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**OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY AND REGENERATION PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Economy and Regeneration Portfolio.

**Experience Darlington**

2. Cabinet endorsed both the draft Experience Darlington Strategy and draft Culture Strategy to enable further engagement with stakeholders on how the strategy and action plans can be further developed to align organisations and other potential external resources to achieve the vision and objectives.
3. Experience Darlington is a proposed visitor economy strategy which builds on the work of the Economy Strategy; the Town Centre Fringe Master Plan, the Town Centre Strategy and the recent work of the Creative Darlington Board. It knits together these strands as an overarching strategy with a tourism offer focused on three particular assets and opportunities. These are the town's theatre offer, rail heritage and the development of a Tees Valley 2025 City of Culture bid.
4. The consultative draft Experience Darlington Strategy has four key strands, namely, Place Making Regeneration; Connectivity; Town Centre; and Heritage, Arts and Culture. Additionally there is an ongoing commitment to the wider vision and goals of Creative Darlington, and opportunities to maximise the impact of the significant contribution that artists, arts groups (such as Darlington for Culture), producers, and arts venues make to a vibrant town. A draft Culture Strategy is proposed to be the centre of further engagement and the development of action plans.
5. Experience Darlington is a wider community plan for partners within the Darlington Partnership, businesses, community groups and residents to both benefit from and participate in and should be viewed as an investment prospectus for all of our community.

**Feethams Programme – Riverside Park**

6. Cabinet agreed to release further capital funding of £90,000 to enable delivery of the Riverside Park project which will provide accessible, high quality open space within the Town Centre, as well as an attractive frontage for the new development.
7. Significant progress has been made in realising the objectives of the Feethams Planning and Development Brief which was adopted in 2008. One objective of the Development Brief was to provide a riverside promenade, known as Riverside Park, with improvements to the landscape and ecology value of the Skerne.

Consultation on the development of the Riverside Park design was undertaken in early 2016 and informed the planning application process.

8. It is expected that work will commence in January 2017 and the Park will open by Summer 2017.

### **Development Management**

9. A significant planning application for housing has received planning permission for up to 100 houses to the North of Hurworth, following extensive consultation and debate at Planning Committee. Applications for the former Lancaster House and Durham Tees Valley Airport (DTVA) are currently being considered.
10. A significant extension to the ALDI distribution centre, which will create up to 200 jobs and secure the site's long term future as a distribution centre servicing the supermarkets expansion programme in the North East, has been considered by the Planning Applications Committee. Local residents had requested the Secretary of State to 'call in'. The Secretary of State has decided not to call this in.
11. 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 on Yarm Road.
12. The Secretary of State recently considered the planning applications for out of town retail developments at Scotch Corner. It is disappointing, from a Town Centre perspective, that the Secretary of State has approved both applications as he has concluded that they would not have a harmful impact on Darlington.

### **Local Plan**

13. The Local Plan has moved into its second stage when work starts on the evidence base to demonstrate, how, when, where and who can deliver the strategic planning framework agreed by Cabinet.
14. Masterplan Inception meetings have been held with landowners and developers in respect of strategic locations on the northern fringes of the Town and it is anticipated that details will emerge shortly about how local Members, the public and other interested parties can get involved.
15. It is anticipated that the Government will review the National Planning Policy Statement by May 2017 and at some point stock will need to be taken as to what this might mean for the Local Plan. However, at this point there is no reason to pause work on the Local Plan. The Government has also clarified that the Council will not be penalised through New Homes Bonus (NHB) for the current Local Plan timetable but will revisit the case for withholding NHB from areas not delivering on housing growth from 2018/19.

## **Bid to Homes and Communities Agency Capacity Fund**

16. The Council has submitted a bid for £200,000 to the Homes and Communities Agency's Capacity Fund. The bid seeks funding to enable the Council to commission a suite of studies required to support the development of the Local Plan; specifically examining accelerating housing delivery in the Eastern Growth Zone.

## **Digital City**

17. Digital City will be delivering a twelve week project in conjunction with the Economy Team, from Unit 27 in the Cornmill Centre (and will be referred to as The Hub) as of February 2017. Consumer and one-to-one business support will be delivered to high street businesses covering bespoke digital skills training.
18. Workshops are also planned with partner organisations both on site at The Hub and at the Teesside University campus in Darlington, from Department for International Trade (DIT), Enterprise Revolution and businesses in the digital cluster.

## **Business Engagement**

19. Following the appointment of a new Economy Manager, the Economy Team are increasing engagement with the Borough's key employers and have started to deliver a 'Strategic Account Management' (SAM) programme. The aim of the SAM programme is to engage with more key employers aimed at stimulating and supporting economic growth by means of job creation, job retention and an increase in the take up of more commercial space, leading to an increase in business rate income for the Authority. Key companies attributed to the SAM programme are:-
  - (a) Companies from high growth/priority sectors (such as marine, offshore, advanced manufacturing, logistics, and life sciences);
  - (b) Companies employing large numbers of staff;
  - (c) Significant payers of business rates; and
  - (d) Foreign owned companies
20. The Economy Team are working closely with a range of partner organisations to deliver this activity in a collaborative approach, including Teesside University, Darlington College, Tees Valley Combined Authority, Tedco, Business and Innovation Centre (BIC) the Department for International Trade (DIT), and Tees Valley Business Compass (delivered by Business and Enterprise Group (BE Group as of January 2017).

## **Local Government Council (LGC) Awards**

21. Economic Initiative has been shortlisted in the 2017 LGC Awards, for a potential award in 'Driving Growth'. The submission focused on the story of growth in Darlington, from the development of the Darlington Economic Strategy in 2012, through to the physical regeneration of key sites. The impact has been demonstrated through key indicators such as GVA and a rise in employment figures, coming second only to Croydon on a national stage.
22. A judging panel will take place on 24 January 2017 in London and be attended by John Anderson, Chris Dowle (Centre for Process Innovation) and Mike Airey (Handelsbanken).

## **Healthy New Towns**

23. Darlington is part of the HNS England Healthy New Towns Project and is leading the way nationally in integrating spatial planning and public health. As part of this a suite of Healthy New Towns design principles have been developed that will guide future development and facilitate the establishment of new models of care across the Borough. These design principles, focussed on sustainable travel; access to greenspace; goods; services and healthy food; employability and skills; and better neighbourhoods, have informed two planning and development briefs for Red Hall Local Centre and the adjoining former Stables Site. Intended to be exemplar developments, these will establish the principles of a Healthy New Town and facilitate housing and economic growth in the area.

## **Ingenium Parc and Maidendale**

24. A collaborative approach has been taken to working with the Friends of Maidendale Nature Reserve to develop a Masterplan for Darlington's latest employment site project, Ingenium Parc. Intended to be a location suitable for a range of engineering and general business uses the Masterplan will integrate improvements to the habitats, biodiversity and ecology of the area whilst also providing space for the demand for employment sites. The Council is working closely with the Friends to ensure that any new development will enhance the area and mitigate for any loss of greenspace. Plans also include the integration of sustainable drainage and improved walking and cycling access.

**Councillor Chris McEwan**  
**Economy and Regeneration Portfolio**