
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.

Town Centre Traffic Management

2. A report outlining town centre traffic management was considered by Cabinet that outlined previous reviews and work undertaken to manage traffic in the town centre. There remains concern within the town centre over pedestrian movements and a perception of excess vehicle speed.
3. A package of measures will be developed in partnership with the Police, Bus Operators and other stakeholders, to address these concerns including measures such as the introduction of a 20mph speed limit in town centre locations, an advisory speed limit lower than 20mph in certain locations, the introduction of signs to encourage slower speeds, improving the conspicuity of uncontrolled crossing points and developing a campaign to address concerns.

Central Park South Junction and Spine Road

4. The junction construction work is complete but is likely to remain closed until after the Spine Road works are complete.
5. Phase 1 of the Spine Road from the end of Green Street to John Dixon Lane is substantially complete. The second phase of the Spine Road linking the junction to phase one of the Spine Road will commence early this year after recently acquired buildings have been demolished.
6. This phase will be complete in Summer 2017 at which time the junction will be open. A 157 space car park will also be constructed to accommodate parking from the National Biologics Centre and create the capacity for other future businesses. This will be funded from income from the businesses that use the car park.

Beaumont Street and Feethams Improvements

7. The final phase of work has been completed with the improvement to the footway along Feethams from its junction with Beaumont Street to the junction with Houndgate. This included the installation of a raised kerb at the bus stop and the creation of a new crossing point with the installation of a pair of dropped kerbs. This scheme has been funded from Local Growth Fund and Local Transport Plan monies.

John Street Cycle Way

8. This scheme is funded from a mixture of Local Transport Plan and Local Growth Funding. The cycle path is a key piece of the Town's cycle network. The proposed route will comprise a 450 metre section adjacent to the River Skerne and a 90 metre link up to High Northgate and will take around five months to build.
9. The project will open up an important historic asset in the story of Darlington as it will run underneath the 1825 Skerne Bridge designed by Ignatious Bonomi. The bridge, also known as the £5 note bridge, is the oldest working railway bridge in the world and is a nationally designated scheduled monument.
10. Works to the existing retaining wall adjacent to the River Skerne are complete. Works on the path itself have commenced but we are awaiting approval from Network Rail to carry out the works under the £5 note bridge. It is anticipated that the first section along the river side will be complete by the end of March 2017.

Maintenance Schemes

11. Recently completed schemes:

- (a) C38 Walworth Road – Carriageway Edge Reconstruction
- (b) Houndgate – Reconstruction and Resurfacing

12. Scheme due to start:

- Park Lane East Back – Resurfacing

Transport Policy

13. On 30 November the Tees Valley Combined Authority launched 'Connecting the Tees Valley', the framework for the Strategic Transport Plan, which is due for publication during Summer 2017. The Framework sets out the region's transport priorities up to 2026 and offers the opportunity for stakeholders, interest groups and the public to help inform the development of the Strategic Transport Plan. As outlined within the Strategic Economic Plan, over the next ten years the Combined Authority wants to create 25,000 new jobs and build 22,000 new homes and the Strategic Transport Plan is vital to support this aim.
14. The Combined Authority's transport vision for the Tees Valley is 'to provide a high quality, quick, affordable, reliable and safe transport network for people and freight to move within, to and from the Tees Valley'. The consultation is open until 31 January 2017.

Public Transport

15. Arriva and the Tees Valley Combined Authority won the award for 'Best Transport Team of the Year' at the inaugural North of England Transport Awards. The award was for the partnership between the Tees Valley local councils and bus operators for the delivery of the TVBNI project. Judges were impressed by the range of improvements delivered across Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton. These included a range of bus priority measures to help buses run on time, a 'Real Time' bus information system, improvements to bus stops and the introduction of premium bus services on key routes, most notably Arriva's new flagship Max and Sapphire services which now operate on a number of busy key routes in the area, including amongst many others the X66/X67 service between Darlington and Middlesbrough via Stockton. Tees Valley beat off competition from a number of other authorities including Nexus, Transport for Greater Manchester and South Yorkshire PTE.
16. 'Everyone's using the bus this Christmas' was the theme of this year's campaign aimed at increasing the number of journeys made by bus over the festive season across the Tees Valley. The campaign used a variety of channels including radio, bus backs and digital advertising. In addition 100 Purple 'Pay as you go' popcards were distributed in Darlington as part of the campaign. The popcards were funded through the NESTI project and were pre-loaded with £15 worth of free bus travel.
17. All companion bus pass holders have been consulted on proposed changes to the companion element of their disabled bus pass; namely, a proposed annual charge and changes to the assessment criteria. Impacts gathered during the consultation will be presented to Cabinet in March. It is proposed that the new assessment criteria and annual charge will be introduced in April 2017. All existing companion pass holders would be reassessed by a DBC Occupational Therapist based on the new criteria.
18. Bus passes that have been reported as lost/stolen continue to be blocked on buses throughout the North East. Only bus passes valid for travel can be used and so far a total of 80 Darlington issued bus passes have been blocked.

Sustainable Travel

19. As part of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund Local Motion project, Darlington Association on Disability was awarded grant funding for its project to address the lack of availability of accessible taxis particularly at peak times through the provision of an additional vehicle. The barriers to developing the service were numerous and eventually DAD had to become the licensed operator of a Hackney Carriage taxi. The service has operated successfully for 12 months.
20. The taxi provides a high quality accessible service, available at peak times and evening and weekends on a pre-booked basis. Drivers have all received Disability Equality Training prior to starting employment. Outcomes for individuals are key and the service has had excellent feedback. A marketing video has been launched to promote the taxi and has already received positive feedback via the Local Motion website.

21. In the first year 2804 journeys have been made, of which 1564 were by wheelchair users (54 per cent) and a further 366 customers required an accessible vehicle or assistance (13 per cent).
22. Interpretation panels for each platform have been placed on rail stations along the Bishop Line together with Dinsdale Station in Middleton St George. These panels give the historical context of each station and celebrate our local rail heritage. A successful launch event was held at Darlington North Road station where the formal unveiling took place on 25 November, by David Corfield, Chairman of the North East Railway Association.
23. This year the Department for Transport not only awarded grant funding for Bikeability training but also added a new pot of funding for Bikeability Plus which covers things like learn to ride sessions, bike maintenance clubs and group bike rides. Starting in January 2017 a series of Bikeability Plus sessions will be delivered across primary schools in Darlington. The funding we have received will continue until March 2020.
24. The annual Travel to School survey was carried out in September 2016. Overall the way that pupils travel to school remains fairly static when 2016 is compared to 2015, with over 78 per cent using a sustainable form of transport. A few schools have increased the use of a sustainable mode of travel by over five per cent those being The Federation of Abbey Schools, Firthmoor Primary and St. George's Academy with Heighington CE Primary achieving an increase of over six per cent.
25. The Travel Safety This Winter campaign ran between 27 October and 3 December. An accompanying Design competition ran until 20 December and, following judging by a panel of experts, the winner will be announced at the end January 2017. The TSTW campaign covered five weekly themes:
 - (a) Be seen morning and night,
 - (b) Prepare for the weather,
 - (c) Plan your journey,
 - (d) Brake Road Safety Campaign
 - (e) Be aware.
26. At the start of 2017, a campaign was launched across the Tees Valley to encourage people to make a new year's resolution to change the way they travel, even for just one regular journey. Activity included radio adverts featuring real people talking about their experiences of walking and cycling, digital advertising and social media posts. People can make a commitment to travel sustainably during January at the Local Motion pledge page.

Museum Accreditation Policies

27. We approved the Head of Steam Forward Plan 2016/19, Head of Steam Collections Management Framework 2016/21 and the Head of Steam Access Statement Policy 2016/21 in preparation for submission to the Arts Council England for Museum Accreditation.
28. These plans will enable us to be able to evidence effective and professional management of Darlington's Museum Service and enable the museum to remain an accredited museum and entitled to future support from the Arts Council England (Central Government Body).
29. It will also enable the museum to be eligible for future funding from external bodies, e.g. Arts Council England, English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund; and future loans from other museums, e.g. The National Railway Museum. This will also ensure that the museum remains registered and complies with the standards and ethics as set out by the Museums Association.

Civic Theatre

30. Performances of A Tale of Two Cities took place in the Central Hall over the weekend of 19 and 20 November. The lead in to the performances saw intense activity within the Dolphin Centre, with rehearsals continuing with the 30 strong amateur cast, whilst in the Central Hall itself an extraordinary promenade set was created where the audiences followed the action from London to Paris, beginning in the court room at the Old Bailey and ending at the guillotine, where the hero of the story Sidney Carton gave up his life to save Charles Darnay. The set was designed by a professional theatre designer and built by the Civic Theatre team with the assistance of students from Cleveland College of Art and Design.
31. The four performances were seen by 550 people and 55 people also acted as a 'guinea pig' audience at the dress rehearsal. Volunteers from Darlington for Culture assisted with the stewarding. The feedback from audiences was excellent and the cast themselves have described their experience as 'life changing'.
32. The Dickens season continued with a manuscript writing workshop delivered by the Charles Dickens Museum, in the friends Meeting House on 14 December. The final event in the Dickens season took place on 21 December in St Cuthbert's Church, with a one man performance of A Christmas Carol, the work from which Dickens himself read in the Central Hall in 1858. The event sold out. St Cuthbert's Church is keen to present more theatre/music events within the Church and the theatre team hope to do so in 2017.
33. Young people from the ArtsSpark Youth Dance Company were invited to perform at a drinks reception hosted by County Durham and Darlington Community Foundation on 1 November at Business Central in Darlington and were awarded a small grant of £200 in appreciation. They also performed at the light switch on in Darlington market place on 24 November.

34. There has been a very positive response to public hard hat tours of the restoration work taking place on the theatre site. There have also been a number of specialist tours organised for groups such as the Rotary Club and The Institute of Builders.

Sports Development

35. **Youth Engagement** - The Move More team continues to successfully engage with the Youth Offending/Anti-Social Behaviour teams. This weekly sessions continue to be extremely popular and an invaluable way to engage with hard to reach children. The session continues to engage over ten children every week in a wide range of sports and physical activity.
36. **Eastbourne Sports Complex** - Since the opening of the new 3G pitch at Eastbourne Sports complex, the new business plan has supported an increase in usage at the site of approximately 30,000 more visits compared to this time in 2015. New activities on site have included Netball, Couch 2 5k Running programme, Junior Athletics, Dance, Archery, New Outdoor Events. The comprehensive Football programme on the new Artificial Pitch has been a major step forward in partnership with Middleton Rangers, Darlington FC and Martin Gray Football Academy – the facility is being used at 85 per cent capacity at present by clubs and community groups.

Libraries

37. Half-term fun at Darlington Libraries included a theatre performance of 'Hey Presto!' by New Writing North, a Halloween film and craft event and spooky storytelling and crafts.
38. As part of the Northern Children's book Festival, local author Niel Bushnell visited Crown Street Library and ran sessions for children from four different schools.
39. **Food Banks** - Bookstart in Darlington partnered with the food banks to ensure that every child was able to open an advent calendar this year, even those who couldn't afford to buy one. The calendars, gifted by Booktrust, were made freely available for families to pick up from Crown Street Library or one of the food banks in Darlington.
40. **Author Visit** - On 19 December, Gervais Phinn, a very popular speaker, visited Crown Street Library. Gervais signed copies of his new book 'Secrets at the little village school'. All tickets sold out.

Centre for Local Studies

41. The Centre for Local Studies remembered the Darlington men who fought and died during World War 1 with the display of the knitted and named poppies. This display was supported by two talks from local historians, both of which were well attended and built on the understanding of the impact of the conflict on Darlington as a town.

Creative Darlington

42. Creative Darlington commissioned the development of a funding proposal to support a programme of theatre transition activity in 2016. The programme aims to gather audience data, encourage joint working and build Darlington's reputation as a great theatre town, whilst the construction of The Hullabaloo and the restoration of the Civic Hippodrome are underway. The transition proposal involves Theatre Hullabaloo, The Civic/Hippodrome, the Jabberwocky Market and OddManOut and national organisations and partners, including Audience Agency. The Darlington Borough Council proposal received a grant offer of £65,000 from Arts Council England through its Grants for the arts (Lottery) programme in December 2016, which has been accepted, and activity will begin in Spring 2017. The programme will be supported by the Civic/Hippodrome team and Council events service, and by the events budget and strategic arts budget.
43. The Tees Valley combined authority is expected to submit a proposal to the Great Places programme which, if successful, will support engagement with local heritage and culture and review the Settlement concept, working with Tees Valley based national portfolio organisations, local authorities and other agencies. The Great Places programme is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England. A Tees Valley proposal is expected to be submitted this month with a result anticipated by April 2017.
44. Creative Darlington supported residency involving artist Norma Kyle and photographer Shelly Newnham in the indoor market from Summer 2015 to Autumn 2016, capturing a period in the life of the indoor market and celebrating the businesses who got involved. The residency has generated two exhibitions, one currently on display within the indoor market and one on display in Darlington Town Hall exhibition space and has also generated an original website <http://www.themarketrevisited.com>
45. Creative Darlington has worked with Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College art and design foundation students to explore the indoor market and the market concept and to encourage further engagement. Approximately fifty students have proposed ideas to date, which will form part of their portfolio of work.
46. We expect to support a small number of the ideas presented to date, which will be shared within the indoor market and through other networks, in Spring 2017.

Head of Steam

47. The Culture Bridge North East Continuing Professional Development events have concerned how work is assessed in Early Years and Primary education, and the demonstrable difference museums can make to children's attainment, as well as a day on the impact cultural institutions can have on children and young people's wellbeing. We are working with Abbey Federation of Schools to show how the Arts Councils seven quality principles can be applied to the learning that schools and museums provide.

48. The Making a Mark Project in which Museum and Schools in the Tees Valley work together to inspire, support and enhance children's' learning has been extended for another year by the DfE and Arts Council England. This means another year of funding which is allowing us to develop new workshops and resources for our schools. The project has been measuring the quality and impact of the work that has been done and teachers have been very positive about the difference that Museum learning had on the attainment of their children.
49. **Volunteers** - Two of the volunteers at the museum won Highly Commended in the Audience Engagement category at the North East Museum Volunteer Awards in November.
50. **Collections and Exhibitions** - The Museum is developing a bid for funding from the Esmee Fairbairn Collections Fund to develop a project to showcase the Stockton and Darlington Railway collections in the Tees Valley for the run up to 2025. This will involve working collaboratively with partners such as Stockton Borough Council and the National Railway Museum.

Darlington Christmas Light Switch on

51. Each year the lights switch on proves to be the best one to date with an estimated 8000+ people attending the event this year. Sponsorship was secured through Darlington Feethams development which helped significantly with the delivery of the event.
52. Media partner, TFM's breakfast show presenters Steve & Karen returned to host the event for a fourth consecutive year. The evening was topped off with a fantastic mini fireworks display. The lights switch on coincided with the start of late night shopping and a Festive Market; which proved to be our most successful market to date receiving a vast amount of positive feedback from members of the public.

Street Scene

53. Members will be aware that from 1 October Street Scene, which is now predominantly street cleansing services, have experienced a 40 per cent reduction in resources. As a result, street cleansing schedules and litter bin servicing schedules have been amended to recognise the reduced level of resources. Every effort will be made to ensure that the Borough is kept in as clean and tidy condition as possible and should the service schedules require amending then this will be done accordingly.

Grounds Maintenance

54. The winter programme of pruning shrubs and bushes around the Borough is on target to be completed on time. During the 2017 growing season reductions in resource will result in the time taken to complete the cycle increasing and therefore less grass cutting being undertaken across the town.

Countryside

55. Members will also be aware that significant cuts were undertaken in the Countryside team. It is hoped that via a restructure the majority of elements of the Countryside role will continue to be provided for, with the majority of work taking place on the transfer of public open spaces to community groups.

Environmental Crime

56. Once more Members will be aware that there was a reduction in the resource allocated to Environmental Crime. The two officers concentrating on Environmental Crime will focus on fly tips, abandoned vehicles and issues within rear lanes.

Community Involvement

57. Members will be aware that as cuts are experienced by the Council more emphasis will be placed upon community involvement to help keep the Borough clean and tidy. The Council has written to all Street Champions asking their current status and enquiring as to their willingness to share details etc. Further, we are liaising with Friends Groups and other groups about the potential transfer of assets, with groups facilitating the maintenance of assets and not the Council, therefore reducing demand on already stretched resources.

Probation Service

58. The Council is working with the Probation Service and arrangements are in place for regular maintenance of areas across the Borough. One such location is the Denes, where the Probation Service is to go through undertaking all aspects of environmental work. Further, repairs are being made to boardwalks within Maidendale Nature Reserve and South Park by the Probation Service and it is envisaged that this partnership will continue to be fruitful in the forthcoming months and years.

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