
OVERVIEW OF LEISURE AND LOCAL ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio.

Central Park South Junction

2. Work has commenced on the new access road into Central Park that will facilitate further development (close to Neasham Road roundabout). There have been a number of service diversions been carried out and work commenced on the main civil engineering phase at the start of August.
3. Funding for the scheme has been provisionally allocated as part of the Local Growth Fund (LGF) which is administered by Tees Valley Unlimited (TVU).

Car Park Improvements

4. Two public car parks in Winston Street/Barnard Street that serve the Duke Street commercial area have been improved. The works included resurfacing, replacement of an old barrier and a new layout that enables vehicles to more easily access car parking spaces.

Sugar Hill Park Footway/Cycleway

5. Work has commenced to construct a path through Sugar Hill Park linking Prior Street to the area around the former Alderman Leach Primary School. This route will act as a Safe Route to School and was part funded from a developer contribution.

Multi Storey Car Park

6. Works on the multi storey car park are progressing to budget and programme, over 50 per cent of the main structural frame is now erected on site.

Town Centre Parking

7. Since the Autumn of 2014, part of the Council's strategy to manage the loss of parking spaces due to the new Cinema and Multi-storey car park development has been to offer short stay parking for just 50 pence per hour at four of Council car parks. And in addition offer an extra hour's free parking at all of the Council's car parks, for drivers paying for two or more hours. So for example at Archer, Chestnut, East and Garden Street car parks motorists can park for three hours for just one

pound.

8. Recent evidence on numbers of parking tickets sold in Council car parks has shown that despite the loss of the parking spaces at Feethams, over the period since 1 April the numbers of parking tickets sold in 2015 has increased by 6,160 when compared with the same period in 2014. This has been achieved through more drivers parking at on-street parking bays and increased use of the four lower tariff car parks.
9. During the period up until Christmas the Council will continue to promote the current parking offers and, in particular encourage motorists to use the less busy car parks close to the Town Centre.

Parking Annual Report

10. Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) places the responsibility for enforcing on-street parking restrictions, in addition to off-street car parks with the Council rather than the police. The Council operates its parking enforcement service under the provisions of the Traffic Management Act 2004.
11. Enforcement is carried out by an in-house team of Civil Enforcement Officers, working to a stringent set of guidelines governed by the Traffic Management Act.
12. The Council does not set Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) issue targets for the Civil Enforcement Officers and they do not receive any payment based on number of PCN's issued.
13. The Council's policy for Civil Parking Enforcement is to work towards reducing the number of PCN's issued by educating motorists to park legally. In 2014/15 the Council issued 14,083 PCN's, a 10 per cent reduction on PCN's issued in 2013/14.

Highway Maintenance Schemes

14. Recently completed schemes:
 - (a) B6275, Station Road, Piercebridge – Carlbury Slip Diversion Carriageway Resurfacing
 - (b) B6279 Staindrop Road – Carlbury Slip Diversion Carriageway Resurfacing
 - (c) Carriageway Micro Asphalt Contract 2015 – 42 Sites
 - (d) Neasham Road – Carriageway Refurbishment
 - (e) Gladstone Street – Carriageway Refurbishment
 - (f) Brinkburn Road – Carriageway Refurbishment
 - (g) Burtree Lane – Carriageway Refurbishment
15. Ongoing schemes:
 - (a) A1150 Whinfield Road – Carriageway Refurbishment
 - (b) A68 Bondgate – Carriageway Refurbishment

16. Schemes due to commence:

- (a) Footway Micro Asphalt Contract 2015 – 28 Sites
- (b) Estoril Road – Carriageway Reconstruction
- (c) Springfield Road – Footway Refurbishment

Stonebridge

17. From Monday October 5th 2015, bridge strengthening works will begin on Stonebridge in Darlington town centre in order to safeguard the future of this important and historic bridge. It is expected that these works will be on going until the end of February 2016 and subject to programme, a four week break over the busy Christmas period where the road works will be temporarily removed between December 7 and January 5.
18. If the strengthening works are not carried out in the near future, then the council will be forced to apply 'Weak Bridge' restrictions to the bridge. This would mean heavier vehicles like buses and lorries could not use the bridge. Ultimately, the bridge may need to be closed to all traffic, if the work is not carried out.
19. The council made a successful bid the Department for Transports Highways Maintenance Challenge Fund, and was one of only 23 councils in England to receive funding. The money from central government must be spent by April 2016 and can only be spent on Stonebridge. The council is funding some additional works after March 2016 but these will be funded from the councils own resources.
20. Traffic Management plans will be put in place to ensure that traffic can still move freely through and around the town centre. While the strengthening works are underway the bridge will be closed to all traffic except buses, taxis and bicycles, which will be able to use the bridge in one direction (out of town). Other traffic will be diverted to use alternative routes, including East Street which will be opened to two way traffic while work is underway.
21. We have worked with local businesses and transport operators to develop the alternative access arrangements and associated signage. These arrangements will be kept under review to check that they are working as well as possible. Further details are available on the website <http://www.darlington.gov.uk/transport-and-streets/stonebridge-strengthening/> There will be regular progress reports on the website.

Public Transport

22. The Council is renewing 21,000 concessionary bus passes which will expire in March 2016. A communications plan has been developed and this has now been put into action. Between July and September adverts have appeared advising people that if their details have changed in the last five years then they need to advise the Council. This has had a good response to date. We will be writing to all pass holders before the end of January 2016 with more information and some pass

holders (with photographs that are over five years old) will be contacted to have a new photograph taken.

23. The works to the coach stop on Feethams have been postponed until November in order to accommodate the refurbishment works on the Dolphin Centre, which will require a rolling programme of footway closures along Feethams.
24. The new Frequenta bus services were launched in Darlington on 16 July. All of the buses operating on services 2 Red Hall/Branksome, 3 Mowden, 3A Harrowgate Hill, 3B Albert Hill/Fitzwilliam Drive, 3/3A/3B Skerne Park, 4 Minors Crescent, 9 Springfield, 10 Whinfield and 13A/13B Firthmoor have been branded with the Frequenta design. The services operate a five or ten minutes frequency into the town centre, providing quick and convenient transport. The bus stop flags along the routes have also been branded.

Public Transport Marketing

25. Catch the Bus Week (CTBW) ran from 29 June to 5 July. The comprehensive marketing campaign included outdoor, radio and digital advertising and was developed using information gathered from local people who do not currently use bus services. It featured five local bus drivers from depots in Darlington, Stockton, Hartlepool and Redcar and aimed to encourage people to give the bus a try during CTBW. The campaign was the most successful one that Local Motion and Connect have run to date, with over 30,000 people visiting the campaigns landing page which provided help and advice to people unfamiliar with bus travel and offered the opportunity for people to enter a free prize draw. Feedback from the bus operators was extremely positive and we are currently awaiting patronage figures from the period concerned which will hopefully show that the campaign has had a positive impact on bus travel.
26. The Big Summer Days Out campaign started in April and runs through to the end of the month. The aim of the campaign was to encourage people to both get active and travel more sustainably over the Summer months as well as supporting economic activity through the promotion of destinations and activities across Darlington and the wider area. The campaign was based around bigsummer.co.uk, a website that is packed with ideas for days out that incorporate walking and cycling and destinations that can be reached by public transport. Attractions participating in Big Summer agree to offer discounts and special offers to people who arrive by public transport. The website is hosted by TFM and was promoted on radio, in local press, online and via outdoor advertising across the Tees Valley. Over 100 organisations and attractions supported the campaign and to date almost 20,000 people have visited the big summer website.
27. The Young People campaign started in mid-August and runs to the end of September. The 'Your Journey' campaign is aimed at older teens who may be transitioning from school to college, university, training or work. Your Journey aims to help young people make more sustainable travel choices by presenting information that is relevant to them in a clear and easy to understand format. The campaign was developed in collaboration with students in Bishop Auckland and

Hartlepool to ensure it was tailored to meet their needs and would resonate with their peer group. The strong message that came back from this demographic was that they thought buses were expensive, offered poor value for money and they were confused by the products offered by the various bus companies. In response to these concerns Local Motion and Connect devised the Your Journey campaign which is a digital based campaign using short, funny videos to grab the attention of this difficult to reach age group. The videos direct them to a landing page that acts as a signpost to the relevant information and also includes a new ticket finder tool that helps them find the most appropriate ticket or pass.

