
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.

Darlington's Big Community Switch

2. The 5th round of Darlington's Big Community Switch was launched on 23 April, with the auction taking place on 19 May.
3. Registration was extended until 28 June to provide opportunity for more households to register. The total registrations received was 412 (268 online and 144 offline). 124 Households accepted the offer to switch which is approximately 30% of registering.
4. There were three winners at the auction who will supply a range of contracts – British Gas, E.ON Energy and OVO Energy.
5. Eight of ten households who registered before the auction could save on their energy bills if they chose to switch.
6. The highest average potential saving was for Duel Fuel Monthly Direct Debit paper billing (online registration customers) who stand to save an average £228 per year if they switch
7. Further information can be found at www.darlington.gov.uk/bigcommunityswitch

Fuel Poverty Statistics

8. Updated fuel poverty statistics (2013) have been extracted and compiled:

Percentage of households in Fuel Poverty/ Offgas (DEC, 2013)			Percentage of Excess Winter Deaths (ONS, 2012/13)
	Low Income High Cost (LIHC) indicator	Offgas	Excess Winter Mortality (EWM) Index
Darlington	12.50 per cent	3.0 per cent	18.5 per cent
N.E.	11.80 per cent	4.0 per cent	20.6 per cent
England	10.40 per cent	10.0 per cent	19.8 per cent

9. The former Northgate, Bank Top, Central, North Road, Park East, Heighington and Coniscliffe, Cockerton West, Hurworth, Pierremont and Sadberge and Whessoe wards had Lower Super Output Areas with the highest levels of Fuel Poverty in the Borough.
10. Updated Fuel Poverty 10 per cent indicator statistics have not been released. The EWM index shows that there were 18.5 per cent more deaths in Darlington in the winter compared to the non-winter period in 2012/13.

Parkgate Conservation Area and Character Appraisal

11. Cabinet has approved the designation of Parkgate Conservation Area and adopted the Character Appraisal including its proposed boundary.
12. Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 state that it is the duty of Local Planning Authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area that are Conservation Areas and this is achieved through Conservation Area Character Appraisals, Management Plans and ultimately through detailed policy in the Local Plan.
13. Darlington currently has 16 Conservation Areas and the designation of Parkgate as a Conservation Area is the first new Conservation Area since 1997 and forms part of regeneration of the area as a whole through the Town Centre Fringe Masterplan and the Heritage Lottery Fund bid for the Civic Theatre.
14. Conservation Area designation is done to either maintain an historic area in a good condition or to help improve one that is not and is achieved through decisions made on planning applications received for development in and adjacent to its boundary.

Darlington Town Centre Business Plan

15. Cabinet has approved the Darlington Town Centre Business Plan, which responds to the findings from the Town Centre Conference and other recent consultation, and draws together in one document policies and proposals including Local Plan, Transport Plan and Car Parking Strategy, Economic Strategy, Distinct Darlington Business Plan and Feethams Brief which impact upon the Town Centre.
16. The business of Town Centres is highly complex encompassing businesses and services in all guises, private and public sector; it is a dynamic community which must change with the times.
17. Darlington Town Centre has a great deal going for it, good accessibility, a unique and distinctive heritage character giving rise to a strong sense of place, a good leisure offer, and a substantial local catchment area of 300,000 people living in Darlington, North Yorkshire, County Durham and the Tees Valley.
18. The Business Plan provides a statement of vision, ambition, outcomes and priority actions aimed at securing the future success of the Town Centre.

Public Events Safety Advisory Group (PESAG)

19. Cabinet noted the findings and recommendations of the Public Events Safety Advisory Group and in doing so requested Officers to continue to action the recommendations deliverable within existing resources.
20. Cabinet also noted that as the Medium Term Financial Plan takes shape, alternative models may need to be considered such as a self-help web-based service for smaller events and/or events on private land restricting a more detailed examination to larger events and those on Council land.

Ingenious Darlington

21. The 'Marketing Darlington' Group, led by private sector representatives and supported by Council colleagues, has been working on the brand roll out of Ingenious Darlington for a number of months.
22. A series of 'soft-launch' presentations to key Darlington stakeholders took place on 19 June at Rockcliffe Hall, 25 June at Business Central and 1 July at Houndgate Townhouse.
23. The branding is also being promoted and made available via dedicated website. Designed by the brand creators, Given, and developed by the Council's web team. The website houses the brand assets/downloads and is where people can find out about how Darlington organisations have used the branding themselves. The web address is www.ingeniousdarlington.co.uk

Feethams

24. 'Topping out' of the £30m Feethams Leisure Scheme took place last month, works are due to be completed spring 2016.
25. The Council's Employability and Skills Officer has contacted the Leisure Scheme operators, and will work with partners over the autumn to support plans for the recruitment of the 500 employees.
26. Construction of the 650 space multi-storey car park is on schedule to be completed at the end of the year.
27. The Council has purchased the area of unused land adjacent to Beaumont Street East car park (opposite the Town Hall) and is preparing a brief for the site. The aim being to regenerate this site bringing more jobs to the Town Centre.
28. The Council and Coast and Country have brought Regents House back into use, converting unused office accommodation into 47 residential apartments.

Business Central – Central Park

29. Business Central officially opened on 19 March 2015 with a host of businesses in attendance.
30. In addition to the Centre Manager two further members of staff have been employed to support the businesses located there.
31. Out of 60 units, ten now have tenants including Business Enterprise Finance; Optimal Automation, First Call Healthcare, North Point, Carol Hynd Accountancy, Euro Super Abrasives, Northstar Ventures, Mood Clinic and Harvey and Hugo.
32. Three additional businesses have taken up the option for open space membership, meaning they can use the open areas for meetings.

The Forge – University of Teesside

33. Based at the £13m campus at Central Park, Darlington, University of Teesside has launched The Forge as the ‘front door’ to the University for businesses ranging from start-ups and Small Medium Enterprises to blue-chip multi nationals.

National Biologics Manufacturing Centre (NBMC)

34. The £38m National Biologics Manufacturing Centre is scheduled to open in early autumn 2015.

Central Park – New Road

35. With £2.2m from the Local Growth Fund, in the coming months the Council will start work on constructing a new road junction linking Central Park to Yarm Road. This will improve access to Business Central and the NBMC and open up access for further development at Central Park.

Skills Update

Foundation for Jobs (FFJ)

Link to website: <http://www.foundationforjobs.co.uk/>

36. An employability scheme at Hummersknott School developed in partnership with Darlington Cares and Whessoe Oil and Gas for Year 10 students has now been completed. This scheme was used as a trial and given its success we will be looking to role this out wider with other Darlington schools.
37. Following a FFJ Computer Coding up skilling course for teachers, in partnership with Teesside University, a number of schools are adding relevant clubs and activities to their curriculum. A group from Longfield Academy will make a hosted visit to Digital City’s Boho One building in Middlesbrough this month.

38. FFJ in partnership with Virgin Money is running the Make £5 Grow at Firthmoor Primary School during the Summer Term. The project involves pupils taking part in six 90 minute business sessions where they plan, design and make products before selling them at an outside location.
39. FFJ hosted a new bio science event on 9 July, where pupils made plastic from potatoes and bio-fuels assisted by specialist staff from the Centre for Process Innovation (CPI) the organisation behind the new National Biologics Manufacturing Centre.
40. FFJ is working with Darlington College to secure more work experience placement places for young people aged 16 plus with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD). The commitment from businesses is one day a week over two months and they will be supported by a qualified staff member. The Student Loans Company has already taken part in a successful pilot scheme.

Red Hall Employability Project

41. A project to help residents of Red Hall to secure employment by improving their employability skills has worked with 28 unemployed individuals to prepare them for work. Achievements from this project are:-
 - (a) Three are now undertaking Training
 - (b) One has been referred to National Careers for funding for course via redundancy
 - (c) Three Traineeships
 - (d) Three Apprenticeships
 - (e) Two potentially starting Full time Education
 - (f) Three have obtained full-time jobs with four more in the pipeline

Trading Standards – Operation Henry

42. Operation Henry was the first large scale coordinated action by Trading Standards to tackle the local supply of illicit tobacco products across England. The highest seizure rate was in the North East of England with 94 per cent of premises searched revealing illicit tobacco products.
43. The operation was carried out in September 2014. Two premises in Darlington were targeted and illegal tobacco found in both. The total from one of these two shops amounted to almost half of the total seized in the whole of the north east region.
44. The two Darlington cases were heard at Darlington Magistrates Court on 10 June 2015 with the following results:
 - (a) Amer Ahmed Khedir (Darlington Supermarket) entered a guilty plea to all charges and was given a 24 week custodial sentence suspended for twelve months. Costs were awarded to the council in the sum of £1335.16 and he was ordered to pay an £80 victim surcharge. Forfeiture of all of the seized

goods was granted; and

- (b) Goran Saleh Hussain (Easy Shop) was given a twelve month community order with a requirement to undertake 200 hours of unpaid work. Costs were awarded to the council in the sum of £1108.50 and he was ordered to pay a £60 victim surcharge. Forfeiture of all of the seized goods was granted.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio