
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.

Beaumont Street One Way

2. Following the receipt of an objection received to the proposed one way traffic system in Beaumont Street we gave further consideration to the proposal.
3. If the proposed one way system was not implemented there is likely to be a significant increase in the number of vehicles turning right out of the junction of Feethams and Beaumont Street and lead to road safety problems.
4. Therefore, it has been agreed to authorise officers to proceed with the proposal to introduce a one way system in Beaumont Street as advertised for traffic capacity and highway safety benefits.
5. Works around the Feethams/Beaumont Street junction will now take place. This will provide improved pedestrian crossing points to the entrance to the cinema and nearby restaurants. In addition, the entry to the Feethams roundabout will be widened slightly to increase the length of the two lane approach. This will assist traffic exiting Feethams.

Town Centre Parking

6. The new 'Feethams' 650 space multi storey car park opened on 5 February 2016.
7. The surface level Beaumont Street East car park was closed at the end of February 2016 as the parking capacity within the car park is no longer required. The multi storey car park can accommodate all the vehicles associated with the Feethams area and those people accessing the town centre with the former car park site marketed as a development site.

Tees Valley Bus Network Improvement (TVBNI) – Feethams Coach Stop Improvements

8. Works to install screens at the Feethams coach stop have been completed. These are intended to provide better protection in inclement weather for passengers waiting for national and leisure coach trips. New seating has been provided and the screens will be 'branded' in accordance with the design for all of the town centre bus stops. These designs were implemented as a result of passenger

feedback relating to them not being able to easily see the stand letter.

9. This was funded via Darlington's element of the £57m TVBNI project which is now complete.

Stonebridge Strengthening Works

10. Phase 1 works were completed on programme in early December 2015. This phase involved the removal of the northern section of the central span and replacement with new beams. A new concrete deck was constructed on the northern side of the bridge with new road construction.
11. Phase 2 works are currently due to be completed in early April 2016. These works involve the removal of the southern section of the central span and replacement with new beams. As above there will also be a new deck, waterproofing and road construction.
12. A third phase will start in the summer on a date to be agreed with the main contractor. These works are less invasive and do not require carriageway closures. They involve painting of the structure and minor repairs. This work will involve working from the river bed hence the works being delayed until the summer when river levels are typically low.

Central Park South Junction and Spine Road

13. Phase 1 works are nearing completion with the resurfacing works on Yarm Road programmed to take place in April 2016.
14. Phase 2 works involve the development of a new spine road through the commercial part of Central Park. These works are programmed to be complete in September 2016.

Highway Maintenance Schemes

15. Ongoing scheme:
 - (a) Coombe Drive – speed cushion refurbishment
16. Schemes due to commence:
 - (a) Estoril Road – Carriageway reconstruction

Public Transport

17. 22,000 new concessionary bus passes were posted out in February to all pass holders whose card was due to expire on 31 March 2016. These new cards will be valid for a further five years. Posters were put up on buses and in town centre bus stops to advise people that they should have received their new pass and what to do if they hadn't received it. Agreements were reached with the bus operators on how to deal with passengers who were travelling with old cards.
18. Consultation was undertaken regarding a proposed change to the assessment process for concessionary travel. For those applicants that apply on the basis of 'ability to walk' who are unable to prove automatic entitlement, the proposed change is for Occupational Therapists to undertake an assessment. For those that apply on the basis of 'would be refused a driving licence' the proposed change is for a healthcare professional to complete a template to assist with the provision of facts. This brings the process in line with the Department for Transport guidance. Letters were sent to 626 pass holders who would be directly affected by the change, in that they would have to provide further information for automatic entitlement or be re-assessed. 170 people responded, though only one person commented on the proposed change to the process, the remainder being people who wanted to hand back their card or provide further information for automatic entitlement. The change to the assessment process was approved by Cabinet in March. This does not change the concessionary travel scheme or the eligibility criteria. The new process will be implemented from 1 April 2016.

Sustainable Transport

19. The Tees Valley Personalised Travel Planning Programme (PTP) was completed with the final stage included two phases in Darlington. The first was visiting houses that had been constructed since the previous PTP programme took place in Darlington. The second was a programme to re-visit houses that had previously been visited in 2014 across the wards of Bank Top, Eastbourne and College. Households were selected on the basis that they had shown 'some or strong potential for change'. 16 per cent of those that had 'some potential' and 65 per cent 'strong potential for change' had gone on to change their behaviour. This clearly demonstrates that a commitment to change has resulted in actual behaviour change.
20. Local businesses have also been involved in the PTP programme with Travel Advisors providing information to employees at Capita, to assist with their move from Mowden to Lingfield Point, Student Loans Company and Darlington Memorial Hospital.
21. The Travel Advisors are currently carrying out surveys at rail stations as part of Virgin Trains East Coast plans to develop travel plans at all its stations. The aim is to identify how people access the stations and what measures can be put in place to increase both use of the station, but also sustainable access to and from the stations. It is hoped that this work can feed into the masterplan for Bank Top Rail Station.