28. Connect Tees Valley, a partnership of the five local authorities and bus operators, has been shortlisted for a National Transport Award, in the 'Improvements to Bus Services' category. The project submitted was 'Improving inter-urban bus services into Darlington'. The winners are announced in October.

Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF)

29. The five Northern Rail stations on the Bishop Line have all been 'adopted' by local groups. To further improve North Road Station planters have been installed on the platform by Northern Rail and these have been planted up by Bishop Trains, the station adopters. As part of the LSTF project the Community Rail Officer is identifying groups to adopt some of the stations along the Tees Valley Rail Line and working with existing adopters to ultimately increase the number of people using the stations. Discussions are ongoing to identify a group to adopt Dinsdale Station. In August Longbeck Station was adopted by Longbeck Nursery.
30. The Bishop Line has been shortlisted in the Best Marketing Campaign category in the Community Rail Awards 2015. The winners are announced in October.
31. The Bishop Line website has been revamped and launched via Facebook advertising and posters at the six stations along the route. The site www.bishopline.org includes live train times and focuses on the speed of the journeys – only 27 minutes between Bishop Auckland and Darlington. Patronage along the line is increasing year on year.
32. The active travel programme is being delivered in partnership with Groundwork and Bike Stop. In the first three months over 400 people took part in the walking programme and 180 in the cycling programme. In addition over 100 bikes were recycled and sold.
33. The Local Motion website now includes a pledge page, encouraging people to change the way they travel. This is being used as part of the Personalised Travel Planning taking place across the Tees Valley and Durham, and also provides a means of developing case studies by contacting people to see how they have got on with implementing their pledge. Over 250 people have already made a pledge. The Facebook page now has over 1800 likes and continues to grow.
34. The Tees Valley Commuter campaign started in September. This photography led campaign focuses on one key proposition for each mode; bus - value, rail – season

ticket value and cycling – calorie burning and will include social media advertising and regular social media posts plus postcard drops to local businesses and attractions with high footfall.

35. The annual Local Motion MEGA Festival took place in Darlington's Market Square on 26 and 27 August. The event was attended by families who had the opportunity to take part in learn to cycle and scooter safety sessions and could take away information on all sustainable modes including bus maps, cycle maps and information of guided walks in Darlington.
36. The Tees Valley Love to Ride cycle challenge was held from 8 to 28 June and over 1,133 people from 64 organisations across the Tees Valley took part. Of those people that signed up 487 of them were new to cycling. The aim of the project was to get more people to cycle and this high number of new cyclists shows that the challenge was successful. In total 133,574 miles of cycling was recorded on the challenge website.
37. The MEGA Motion School campaign came to an end in July with 3125 Darlington pupils taking part. 633 pupils achieved bronze level (travelled sustainably for at least 15 Friday's), 728 pupils achieved silver level (20 Fridays), 1488 pupils achieved gold level (25 Fridays) and 276 pupils were awarded MEGA Hero status for travelling sustainably for all 30 MEGA Friday's within the campaign. Classes from 21 primary schools were involved in the campaign and are all being encouraged to take part in the new MEGA Motion campaign which was launched on 16 September. The new campaign will encourage schools to take part in nationally run initiatives such as Walk to School Week and The Big Pedal.
38. This year we have nine schools achieving Modeshift STARs Accreditation. Carmel College has maintained Bronze level; Heighington, High Coniscliffe, Holy Family, St Augustine's, St Georges and St John's have gained Silver. Rydal Academy has joined Abbey in gaining Gold level.
39. Across the summer term along with reproducing the popular transition training video for year six pupils, we have delivered bikes rides with eight different schools, giving pupils an appreciation of what Darlington has to offer on their doorstep. We have also supported DSMS in their first ever Coast 2 Coast ride with seven pupils which was testing for all the riders due to both the mileage and weather conditions that were experienced.

Top Up Swimming

40. In June/July the Dolphin Centre team delivered an intensive six week Top Up Swimming Programme in partnership with Darlington CCG targeting Year 6 children in Darlington schools that were both non-swimmers or had low confidence when in the water (only 50 per cent of 7 to 11 year olds nationally (ASA data 2014) can swim 25 metres). They were given the opportunity to learn a lifesaving skill in fun but intense sessions which ran every day in two week blocks. A total of 102 children attended the programme with a total of 92 per cent of children successfully swimming 25m by the end of the programme.

41. Further partnership work with Darlington CCG will deliver a range of targeted interventions to support residents to develop a sporting habit from September. This will include; town-wide programme to target 'non sporty' 14-19 year old girls; a pan disability sports programme; the further development of school based healthy lifestyle clubs for 5-11 year olds through the Healthy Darlington School Sports partnership.

Darlington School Games

42. The School Games programme for 2014-15 had 7580 attendances from children of the ages 6 to 16 in over 50 events and competitions throughout the year. The events included a diverse range of sports including gymnastics, tennis, football, netball, boccia, new age curling, cricket, rounders, and several multi-sport events.
43. Particular highlights throughout the year were a sell-out dance festival at the Civic Theatre and the Darlington Community Games, which engaged 600 children in a single day multi-sport event. Many of the events were supported by young leaders from secondary schools in the town, which amounted to 387 leaders engaging in volunteering throughout the year.

Darlington Civic Theatre

44. The new season brochure for autumn 2015 was launched in July. Highlights of the season include a return visit from the National Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Company, The Importance of Being Earnest with Nigel Havers and Sian Phillips, The Full Monty and Last Night a DJ Saved My Life with David Hasselhoff. Dinosaur Zoo is selling so strongly that an additional performance has been added. This year's pantomime continues to outsell previous years and the cast includes Asleigh and Pudsey, Brendan Sheerin of Coach Trip and X Factor's Niki Evans. A press launch will take place in Darlington in September. Schools are being offered the opportunity to take place in a special panto workshop delivered by QDOS pantomimes and for the first time the Theatre is offering a relaxed performance, a specially adapted performance designed to welcome people with an autistic spectrum condition, learning disability or sensory and communication disorders.
45. On 13 and 14 July, young people from the Theatre's ArtsSpark Youth Theatre and Dance performed in their annual showcase. Approximately 100 young people take part in weekly courses which are held at Hummersknott Academy and the showcase provides them with the opportunity to share their work with friends and families and celebrate their talents. Members of the ArtsSpark Dance company also performed at the IncludFEST which took place in South Park on 18 July.
46. To accompany the performances of Cat in the Hat, a workshop was held in the Theatre where young people had the opportunity to make their own book inspired by the Dr Seuss classic, led by writer Tracey Icton and artist Yvonne Preston.

47. Croft Primary School and Parkside Academy attended bespoke heritage tours of the theatre and there was a heritage tour open to the general public and a ghost tour following a performance of The Ghost Train.

Race for Life

48. On 7 June, 2015 over 3,000 females participated in this year's Race for Life in aid of Cancer Research held in the South Park. Local running clubs, traffic management, stewards and Council events staff provide Cancer Research with numerous volunteers to enable the event to take place.

Community Carnival

49. This year's Community Carnival held on, 27 June 2015, which celebrated its 33rd, was based on the theme Darlington International to include the theme of the Rugby World Cup and attracted well over 400 participants from local schools and dance schools, voluntary organisations and professional street performers.
50. The parade route started in the Market Square and finished at Stanhope Park where there were lots of family activities, as well as the Forum Music Stage and a record number of charity stalls raising money for good causes.

Proms in the Park

51. This year's Proms in the Park, held on 28 June, coincided with Armed Forces Day and was held in the South Park bandstand. The event was jointly organised by the Northern Military Music and the events team. Modus Seabed Intervention sponsored the event for the third year running.
52. Hundreds of people flocked to the South Park to enjoy a fabulous programme of musical entertainment throughout the afternoon. The programme included the Royal Signals (Northern Band), Hurworth Concert Band, 102 Battalion REME Pipes and Drums, Central and East Yorkshire Wing ATC Section 1 Band and guest vocalists. Members of Stagecoach performed during the event to add a family and young persons' element to the event, which was greatly appreciated by the audience. Just over £1000 was collected during the afternoon for the Army Benevolent Fund.

Darlington Cycle Ride

53. The annual 70 mile ride (5 July) and the Castle Ride (2 August) saw over 200 cyclists take part over the two rides, which were preparation for the main 100 mile Hell of the North ride in September.

Darlington Dance Festival

54. Darlington Dance Festival Association held its fifth Mass Dance on 11 July in the Market Square along with professional performances. Approximately 500 dancers performed the mass dance, which was choreographed by Darrien Wright and

Debbie Waistell. Hundreds of spectators gathered round the arena to enjoy and afternoon of dance and workshops in the sunshine.

Our Big Gig

55. Following the tremendous success of last year's Big Gig in South Park, which was jointly organised by Durham Music Services and the events team, it was decided to support a similar event in 2015 which would be predominately performed by young people.
56. On 12 July, 2015 hundreds attended a sunny afternoon of musical entertainment that included Darlington Little Big Band, South Regional Youth Wind Band, Darlington District Wind Band and Durham County Big Band.

Darlington by the Sea

57. Darlington by the Sea led by the Council's events Team with its traditional 40 plus tonnes of sand and family entertainment was launched on 23 July, including the rugby themed street theatre walk about, dressed up as All Blacks rugby players. A range of have-a-go sporting activities were delivered by the Healthy Darlington team along West and High Row. Distinct Darlington added an additional 13 days of Darlington by the Sea fun to bring families into the town centre during the summer holidays.

Music on the Hill

58. To celebrate 10 years since the opening of West Park, Bussey and Armstrong, West Park Friends Group, Darlington Borough Council and The Forum Music Centre presented Music On West Park Hill on 2 August. Around 2,000 people attended the event and despite a few downpours everyone enjoyed a variety of music provided by the Forum Music Centre. There was also family entertainment throughout the afternoon.

Darlington Sherwoods Vauxhall 10K

59. Darlington 10km on 9 August saw record entry levels for a fourth consecutive year. 1,878 entrants proved the run is highly regarded as one of the best in the North East. This year saw the reintroduction of the Junior 3km run supported by Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group for a five-year period. The run engaged 170 8 to 14 year olds in its first year of the rebranded run, which bodes well for future growth. The Family Fun Run also exceeded entry levels with approximately 200 little runners taking part.

Summer Reading Challenge

60. Darlington Libraries worked with the Reading Agency to offer a National Reading Campaign throughout the holidays. The Summer Reading Challenge aims to prevent the 'reading dip' teaching staff often notice after the long school holidays. Children are encouraged to read for pleasure and are asked to read at least six

books during the school holidays as they collect rewards along the way.

61. This year, Darlington Libraries signed up over 600 children. All who completed the challenge went into a draw to win one of the star prizes donated by our sponsors BikeStop and Halfords. Councillor Cyndi Hughes and volunteers from Darlington for Culture helped to launch this year's challenge as we attempted a Guinness World Record attempt for the amount of pledges or promises related to a reading campaign.

Library Events and Exhibitions

62. Darlington Libraries also organised an exciting and engaging event programme throughout the summer to encourage non library users to visit. Events included a Harry Potter extravaganza, Alice in Wonderland parties, mammal shows and magicians.
63. The Centre for Local Studies hosted a display of photographs and memorabilia celebrating the 50th anniversary of Cummins in Darlington. Author Colin Wilkinson launched his new book 'Darlington Churches' at the Centre and held a book signing session, and local author, Michael Rudd gave a very popular talk about the history of tourism in Teesdale.
64. Darlington Libraries worked in partnership with libraries in Stockton, Middlesbrough and Hartlepool to produce the 'Crossing the Tees' literary festival. With an ACE grant of £15,000, the festival hosted authors and illustrators at venues across the Tees region. Printmaker Adrian Moule held workshops for families and created some canvases celebrating the history and geography of the Tees.
65. A performance by The History Wardrobe entertained everyone and poets, Alan Gibbons and Nick Toczek worked with local schools as part of the festival. The library was used as a venue by the Durham Music Service for a jazz workshop and performance, and by the Hilarity Bites comedy club, entertaining families of all ages. These sessions introduced the library to new audiences and were very successful.

Strategic

66. Creative Darlington undertook a sector convenor role, with support from Darlington Borough Council and Darlington for Culture, to ensure Darlington voices contributed to the Case for Culture 2030 produced by Beamish for the North East Cultural Partnership, and launched in July 2015 in Durham City. It is expected the document, which contained recommendations including the continuation of resources for the North East Cultural Partnership, will be useful in helping present a single voice for North East cultural ambitions.
67. Creative Darlington contributed to the Destination and Place Making, and Social Inclusion working groups of the Tees Valley Task and Finish Group, which met at the Darlington campus of Teesside University in July 2015 to disseminate the Group's final report. Recommendations included the cross promotion between key

Tees Valley Festivals, exploring the feasibility of re-establishing a destination management organisation for the Tees Valley and of the Tees Valley's intent to apply for UK City of Culture in 2025.

Halle Orchestra in Darlington 2016

68. Durham Music Service has successfully secured a Grants for the Arts award of £14,880 with support from Creative Darlington to bring the full Hallé Orchestra to perform two concerts at the Dolphin Centre on 23 June 2016. Members of the Orchestra will deliver workshops in Darlington schools as part of a project of approximately £40,000 in value, subject to sponsorship being secured. Creative Darlington advised Durham Music Service on the development of its successful application and £5,000 has been committed from the strategic arts budget to deliver this project in Darlington. In addition to offering children and young people in Darlington the opportunity to work with one of Britain's best orchestras, the project also offers Darlington an opportunity to showcase a strong and developing relationship with Durham Music Hub and to promote success in securing support for the arts from various sources, including philanthropy and sponsorship.

The Town Hall Gallery

69. The Town Hall exhibition space provides opportunities for emerging artists to share their work with members of the public and to share work from Darlington Borough Council's arts collection. Recent exhibitions have included a review of the residency that artist Yvonne Talbot and a writer undertook in Darlington Indoor Market in the 1980's, running from May to July, Sara Cooper's Collections project was exhibited from July to August and the space currently holds an exhibition by artist Susan Williams.

The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts

70. The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts promoted a third birthday party event in June 2015 which included exhibitions, craft stalls, cakes, live music and a birds of prey display. The event was managed by the Bridge Centre for Visual Arts organisation and received a lot of voluntary support in addition to positive feedback. The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts organisation continues to programme exhibitions and adult art courses with bookings for the autumn term being taken now at the Civic Theatre Box Office.

Markets

71. The Annual Tea Dance, commemorating the 70th anniversary of VE day took place in the Market Square on 12 August in conjunction with GOLD. The event was a great success with cream teas for 600 lively residents and visitors who enjoyed sunshine, music and dancing.
72. Summer Markets started its four-day spectacular on High Row and West Row with 26 stalls selling a variety of goods, plus entertainment, climbing wall and a funfair, and ending with a 'Tributes Band' day in the Market Square.

Head of Steam Museum - Schools

73. The museum is popular with schools due to partnerships with local schools on projects for the 190th Anniversary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway and promotion of sessions about local history and the railways. Schools numbers in May were 261, in June 718 and in July 908.
74. Making a Mark Project: a teacher planning surgery was held at MIMA to promote the museums in the project to schools and help teachers to plan visits, loans etc., for the autumn term. 40 teachers attended. A successful day was also held at Kirkleatham Museum to promote the summer holiday activities at the museums to families; 500 people attended.

Families

75. During the summer holidays, activities for families have been held on every weekday, these included crafts, history workshops, sports, and storytime, working with partners from the Move More Team and the Library.

Volunteers

76. The World War 1 Project and events meant the museum had lots of volunteer support in the last few months; volunteer hours in May were 194.5, and in June were 73.

Outreach and Community Groups

77. Continuing to work with the Links group, developing links with uniformed groups in Darlington.

North East Railways in WW1

78. Volunteers on our Heritage Lottery Fund project 'North East Railways in World War 1' continue to add more detail to the existing 9,000 records using archival documents. The project has been featured in prominent family history websites and magazines including Who Do You Think You Are and Family History magazine.

Events

79. The Teddy Bears Picnic on 19 July was a great success with over 970 people attending the event.

Exhibitions

80. The summer exhibition was 'The Games We Played: Childhood Board and Card Games', which featured some of the most popular, and lesser known, board and

card games from 1920s to 1970s. The exhibition ran from 25 July to 6 September.

190th Anniversary

81. The town will be celebrating the 190th Anniversary of the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, on 27 September 1825, with a free fun-filled event at the Head of Steam – Darlington Railway Museum. The two men behind the pioneering railway – Edward Pease and George Stephenson – will be at the museum on 26 and 27 September 2015, to welcome visitors who are encouraged to dress up in the style of the day, with prizes on offer for the best costume. There will be a free vintage bus to shuttle members of the public between the museum and the Festival of Thrift throughout both days.
82. There will be a host of free family fun including Cockerton Silver Prize Band, songs and music performances, mini train rides, Punch and Judy, face painting, children's entertainer, and fairground rides. There will also be book readings by Jaime Moussa and Tony Stowers, and a display of anniversary inspired artwork created by local schoolchildren who have been working with museum staff and local artists.

Wildflower Meadows

83. On selected sites across Darlington, a highly successful venture has been undertaken that has seen 15 acres of specie rich, wildflower meadow created. The programme of wildflower planting follows the previous experiment where the same areas had for the past five years, been allowed to grow longer in order to see which areas of public open space, managed as amenity grassland for many years, concealed within its flora, an historic species rich meadow. Now that this has been revealed, it has been possible to select areas for the new wildflower planting but at the same time avoid disturbing the more naturally species rich areas and as a consequence, get the best of both worlds. What we now see at the seven selected sites is a fantastically colourful and vibrant display of wildflowers that have blossomed in the past few weeks across Darlington at sites located close to Wylam Avenue, Cocker Beck, Baydale Beck, Grange Road, Rockwell Pastures, West Park and less successfully at Fitzwilliam Drive (less successful because the area was only sprayed off in the spring while the other were sprayed off in the Autumn.); a lesson learnt and one that will be rectified this coming year. The venture has received a great deal of support and commendation from the public, received through letters of support, emails and through social media.
84. Given the extreme popularity of the venture this season, 2016 will see this experiment rolled out further to another selection of sites, this time chosen, firstly, as a display for people visiting the town, secondly, their relevance to improving biodiversity and finally, their proximity to where residents live. It means that for a short while this winter there will be areas left as bare soil but this seems a small price to pay for such a colourful display, as well as a vitally important helping hand for wildlife and a wonderfully colourful display in the following summer. The mixes are especially designed to help honey bees at a time when this all important species is under threat.

Green Flag

85. Following the recent judging, it has been confirmed that both South Park and West Cemetery have retained their Green Flag status and that West Park has become the third Green Flag site within the Borough.

Nursery

86. Members will be aware that the land occupied by Woodburn Nursery and Salutation Road has been sold and was handed over to private developers during July. This has necessitated the transfer of the Nursery and Horticultural staff from there and this was successfully undertaken without issue. The Nursery team are now housed in the Clock Tower within South Park.

Cemeteries and Crematorium

87. Also affected by the closure of the Woodburn site were the teams who maintain the Council's cemeteries. As a result a new facility had to be built in the extension part of West Cemetery, which was completed in good time for the transfer of staff and is now being used accordingly.

Councillor Nick Wallis
Cabinet Member with Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio