly of Derbyshire, pleaded guilty, Mr Munnelly was fined £1000 with £500 costs for failing to comply with an Environmental Act 1990 legal notice. All repair costs have also been recovered by the Council.
29. The case highlights that some landlords are still failing to provide adequate and safe levels of heating but action will be taken by the Council when they fail to do so.

**Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio**