

LEADER'S OVERVIEW

Regional and Tees Valley Updates

Transport for the North

1. Transport for the North evolved from a coalition of the five northern core cities which came together for the original 'One North' report in July 2014 and this resulted in the Transport for the North (TfN) report published in March 2015.
2. I have, on behalf of the Tees Valley authorities, been working to ensure our inclusion on the governance of TfN. Work continues to address this and it has been acknowledged that the current arrangements for TfN do not fit its emerging purpose as a 'genuine representative body for the whole of the North of England'. Work is now underway to review its governance by Autumn 2015. Tees Valley will be pushing for full representation on the TfN Partnership Board and on 29 June I met with the current Chair, Sir Richard Leese, to press our case. Darlington recently hosted a visit from a senior Director from the Department for Transport (DfT) to demonstrate both Darlington and the Tees Valley's progress and ambition to contribute to the Northern Powerhouse aspirations. The tour included Bank Top, Teesport and Business Central.
3. The TfN report covers a number of areas including Rail, Road, Freight and Logistics and plans to deliver transformational investment in infrastructure to drive the economy. Darlington and Tees Valley colleagues are aligning a number of elements of work to fit the timetable and influence investment in Tees Valley Infrastructure.

Combined Authority

4. Work on the Combined Authority continues and it is hoped that the Government will conclude their element by the end of the year.

Strategic Highway Network

5. Work is progressing on a study commissioned jointly with Highways England (formerly called Highway's agency) and the Tees Valley Authorities looking at Infrastructure needs for the strategic highway network. Highways England has funded 90 per cent of the study.

6. The study will examine issues and constraints on the A66 from Port of Tees to the A1(M) and from the A689 from the A19 to the A1(M) and identify options for improving road connectivity across the Tees Valley and to the wider Strategic road Network. The project will look at options to alleviate pinch points and constraints around Darlington and also look at the potential options for a new Tees crossing to alleviate pressure on the A19.
7. To be complete by March 2016, evidence from the study will feed into the Highways England Road Investment Strategy. The evidence will also be used to influence and inform Transport for the North work programmes.

Rail North

8. On 20 March 2015 the Secretary of State and Rail North Limited entered into an agreement which sets out the arrangements as to how Rail North Limited will manage the Rail Franchise Agreements and how the Secretary of State and Rail North Limited will work together to transition further devolution in the future. As a Director of the Rail North Limited (RNL), I represent the interests of the Tees Valley Local Authorities.
9. The North East regional partners are currently working towards agreement on the governance arrangements and operation of a North East Rail Management unit, which in conjunction with the DfT will have responsibility for overseeing the delivery of rail services in North East England. This provides the opportunity for local intelligence to inform decision and the operation of rail services.
10. As previously reported Northern and Trans Pennine Rail Franchises are due for renewal in 2016. Officers have met with the shortlisted Bidders for both franchises, impressing upon them the need for investment in meeting key priorities for Darlington and the Tees Valley.

Bank Top Station

11. Darlington Station is a high value Tees Valley asset and this project is seen as a catalyst for economic growth in Darlington, the Tees Valley and the North East.
12. Funded through Tees Valley Unlimited (TVU) the Council has appointed consultants ARUP to complete a master plan and business case for investment at Darlington's Bank Top Station. The study which will be complete by December 2015 will be used as an important evidence base to influence Network Rail's investment programme for the period 2019/24. The importance of this project will also be used to influence.
13. Core outcomes the study aims to address, for rail services and the Station are:
 - (a) Reduce journey times and release capacity for additional long distance rail services on the East Coast Mainline.

- (b) Enable frequency, reliability and journey quality improvements on local passenger services with improved timetables, including better connections with the mainline. These are vital improvements in supporting economic ambitions for the Tees Valley and South Durham.
 - (c) Bring about a step change in the quality of the Station environment and approaches to the Station
 - (d) Improve local connectivity to/from the Station for bus passengers, pedestrians and cyclists.
 - (e) Maximise the opportunity for commercial development and economic growth within the Station environs, on Central Park Enterprise Zone, in Darlington Town centre and other land close to the Station.
14. Network Rail and Virgin East Coast (responsible for operating the Station) are key partners in guiding the work on the Master plan.

General Updates

15. The Local Government Association's Annual Conference was held in Harrogate from 30 June to 2 July 2015, which I attended. A number of issues were covered at the conference including devolution to Combined Authorities and resources for local government.
16. The Daily Telegraph, working in partnership with Amacus (a private training provider in the North East of England) and this Council, filmed the opening of 'The Keys' in Darlington. It is intended that the film will be available on a number of websites.
17. I attended a photocall with Terrace Hill, the developers of the Feethams leisure scheme, to mark the milestone reached by the development, namely the fact that the steel frame is now in place, taking the building to its full height.
18. I was very pleased to attend the visit by HRH The Princess Royal on 18 May 2015, to Darlington's Neighbourhood Resolution Services (Community Restorative Justice Scheme) and to the launch of the 'Restorative Hub, Centre for Excellence'.
19. I attended the opening of Regent House on 4 June 2015. A partnership between Coast and Country Housing Limited and this Council, has seen Regent House carefully transformed from a long-term derelict office block into affordable, modern town centre living accommodation. The innovative 'Empty Homes to Happy Homes' project aims to address the issue of long-term empty properties across the region, whilst providing training, volunteering and employment opportunities.

