
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.

Electric Blanket Safety Testing Campaign

2. Trading Standards worked in partnership with Age UK to run this year's electric blanket safety testing campaign, which took place on 6 and 7 September. 92 blankets were tested and 32 were found to be unsafe for use, a failure rate of 35 per cent. The unsafe electric blankets were taken out of circulation and their owners were offered a free replacement blanket by Age UK. This campaign has, once again, highlighted that many people remain unaware they are using a potential lethal product, until it is professionally tested.

Counterfeit and Illicit Products

3. As part of a rolling programme of enforcement action to tackle the sale and supply of counterfeit and illicit tobacco products within Darlington, Trading Standards seized a quantity of counterfeit and illicit tobacco products from a local individual. Investigations are on-going.
4. Trading Standards seized counterfeit clothing and footwear from a Darlington resident. The individual received a formal caution.
5. After an investigation by Trading Standards, a local resident was convicted of being in possession of counterfeit clothing and footwear with a view to distributing them. He was sentenced to 40 hours unpaid work to be completed within a twelve month period. He also received an order to pay £1064 costs and a £60 victim surcharge.

Advice to Darlington Business Club

6. Trading Standards recognises the challenges that some businesses, particularly small businesses, face when they try to navigate their way through the complex web of trading standards laws that apply to them. The service is focusing on engaging with businesses to deliver the support they need and to provide clear, accurate and practical advice on how to comply with the law. An Officer from Trading Standards gave a presentation to the Darlington Business Club on 7 September, which was well received.

Local Flood Risk Management Strategy

7. Cabinet agreed to adopt the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, a requirement of The Flood and Water Management Act 2010, which set out how the Council met its legal requirements; outlined the history of flooding in the Borough; and detailed how the Council worked with partners to achieve its objectives for managing local flood risk.
8. The strategy referred only to local sources of flooding including from ordinary watercourses, surface water and groundwater and was supported by five main objectives. Flooding from main rivers is addressed by the Environment Agency in the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England.

Release of Capital Programme Funding for Regeneration Projects

9. Cabinet approved the release of £250,000 for Advance Design Fees to bring forward projects and prepare sites for development in order to enable the Council to deliver its priorities and to meet income targets in the Medium Term Financial Plan through attracting new business and growing the economy.
10. It is anticipated that further capital funding will be available to economic projects for their delivery through the Combined Authority and future rounds of Local Growth Fund (LGF) and the Growth Deal. Projects that are well defined and 'shovel ready' are likely to be more successful in attracting funding in this competitive process. Release of the funding will enable Council-owned land to be ready and available for these LGF opportunities. Regeneration projects that require funding are mainly within the Central, Eastern and North West Growth Zones of the Borough.

Central Park – Next Steps and Update

11. Cabinet received an update on the development and delivery of Central Park together with the next steps for Central Park South.
12. Central Park is one of the regeneration flagship projects for Darlington and the Tees Valley. It is in an excellent location due its connectivity with Bank Top Station and the East Coast Main Line (ECML).
13. Significant progress has been made on the current Masterplan since 2012, including the delivery of over 120 new homes, Business Central and Centre for Process Innovation's (CPI) National Biologics Manufacturing Centre (NBMC). The Council has also commenced construction of the new Yarm Road Junction and Spine Road (known as the Enabling Road Infrastructure) at Central Park. The works are funded by Local Growth Fund to support new businesses and open Central Park South for further development.
14. In order to maximise the commercial opportunity presented at Central Park further work has been undertaken to refresh the Masterplan with the purpose of increasing the number of commercial development plots available.

15. Work is also underway with key stakeholders to consider a refreshed overarching vision for Central Park and its potential as a Science and Innovation Park that will benefit from Enterprise Zone status.

Economy Strategy Refresh and Brexit

16. Cabinet received an update on the revised Tees Valley Strategic Plan and Brexit and in doing so endorsed an amended action plan that supported Darlington's Economic Strategy, in light of recent policy changes and emerging priorities for business.
17. Since the Economic Strategy was adopted in 2012 the local economy has seen significant growth with over £150 million of physical development and Darlington's economy outperforming regional and national growth trends.
18. In the four years since Darlington's economic strategy was created there has been considerable change which has impacted on delivery, however, the Strategy contains a commitment to annually review and assess progress against the performance targets. This year's Annual Monitoring Report for the Economic Strategy 2012-2026 reflected those wider political changes which have influenced the targets for delivery for 2016 / 2017.

Foundation for Jobs Update

19. The Bioscience event was held on 19th October at Carmel Academy.
20. The event was aimed to build upon pupils interest in bioscience following the opening of the National Biologics Manufacturing Centre.
21. This was followed by the suspension bridge building civil engineering activity at the college which ran for a period of nine days from 7 November..
22. The Council has just started a new employability skills scheme partnered with Cummins and Darlington Cares taking place at St Aidan's Academy. Further schemes are planned for Hummersknott and Longfield Academies.
23. In addition the Council is again running the Virgin Money Make £5 Grow entrepreneur scheme for primary age pupils in Red Hall Primary School this term, leading to a final sale before Christmas.

Uniform Project

24. As part of the Medium Term Financial Plan and service review, a significant upgrade of the ICT systems that are used to manage Planning Services has commenced with the upgrade of servers and installation of test systems. The timetable to operate the new systems live is scheduled for the turn of the year. The improved systems will not only generate much improved efficiencies but also enhance access and information services for both Members and the general public.

25. The training programme that will accompany the upgrade of the system will begin ahead of Go Live and will be in two parts. A specific training programme will be designed for Planners and Building Control and a more generic training programme will be delivered to all Uniform users. At an appropriate time an introduction to the new system will be organised for Members.

Development Management

26. Significant planning applications for housing (approximately 160 houses) at Bellburn Lane, Alexander Street and Eastbourne former school Park, have received planning permission. Applications for the former Lancaster House and Durham Tees Valley Airport (DTVA) are currently being considered.
27. In addition Planning applications are under consideration for two supermarkets at Faverdale (Aldi and Marks and Spencer) and two car show rooms at the former Torrington's site.

Local Plan

28. The Local Plan has reached an important stage in its preparation. Following the successful consultation over the Summer on the Strategic Issues and Scoping document, Cabinet considered the responses received, including the results of the 'call for sites' process and the main issues raised. The Local Plan Strategic Framework was agreed setting out the Vision, Aims and Objectives for the Plan, and establishing the locational strategy and strategic development locations as a basis for further work. Stage 2 of the Local Plan process, over the next twelve months, will see Officers working collaboratively with landowners, developers, local communities and other key stakeholders, using a number of techniques, to review/refresh the plan evidence base and assess the development potential and deliverability of strategic and local sites.

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Economy and Regeneration Portfolio