22. The new MegaMotion campaign with Star Radio has been a great success. The key aim was to increase the number of Facebook 'likes' so that ongoing Facebook messaging can reach a much wider audience.
23. On 8 February the Local Motion commuter campaign was launched, entitled 'Commute Yourself Happy'. Commuters were asked to share their happy, funny or heart-warming stories to show that commuting by sustainable transport isn't just about getting from A to B. It was aimed at commuters in Darlington, Tees Valley and South Durham.

Disability Funding

24. Within the CCG funded disability project we have begun two new sessions targeting children aged 11-19 afterschool. One is being held at Longfield Academy of Sport, working with Local Powerchair Football club where we have 7-10 children attending each week. The other is being held at the Education Village, working within the 14-19 unit. In three months it has been running we have had a total of 40 visits in which the participants have been learning Taekwondo and Boxercise.
25. The Adult Disability project continues to go from strength to strength and we have recently hosted a second sports afternoon with the Danshell group, in which participants county-wide came to the Dolphin Centre to take part in a wide variety of sports including: Boccia, Trampoline, Kurling, Cricket and TriGolf.

Sportivate Funding

26. The Darlington Move More Team has been successful in securing £10,000 towards delivering Sportivate projects from Tees Valley Sport that look to engage 11–25 year olds into Sport and Physical Activity. The bids include Netball, Roller Skating, Trampolining, Tennis, Swimming, Spinning and various Disability projects.

Inspired Facilities Applications

27. The Darlington Move More Team has recently supported Darlington Parks Bowls Association and Darlington Cricket Club with two Inspired Facilities applications. The Bowls Association has applied for £65,000 towards refurbishing the playing surfaces at North Lodge and North Park. Darlington Cricket Club has applied for £35,000 towards a new state of the art practice facility.

Top Up Swimming

28. The top up swimming programme targets children that cannot swim or have a low swimming ability. The programme ran for six weeks and eight different schools accepted the offer enabling 102 children to attend. Overall 94 of the 102 children swam 25 metres by the end of the programme and 100 per cent of the children had achieved swimming award one.

MEND

29. Mind Exercise Nutrition Do It! is a ten-week programme where parents/carers and children, and any siblings attend together. To be eligible for the programme one of the children needs to be above a healthy weight. Sessions focus on supporting behaviour change (the 'mind' element), exercise and nutrition (centred around the Eat well plate, with specific sessions on shopping, labelling, sugars, fats etc.). So far five families have taken up the offer to start the programme including those that are Looked After Children and also children that have a disability.

QE Move More

30. The QE Move More Project has engaged over 100 Students since September through activities, such as using the Dolphin Centre Gym, Spinning, Yoga and Boxercise.

Northern Games 2016

31. Darlington Move More team will be supporting the Northern Games organised by the Rotary Club in June 2016. This event is going to be promoted through the Disability Move More sessions with the aim of getting good Darlington Representation.

Back To Netball

32. Back to Netball provides a gentle introduction for female players over 16 years of age. The sessions are Coach led and cover basic netball skills, development and court play. The emphasis of these sessions is to have fun while learning new skills and playing netball. The sessions have re-commenced at Darlington School of Mathematics and Science in January and over 30 participants are attending on a weekly basis.

Running Programmes

33. Couch 2 5k programme is for ten weeks and is designed to assist running for beginners. The programme gently gets the body moving by alternating between walking and running small distances and slowly building up until after the ten weeks the participant feels ready to run five kilometres. The course takes place on Tuesdays and Wednesday evenings 6.30pm - 7.30pm.

Indoor Cricket League

34. The Schools Indoor Cricket League successfully ran between September and December 2015. There were four competitions, two girls' competitions and two boys' competitions. This will become a yearly event and was set up with one of the aims being the creation of a new Darlington Girls Cricket Hub linking with Darlington Cricket Club. This will be launched in the summer.

No Strings Badminton

35. No Strings Badminton now runs three times a week after the Move More team took over the Tuesday and Thursday classes. The sessions are all proving popular every week and average around 20 participants.

Town Centre Events

36. The Events programme has continued during January and February with music and street theatre taking place. The entertainment has proven very popular with both businesses and visitors. The weather conditions have been mild, benefiting our performers not having to endure freezing conditions.

Sherwoods Vauxhall 10K Launch

37. The Sherwoods Vauxhall 10K was launched on 12 March with activities in Joseph Pease Place. The 10km and the junior 3km and family fun run will take place on 7 August 2016.

Town Centre Hire Space

38. Town centre hires have significantly increased over the winter period. Predominately charity organisations have utilised the space, however businesses have returned on more than one occasion over this period. The Events team are developing a new marketing strategy to entice more business into the town on the prime locations. There will be a revamp of the current brochure and approach to potential business with additional incentives to regular customers.

Chinese New Year Celebrations

39. Residents in Darlington were invited to celebrate Chinese New Year and bring in the year of the Monkey in style at Joseph Pease Place on 8 February 2016. The celebrations, started at 12.30pm and included pupils from Carmel College performing Thai Chi and a song from 12.45pm, Hummersknott Academy performing a traditional dragon dance at 1.00pm and students from Polam Hall School writing calligraphy New Year's messages for visitors to their market stall.

Easter Entertainment

40. Family entertainment will be provided on 26 March in Joseph Pease Place and will include street theatre and circus skills workshops. Distinct Darlington will offer a treasure hunt around the town centre which will include the Indoor Market.

Events

41. Local author Helen Carver visited the library to give an entertaining and witty talk about her book 'Life begins at 50' on 20 January 2016. Helen recounted her experiences travelling around the world with her teenage daughter.

42. Bestselling crime novelist Lin Anderson visited the library to talk about her new Rhona Macleod novel on 3 February 2016.
43. The library hosted a sleepover for a local troop of Brownies on 22 January 2016, everyone enjoyed the experience and the chance to explore the building out of hours, and complete their world traveller badge by using the travel section in the library.
44. Following the success of the Christmas card making session, the library held it's first of the library's regular card making workshops on 27 January 2016. The workshop was a great success with over 30 participants within the age range of 25-75 years attending. These workshops will be held monthly.

Booktime

45. The Bookstart Coordinator has begun the Booktime visits for 2015/16 where the library offers a visit to every Reception class in Darlington giving them a library talk, a story and a rhyme time session. Each child is given the gift of a book pack containing a high quality picture book, guidance for parents and carers and a colouring/craft activity.
46. This follows our 'Reading Every Day' message as we talk about the love of bedtime stories and encourage children to visit the library. Schools appear to place a high value on these free library sessions as the uptake is 100 per cent of schools and the feedback is always incredibly positive.

School Visits

47. The Government recently announced that it wants all eight year olds to be enrolled at their local library. Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, has launched a new literacy 'mission' and has enrolled children's author David Walliams to help boost literacy.
48. This has presented a huge opportunity for the library to work with schools and to raise their reading standards. We have offered children in Year 3 classes the opportunity to visit the library as a class, offering each child to have their very own library ticket.
49. The class visit includes a talk about the library and a themed activity linked to National Curriculum. Topics this year include The Great Fire of London and Victorian Britain. At the end of the school visit, the teacher is issued with a class ticket to borrow books for use in the classroom. This offer will expand in time to different age groups and link in with the Local Studies section of the library. Since launching the offer in early January we have nine classes booked in and more expressing an interest.

Christmas at the Library

50. The library hosted eight Christmas parties for babies and young children at Cockerton and Crown Street libraries. The sessions were full and every child left with a present to pop under their tree.
51. The Christmas Craft session was held at both libraries for older children with a face painter; both of the sessions were full.

Groundworks at Cockerton Library

52. A weekly Groundworks play session is proving popular at Cockerton Library with additional sessions during school holidays. Cockerton Library is now being used for additional sessions two mornings and one afternoon a week outside of normal library opening hours.

National Storytelling Week and Harry Potter Night

53. To celebrate National Storytelling Week, Crown Street Library held an 'Imagine Me' storytelling with pre-schoolers session on 3 February 2016 where we searched for the mysterious Gruffalo. To celebrate Harry Potter Night on 4 February there was a late afternoon of magic for children with award winning magician Graeme Shaw.

Centre for Local Studies

54. The Centre for Local Studies always has a changing display of material either from its own collection or on loan from other organizations with a link to the town. The Centre seeks to engage visitors with their collections each month and, where possible, ties displays in with other events in the town.
55. In December the 150th anniversary of the restoration of St Cuthbert's Church was celebrated in the Centre for Local Studies with an exhibition of images and framed prints and paintings from the Centre's collection. There was considerable interest in some pre-restoration images which have not been widely seen before.
56. Throughout January, a display of 'Lost railway properties in the Darlington area' was on display, on loan from the North Eastern Railway Association. The fantastic images of railways in the town have been enjoyed by regular and new visitors alike. A display of historic Darlington calendars was also shown again due to popular demand with the oldest calendar dating back to 1885.
57. Some history students from Hummersknott School had a special group visit to the Centre for Local Studies to focus on researching Darlington men who died during World War 1. They had a brief introduction to the Local History library collection and then did their own research on an individual soldier using local resources such as maps, Electoral Rolls, Census returns and street directories, as well as online resources.

Creative Darlington

Strategic

58. Creative Darlington has met with Arts Council England and Stockton International Riverside Festival to progress the development of a funding proposal to Arts Council England's Ambition for Excellence strategic programme, which will be focused on developing the work of key festivals in the Tees Valley, Animex, Festival of Thrift and Stockton International Riverside Festival.

Audience Development

59. Battersea Arts Centre has been offered support from Arts Council England's strategic touring programme to extend the operation of their Collaborative Touring Network from 2016 to spring 2020, which will include the Jabberwocky Market. The Creative Darlington Board is considering a proposal from Caroline Pearce, Luxi Ltd, to build and develop funding for artists commissions and residencies within the Jabberwocky Market programme post spring 2016.

Developing Finance for Arts Activity

60. Creative Darlington offered support to Darlington based producer, Sarah Wilson to programme three live music events for families with young children in Darlington between February and April 2016. 'After a wonderful start in 2015 with capacity audiences of ages five months through to 71 years enjoying a New Orleans Jazz Band, a Hammond organ trio and a gypsy jazz group, we have lots more exciting musicians planned for BIG Little Gigs throughout 2016' says Sarah. The featured band on 6 February 2016 was Blind Panic Ceilidh Band who performed at the Friends Meeting House on Skinnergate.
61. Original works developed through the Festival of Flipbook animation project led by Anton Hecht at Crown Street Library, with support from Creative Darlington and Arts Council England, are currently being exhibited in Falmouth Public Library in the United States of America.

Crown Street Art Gallery

62. The Retracing Routledge exhibition developed by Susie Stephens closed on 14 January 2016, attracted over 2,500 visits and secured positive comments, helping to promote Darlington's heritage and the work of Katherine Routledge. Project development was supported by Creative Darlington through a Developing Finance for Arts Activity in Darlington award, with Susie securing additional sponsorship and philanthropic support to make the project happen here.
63. The Community Arts Project Spring Exhibition opened in Crown Street Art Gallery on 16 January 2016 and was well received. The following exhibition, a group show by Darlington Society of Arts, opened on 27 February 2016.

The Town Hall Gallery

64. A new exhibition of abstract paintings by Darlington based artist Paul Wheeler is currently on display in the Town Hall exhibition space in Darlington, informed by Paul's observations of Mexico.

The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts

65. The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts opened a new term of ticketed adult art courses in the week commencing spring term, 11 January 2016. A wide variety of courses are promoted by artists from the venue with the Council currently providing marketing and box office support and receiving income for use of the building from the artists managing these courses. The December footfall at the Bridge Centre for Visual Arts up to 19 December 2016 was 1,424.
66. The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts organisation manages an exhibitions programme at the venue. Renditions in Rags by Sue Angus and Tandem, an exhibition by four local fabric artists, opened on 9 January 2016 and have been very well received, generating some commissions and sales for participating artists.

Civic Theatre

67. This year's pantomime at the Civic Theatre Cinderella, was one of the best received for several years, with lots of excellent feedback from customers. The cast very much enjoyed their time in Darlington and acted as enthusiastic ambassadors for the theatre and its restoration while they were here. It was seen by over 41,000 people. Secondary spend was very good too at £86,656, well up on last year and we also took over £22,000 on merchandise. Collections for charity during the run raised £4,854 for Great Ormond Street Hospital, £614 for Maxi's Mates dog's charity, £9,593 for St Teresa's Hospice and £130 for The National Autistic Society. Members of the cast visited the Hospice while they were here and members of the front of house team also visited the Hospice to present the cheque to Jane Bradshaw, CEO of the Hospice.
68. On 8 January 2016, Darlington Civic Theatre organised its first ever relaxed performance of the Pantomime. A relaxed performance is specifically adapted to welcome people with an Autistic Spectrum Condition, learning disability or sensory and communication disorder, or anyone that might find a typical theatre setting a challenge. Audience members could leave the auditorium at any time and come back in again, light and sound levels were adapted, and there was a "chill-out zone" outside the auditorium. Audience members could talk as much as they liked, and there was no expectation that the audience had to be quiet. A greater number of wheelchair spaces were created at the front of the auditorium. The performance attracted over 250 people including children and adults from various organisations such as The Alzheimer's Society, Beaumont Hill Academy, and Marchbank Free School. Children who had never previously been able to attend a performance were able to attend with their families in a relaxed supported environment. Jenny Leeming from The Alzheimer's Society said of the event: "The Civic Theatre staff went out of their way to support people with dementia and their carers...we all had

a wonderful afternoon. We look forward to more relaxed performances in the refurbished Darlington Hippodrome”.

69. In January, the Theatre introduced a Restoration Blog on its website to interest and engage people with the restoration of the theatre. The first blog was written by the two actors who played the Ugly Sisters in this year’s pantomime and gave a glimpse of life back stage at the theatre and how the restoration will make improvements for visiting companies.
70. The Director of Fundraising has developed a talk that can be delivered to clubs and societies who are interested in the story of the theatre and its restoration and which will both help to engage people with the theatre and raise funds for the restoration. The Theatre Director delivered this talk at Stockton Probus Club in January. The Theatre is also continuing a series of Heritage Tours for people of all ages, which are proving to be very popular, particularly now we have a model and more developed plans of the restored theatre. Feedbacks on the plans seem very positive.
71. The new season following pantomime got off to a very good start with attendances of 727 for Beyond the Barricade, 880 for Vampire’s rock, 747 for Grimethorpe Colliery Band and 858 for Joe Brown. The Russian State Ballet of Siberia, brought a new title, The Snow Maiden, alongside favourites The Sleeping Beauty and Swan Lake. Just fewer than 3,000 people saw the shows and ticket sales were £3,000 up on last year.
72. The theatre played host to a Mayoral event for schools, which was based on a Eurovision theme. 350 children took part from 23 schools and the evening was very much enjoyed by a packed house.

Head of Steam

73. Schools users for December 2015 were 114, and we had 255 school users in January 2016. We have 122 students booked in for February 2016.
74. Making a Mark Project – The project is due to finish by the end of March. A new web based resource for schools was launched on 11 February 2016, which will ensure that the work produced continues to be available to schools. There are also various curriculum plans to help teachers plan visits. The web address is: www.npg.org.uk/manteesvalley
75. In February half term we held two family craft activities, as well as a fun trail around the museum.
76. Dementia Friends – so far four members of staff and volunteers have been trained as Dementia Friends.
77. Volunteer hours in December were 157 and in January 92.5. The rise in hours in December was due to our Santa at the Station events and extra volunteers helping to ensure successful activities.

Collections and Exhibitions

78. Head of Steam has launched a new project to commemorate the closure of North Road Works 50 years ago. 'North Road Works Memories' hopes to collect the memories of former employees and their relatives. A new website has been created so members of the public can view the memories collected:
www.northroadworksmemories.wordpress.com

Outreach and Community Groups

79. We have given a talk to the Crook Local History Society and to the Guild at Cockerton Methodist Church. As part of the North Road Works Project, our Collections and Learning Assistant is working with the Move More team to go into residential homes and sheltered accommodation with photos, objects and to collect memories.

Street Scene

80. The winter programme in relation to the servicing of shrubs and hedges across the Borough is ongoing and expected to be completed on time in readiness for the forthcoming growing season.

Horticulture

81. Improvements to South Park are ongoing. A significant amount of work by the Horticultural staff has improved sightlines and removed large scale overgrown areas of bramble, etc. One area of particular note is the recovery of a large rockery that had been hidden by large amounts of growth for the past 10 years. The area has been greatly improved and will be a major asset to the park when completed within the next month. The resurfacing of the play area in South Park is scheduled for late February and will be undertaken in readiness for the expected large usage during the Easter holidays.

Arboriculture

82. Members will be aware of recent inclement weather where significant gales were experienced during the weekend of 29 January to 1 February. As a result of the winds numerous trees were blown down in the Borough, however the Arboriculture Team dealt with all concerns with expediency and plaudits were received for the works undertaken by the team during this difficult period.

Councillor Nick Wallis
Cabinet Member with Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio