

LEADER'S OVERVIEW

Cabinet

1. At the meeting of Cabinet held on 3 March 2015, further consideration was given to the potential creation of a Combined Authority for the Tees Valley (including this Council, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Stockton and Redcar and Cleveland). A consultation exercise had been undertaken on the proposal and it was pleasing to note that this had been positive in nature. A further report on the proposals can be seen elsewhere on this agenda.

Darlington Partnership

2. At the last meeting of the Darlington Partnership Board, on 28 January, Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth, gave a presentation on the current position of economic development projects in Darlington and on the future direction. The presentation was praised by the Partnership who went on to discuss how the good news included in the report could be publicised effectively.
3. The Board also received a presentation on the work that has been carried out to develop a brand for Darlington. The core ideas were welcomed and the private sector representatives who had given their time to oversee its development were thanked. Discussion followed around how the brand could be widely adopted.
4. The Partnership received a report on the proposed Tees Valley Combined Authority. Following discussion, the Partnership agreed to support the proposal.
5. Over recent years the Partnership has developed a process for identifying areas of significant challenge or opportunity for Darlington where it is felt concerted action could make a measurable difference. This Action Priority approach has led to the development of successful, innovative initiatives including Foundation for Jobs, Good Friends and most recently a project promoting mental wellbeing in the workplace called Minded to Help. The Partnership Board in March will be taken up with reviewing its Action Priorities and agreeing the focus for 2015/16.

Rail North

6. Darlington has become a Member of Rail North, developed through a partnership of 30 Local Transport Authorities across the North of England working to shape the future of train services, with an emphasis on improved rail services supporting economic growth.

7. I gave a short presentation at the Rail North Business Briefing on 10 March, outlining our priorities for investment in improving rail services. Key asks being better passenger and freight connectivity, improved integration between services, modernisation of the passenger rolling stock and investment in Stations.
8. Government has announced the invitation to tender for the Northern and Transpennine Express franchises, with bids from the shortlisted train operators to be submitted by Summer 2015, and award of the contract scheduled for December 2015. Darlington has worked with Rail North and Tees Valley LEP to influence the development of the Invitation to Tender
9. The Rail Electrification task force of which I was a sub member is set to report its findings imminently and work has been undertaken to demonstrate the importance of the electrification from Northallerton to Middlesbrough. Electrification of the Tees Valley network will improve connectivity to other parts of the Northern economy (Leeds and Manchester) and beyond, improving access to markets and people.

Transport for the North

10. The Northern Powerhouse concept has moved rapidly with focus around the Core Cities of Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield, Liverpool and Leeds with a report on Transport for the North expected imminently. Meetings have taken place with the Secretary of State and Senior Civil Servants in the Department for Transport to express the ambition of Darlington and the Tees Valley and state the case that the Tees Valley has an equally important role as the Core Cities. There has been a strong lobby with evidence to influence the Transport for the North report that will call for a £15bn 15-year plan to be adopted to improve transport.
11. The evidence submitted has detailed that the Tees Valley's vibrant economy is vital to Northern economic growth and highlighted the key economic assets that are benefitting the North. It also sets a future vision for transformational growth with Connectivity vital to the Tees Valley economy.
12. It is crucial that, as the gateway to the North and with over 70 per cent of major local businesses internationally owned, the Tees Valley remains globally competitive by offering effective transport links and resilient infrastructure.
13. The Tees Valley's ambition is to contribute to Northern economic growth by creating 25,000 new jobs and an additional £1bn of investment over the next decade. Our Strategic Economic Plan identifies infrastructure constraints as barriers to growth in our key sectors. The interventions needed to deliver these ambitions in Tees Valley are based upon improving those key assets that can have a transformational impact upon the Northern economy, these are summarised below. The work done to date will hopefully see both Darlington and Tees Valley benefit from this rapidly evolving concept and potential funding opportunity.

Strategic Priority	Key Details Include
a. Tees Valley Strategic Growth Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A19 Upgrade • New Tees Crossing • East-West Connectivity Improvements (A66, A689, A174)
b. Tees Valley High Speed Rail Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electrification (Northallerton - Teesport as first priority and then to Hartlepool, Darlington-Saltburn and Whitby) • Darlington Station Improvements • Rolling stock and local connectivity improvements
c. Unlocking Tees Valley Freight Markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern Gateway Container Terminal • Rail gauge Clearances

Growth Royal Bank of Scotland Survey

14. Royal Bank of Scotland has released its latest Regional Growth Tracker which is calculated by taking the UK growth rate of each sector and weighting them by the sector shape of each region's economy. The results show that Darlington was the only North East area to perform better than the UK average (2.8 per cent growth) over the last year, other points are:-
- (a) Darlington growth over the last year is estimated at 3.4 per cent which is higher than the North East average of 2.7 per cent;
 - (b) the North East economy grew by an estimated 0.3 per cent in Q4 2014 compared to Q4 2013; this was considerably slower than the previous quarter's 0.8 per cent growth; and
 - (c) Darlington's performance in part can be attributed to having a higher percentage of businesses in the faster growing professional services sector than other North East authority areas.

Policing and Community Safety

15. Work has progressed in relation to the Checkpoint initiative, which was formally launched by Ron Hogg, Police and Crime Commissioner, during this period. Checkpoint is a multi-agency programme that aims to support offenders who have been involved in certain offences through a range of critical pathways to prevent their offending behaviour from escalating. Pathways include debt, housing, employment, domestic abuse, drugs and alcohol misuse and relationships. It is hoped that this support will address the causes of offending behaviour and the initiative will be evaluated by Cambridge University to determine its effectiveness. A Project Board of key stakeholder partners has been established to oversee the implementation of the programme. An initial pilot phase started at the beginning of March.

16. A successful planning event took place at the end of January 2015 to contribute to the development of the new Community Safety Plan for Darlington. The event was well attended by all partner organisations, who met to formulate key local priorities and actions and consider the structure of the new plan. This will form the basis of on-going development work in the coming months.
17. Further referrals have been accepted to the Perpetrator Programme, with assessments being collated. It is likely that ten men will start the group. This will take two weeks and then the programme will be up and running.

Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)

18. Following a full tender process in 2014/15, the DAAT announced NECA (North East Council on Addictions) as the provider for Darlington's all age, all substance, Health and Wellbeing Substance Misuse Service.
19. Work between January and March 2015 focussed on a smooth transition to the new service. Partners and providers are now engaged in joint working to ensure successful implementation during 2015/16 and develop robust pathways for all elements of the recovery journey.
20. I chaired the March meeting of the DAAT Board on 4 March 2015. The meeting focussed on implementation of the new treatment service and plans to develop a comprehensive local Substance Misuse Strategy.

Alcohol Declaration

21. At a recent meeting of the Association of North East Councils (ANEC), Leaders and elected Mayors unanimously supported a North East Local Authority declaration. The declaration was presented as a collaborative initiative and it was clear a great deal of work had taken place in each Council to enable this point of agreement to be reached. There was also interest at that ANEC meeting in widening support for the declaration to other sectors, e.g. NHS/Police/CCGs, which is an aspect that can now be progressed.

Bishopsgate House and DfE Relocation

22. Following the completion of Bishopsgate House, including the works to the Town Hall Reception, the Department for Education have successfully relocated all operations from Mowden Hall. Bishopsgate House provides BREEAM Excellent office accommodation for the 430 staff within the Department for Education, as well as the Collaboration Space and shared facilities for use by Council staff. The Collaborative Space is the heart of the public sector hub which will be available for other Government departments and agencies, local authorities and strategic partners. The official opening of Bishopsgate House and the Collaborative Space, which will promote and showcase the facilities available to other public sector organisations, took place earlier today. The Council is continuing to work closely with the Department to smooth out any teething issues and on the wider Collaborative Working Agenda.

General Updates

23. Tony Waite, Chair of the County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust, retired at the end of February, after nine years as chair. I wish Tony a long and happy retirement and am delighted to welcome Paul Keane as Chair. Paul has been a valued member of the Health and Well Being Board.

Bill Dixon
Leader