Darlington Partnership

20. I chaired the last meeting of the Darlington Partnership Board held on 13 May 2015.
21. Stella Hall (Director of the Festival of Thrift) and David Bilton (Operations Manager) attended the Board meeting to give an overview of the Festival of Thrift and to urge Board Members to be involved.
22. The Board reviewed its approach this year to Action Priorities which is the process it deploys to focus its energies on issues facing Darlington where it believes it can make a difference through concerted action. Following on from its deliberations at its previous meeting it agreed that it would firstly look to consolidate the initiatives the Partnership has established including Foundation for Jobs, Good Friends, Darlington Cares and Help Hubs. The objective would be to review their focus, ensure their objectives are relevant and ambitious and their funding is secure.
23. In addition the Board agreed it would offer support to the 2025 Capital of Culture bid. It will also maintain a focus on financial deprivation, a major issue that is being addressed by Financial Inclusion Action Group it has established.
24. The Board also considered the emerging Community Development Strategy and the Community Safety Plan both of which are key elements of 'One Darlington: Perfectly Placed'.

Policing and Community Safety

25. The Community Safety Partnership has supported two recent events held by the Police and Crime Commissioner. The first was around Hate Crime and the second around Domestic Abuse. Officers are linking in to working groups, established following these events, to help progress the issues.
26. Locally, a Hate Crime Action Plan has been developed and awareness training is to be provided to a wide variety of agencies in the town to enable them to support victims. It is also intended to train 'Champions' in each agency to explore options for extending Third Party Reporting Centres and the '*Safe place to be#*' initiative.
27. With regard to Domestic Abuse, a report has been written, which explores the experiences of victims when seeking help and was commissioned via the Vulnerability Strategic Group. The '*Voices*' report indicates that there is a lot of positive work taking place to support victims in Darlington, however, there are still lessons to be learnt and the Vulnerability Strategic Group will be looking at these issues in the coming months.

28. The Chair of the Darlington Neighbourhood Watch Scheme won a National Neighbourhood and Home Watch Award for outstanding achievement. The Chair was presented with this by the Crime Prevention Minister at the House of Commons in June. Membership of Neighbourhood Watch has risen from 12 per cent in October 2012 to the current figure of 28 per cent. Neighbourhood Watch volunteers are also playing a major part in the '*Good Friends*' scheme, which is being developed by the Darlington Partnership.
29. A special 'Operation Staysafe' was run on 24 May 2015 to coincide with the schools breaking up and to ensure that young people were celebrating safely and not consuming alcohol. A range of agencies were involved in this including the Police, the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Team, School Nurses and the Emergency Duty Team. Numbers are still being collated regarding the total number of young people spoken to by partner agencies however thirteen were brought back to Central House Annexe for follow up support by the Anti-Social Behaviour Team.
30. Cabinet at its meeting held on 16 June 2015 considered, and recommended to Council for adoption, the Community Safety Plan 2015/20, which can be seen elsewhere on this agenda. The Plan is built around five priorities, namely reducing the harmful effects of drugs, alcohol and tobacco; tackling anti-social behaviour; reducing offending and re-offending; working with families with multiple problems; and supporting vulnerable people. The plan explains the achievements, context, issues and actions in relation to each priority to demonstrate an evidence-based approach. Underpinning the plan is a focus on building stronger communities.

Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)

31. I chaired a meeting of the DAAT Board on 3 June 2015. Following a governance review earlier this year, the DAAT Board has been reframed and renamed the Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco Board. This reflects the streamlining of the substance use agenda to include legal substances such as alcohol and tobacco that also cause widespread harm in our community. The Board now incorporates what was the Tobacco Control Alliance, aligning the two agendas. This will be mirrored in the development of a five year Darlington Substance Use Strategy 2015/20, with a performance framework of key indicators, which will be monitored by the DAAT Board. This, in turn, will be underpinned by a comprehensive Substance Use Plan delivered across all stakeholders and monitored via a Substance Use Planning Group.
32. The Substance Use Strategy will cover the three elements of Prevention, Control and Recovery Treatment, setting indicators for adults and young people and across drugs, alcohol and tobacco under each strand. Key pieces of work for 2015 will include task and finish work to determine local detail for the Declarations on Alcohol and Tobacco signed up to in Darlington.

33. The implementation of the North East Counselling and Addictions Services (NECA) Recovery and Wellbeing Service is progressing well, with a number of workstreams underway to map, develop and test robust pathways for substance users across the critical areas including health, accommodation, criminal justice, finance, education, training and employment, emotional wellbeing, mental health and specific pathways for young people.
34. In addition to winning the Alcohol Concern Award for Innovation for the second year running for the 2015 Dry January Campaign with the Dry Hatter's Tea Party event, Balance North East Alcohol Office announced that Darlington also achieved the highest rate of sign-ups to the programme in the North East.

Health and Well Being Board

35. I attended a meeting of the Health and Well Being Board on 14 July 2015, where a number of issues were discussed including a report, presentation and video on cancer in Darlington from Macmillan Cancer Support and the Citizens Advice Bureau; a report and presentation from the Director of Public Health on her annual report; reports from the Director of Commissioning on the joint health and social care self-assessment framework and NHS England social care payments to Local Authorities; and two items from the Darlington Commissioning Group (CCG) namely a report on children and young people's emotional and mental health and a presentation on the CCG's Annual Report.

Bill Dixon
Leader