
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.

Local Plan Progress

2. Master Plan Inception Meetings have been held and negotiations are advancing for Skerningham and Greater Faverdale areas. Master Plan Groups have been asked to report back on project plans and provide engagement strategies at the earliest opportunity.
3. Local Plan Theme Groups have been established focusing on key issues like housing, employment, education, heritage, green infrastructure, climate change, plan viability and delivery. These Groups have lead officers designated within the Council to develop the robust evidence required to support a local plan. Each Group lead has produced a quad of aims setting out the membership and outputs required which will in turn be developed into detailed terms of reference.
4. Meetings have been held with developers and landowners who are promoting further development at Middleton St George. They have agreed to the principle of working collaboratively to produce a co-ordinated plan for the village and to engage with the local community on this. The next step will be a workshop with developers/landowners/Parish/Ward Members on the best way to progress collaborative working.
5. An application has been made to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) for resources to unblock strategic housing sites.

Planning White Paper

6. A key risk to the local plan timetable is the publication of the planning White Paper 'Fixing our broken housing market' published on 7 February.
7. The key risks for the Local Plan timetable are proposed changes to the way housing need is calculated and to the S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy.
8. The White Paper stresses that growth and delivery of housing remains key as does the need to provide an up to date plan.
9. There is more pressure on house builders to deliver new houses and an acknowledgment that more needs to be done to encourage smaller builders back into the market. It is proposed that local plans may be required to provide a

percentage of small sites.

10. There is a potential for combined authorities to designate strategic development sites.
11. Local Plans should be reviewed at least every five years, as opposed to at least every ten years which was the previous suggestion.
12. The introduction of 'housing delivery tests' are also proposed.
13. It is proposed to amend the National Planning Policy Framework to encourage Local Planning Authorities to consider the social and economic benefits of housing estate regeneration and also to identify opportunities for villages to thrive.
14. There are new proposals to require authorities to develop policies to cover issues like housing densities (to avoid low density development) and digital infrastructure.
15. There is an expectation on developers that all developments of ten or more units should have at least ten per cent affordable housing provision. This is lower than our current requirement of 20 per cent on most sites but higher than we are often able to achieve when viability considerations are applied.
16. If planning authorities are under performing in terms of delivery they will be required to produce action plans to address the under delivery.
17. It should be noted that the content of the White Paper is wide reaching and there are other implications in terms of housing, planning fees and access to information.

Experience Darlington

18. Consultations and engagement on the Council's draft visitor economy strategy, Experience Darlington, has commenced in earnest and the general public feedback is to conclude on 13 April. It is anticipated that Cabinet will consider the outcome of the consultations and refreshed visitor strategy at its June meeting.

Darlington Town Centre – Business Improvement District (BID) 2017-2022

19. Whilst Cabinet supported the private sector led proposal to continue with a Business Improvement District (BID) for five years for Darlington Town Centre, this has not been supported by the majority of Town Centre businesses. Of the 253 votes cast, 126 were in favour and 127 against. This is a disappointing result but we must remain confident about the future of the Town Centre as an attractive place to visit with a wide range of shopping and leisure facilities. We will continue to seek to build upon the significant investment in the Town Centre and also to continue to engage and work with Town Centre Traders.
20. The continued attractiveness, vitality and vibrancy of the Town Centre is important in Darlington's future as a place where people choose to live, work and do business and will remain a high priority for the Council and its partners.

Town Centre Conference

21. The Town Centre Conference was held on 21 March and explored the future of the Town Centre through the lenses of a post-BID decision, digital high street opportunity, visitor economy and planning policy for the future.

Economy Team

Digital High Street

22. Teesside University (through its Digital City programme) delivered a three month 'pop-up shop' at Unit 26, The Cornmill Centre from 15 February offering the following support for High Street Businesses and Darlington residents.
- (a) Innovation Programme: two days of support to help businesses adopt digital technology (from improving online presence to implementing digital into processes);
 - (b) Digital Skills Workshops: Running an array of digital skills workshops; and
 - (c) Surgery Days: Holding weekly business drop-in sessions. This could be to discuss specific issues or accessing the wider support programme.

Foundation for Jobs (F4J)

23. A joint application between this Council and Redcar and Cleveland Council, supported by Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) has been submitted to The Careers and Enterprise Company to support the continuation of the Foundation for Jobs programme.
24. The programme has been shortlisted for final consideration and a decision is to be announced on 31 March.
25. A strategic review of the F4J's programme is being undertaken that will acknowledge changes in funding, emergence of new National and TVCA programmes and economic priorities.
26. Recent event delivery:
- (a) 6 – 10 February – Subsea Engineering Event
School practical activity involving construction of mini subsea robots;
 - (b) 1 March – Build Your Own Hovercraft
Participant groups built their own hovercraft; and
 - (c) 9 March – World of Work Day
Tackling multi-generational worklessness
Red Hall Primary pupils were introduced to a range of job roles through

practical activity.

Service Developments

27. Changes to the service delivery model of the Economy Team are continuing to take shape with an overhaul of process and a code of service to be introduced. This also includes a marketing review and rationalisation of in-house websites and social media platforms.
28. Team focus will continue on aspects of quality lead generation, from high growth and priority sector business sectors to foster long term business relationships with the town's most strategically important employers.
29. This focus is required in order to generate highest level of impact in relation to new investment projects to support business rate growth and job creation.
30. The Team continues to work on lead generation for Inward Investment activity and is currently pursuing two enquiries from Foreign Direct Investment companies. Plans to attend a range of outward facing business development activity at large scale conferences and events are planned for 2017. The first event is attending Multimodal at the Birmingham NEC on 4 April in collaboration with TVCA. The Economy Team is hoping to run a jobs fair on 30 March between 9am and 4pm at the Dolphin Centre.

Recruitment Fair

31. The aim of the event will be to bring together key intermediaries from Job Centre Plus, Department for Work and Pensions and Citizens Advice Centre, as well as local businesses with actual vacancies or upcoming vacancies, to have a one stop shop for employment and job support. The event will be free for businesses to take a stand and we are happy to work with businesses to organise.
32. The proposed 2017 jobs fair follows on from a similar hugely successful event we held in January 2016. In total the 2016 event supported:
 - (a) 1,700 residents attended;
 - (b) 15 businesses had a stand recruiting for over 700 actual vacancies, 500 of these being solely in Darlington; and
 - (c) The event also had nine support organisations in attendance offering advice on a range of things such as CV writing to self-employment.

Local Government Chronicle Awards

33. I am delighted to report that the Council won the national LGC prize for the Best Performing Council in Driving Economic Growth in 2017. This award acknowledges the strength across the Council in all its departments in driving economic growth and acknowledges the strong partnerships in place with the private sector that have delivered initiatives such as Foundation for Jobs,

Darlington Cares and Darlington a Most Ingenious Town.

34. The award also acknowledges the Council's progress in economic growth since 2012 when over 100 businesses contributed to the drafting of the Economic Strategy and how these actions have delivered year on year improvements against all measures.
35. What is particularly compelling is Darlington has won this award against stiff competition from cities such as Newcastle, Southampton, Leicester, Burnley and London Boroughs.

Development Management

36. A significant planning application for housing has now received planning permission for up to 100 houses to the North of Hurworth, following extensive consultation and debate at Planning Applications Committee. Applications for the former Lancaster House and Durham Tees Valley Airport (DTVA) are currently being considered.
37. 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 application, however, this has been refused and Planning Permission has now been granted.
38. Planning permission for 27 houses, including affordable homes, has been granted at Middleton St George subject to completion of a S106 Agreement.
39. Planning Permission for two supermarkets has also been granted at Faverdale (Aldi and Marks and Spencer). It is anticipated that work will commence on site towards the end of the year. Two car show rooms at the former Torrington's site on Yarm Road are also under consideration.
40. Significant progress has been made in upgrading the ICT systems that support the planning service and Uniform Version 10 went live at the end of February. This will significantly improve the efficiency of the service and performance management. The next phase is to develop the Public Access features that will realise significant benefits for the public and Members. It is anticipated this will be complete by the Summer and a demonstration will be organised for Members in due course.

Environmental Health

Darlington Restaurants Top in the Country for Five Per Cent Hygiene Ratings

41. A new study has revealed that food hygiene standards at restaurants and cafes in Darlington are among the highest in the Country. Out of a total of 360 council areas in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Darlington has the highest percentage of eateries with top marks. The study carried out by LoveMyVouchers.co.uk did not include takeaways.

42. When restaurants rated both good (4) and very good (5) are taken into consideration, Darlington comes second in the Country, behind South Derbyshire. The Food Standards Agency website holds the data from inspections carried out by each local authority under the Food Hygiene Ratings Scheme. Every business that serves food is awarded with a hygiene rating between zero and five under the scheme. Of the 161 restaurants and cafes in Darlington, the percentage with the top rating is 94 per cent and a staggering 99 per cent have a rating of four or above. There are no restaurant premises with a zero or one rating.
43. Food establishments are obliged to clearly display the rating that they are given by the local authority under the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. More and more people are paying attention to this scoring system and the rating received by a business can be pivotal to its success.

Trading Standards – Bird Flu

44. An England-wide Avian Influenza Prevention Zone has been in place since 6 December 2016 and was extended until 28 February 2017 to help protect poultry and captive birds from avian flu. The zone requires keepers of poultry and other captive birds to keep their birds indoors or introduce practical measures to keep them separated from wild birds.
45. Trading Standards' Animal Health staff took immediate steps to raise awareness of the zone with local keepers, through the use of visits and social media, and offered appropriate biosecurity advice. This included making sure that feed and water cannot be accessed by wild birds, taking reasonable precautions to avoid the transfer of contamination and reducing the movement of people, vehicles or equipment to and from areas where poultry or captive birds are kept.

Investment and Funding Team

46. The team co-ordinated the bid to the Careers and Enterprise Company to support ongoing delivery of Foundation for Jobs. The bid has been shortlisted and we have been advised a decision will be made sometime in March 2017.
47. The team awaits the outcome of a £250,000 bid to the Estates Regeneration Funding to support regeneration of Red Hall Estate.
48. The Council has secured £110,000 from One Public Estate towards feasibility work on the Town Centre Fringe.

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Economy and Regeneration Portfolio