
OVERVIEW OF LEISURE AND LOCAL ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO

Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio.

Schemes of Work

1. Highways maintenance schemes due to start:
 - (a) Park Lane East Back – Resurfacing
 - (b) Bates Avenue Phase 1 – Footpath renewal

Central Park South Junction, Link Road and Car Park

2. Work has started on the final section of the link road after acquisition and demolition of buildings. The works are programmed to be completed by the end of June 2017. The traffic signal controlled junction can then become fully operational. This will enable further development of the research and development and educational facilities. These are likely to include the Factories for the Future and National Horizons developments.
3. A 160 space car park is being constructed by the Council which is funded by businesses for their employees. This should be completed by the end of June 2017.

A68 Rotary Way Improvement Scheme

4. The Council was successful in a bid for £1.01M funding from Highways England (HE) to provide a third lane approach to the Rotary Way/A68 roundabout. Design work is currently ongoing and orders have been placed for service diversions. Some road works will commence in March/April and will include construction of central reserve gaps to accommodate a contraflow traffic system and service diversions. The main construction phase will start in June and will be complete by the end of November 2017.

Parkgate Improvement Scheme

5. This scheme aims to improve the walking and cycling route between the Inner Ring Road and Darlington Station. Work on the footway alongside Parkgate has been completed and work is underway on a new cycling link between the toucan crossing on St Cuthbert's (opposite the Feethams leisure development) to Park Place. The scheme is funded from the Tees Valley Combined Authority Local

Growth Fund (Sustainable Access to Employment programme) and the Local Transport Plan.

Feethams Improvement Scheme

6. The Feethams improvement scheme is now complete. This was jointly funded from the Local Growth Fund (LGF) and Local Transport Plan (LTP). The works were delivered over a series of phases which included implementation of the one-way system for the multi-storey car park, provision of level access routes from the car park into the town centre, provision of a loading bay on Houndgate and general improvements to the footways in the area to match the new footways implemented as part of the development at Feethams.

John Street Cycleway

7. This cycle way is the final link in the cycle route between the town centre and Harrowgate Hill (and beyond to Newton Aycliffe) as well as continuing along the River Skerne to Rockwell Nature Reserve. The route alongside the river is substantially complete. A licence agreement with Network Rail was signed on 1 February 2017 which has enabled the work to continue through the pedestrian arch of the Skerne Bridge. Work continues on the link between the river and Northgate, implementing a remediation strategy to deal with the contaminated land in this area. The route re-joins the carriageway at John Street before using Valley Street as the route to the toucan crossing on the Inner Ring Road. A traffic calming scheme is also being completed on this stretch of John Street to reduce traffic speed. It is hoped to open the route by June 2017.

Transport Policy

8. Following agreement at Cabinet earlier this month, consultation has started on the framework for the next Local Transport Plan (LTP) for Darlington. The current plan (LTP3) covers the period 2011-2026. However there have been considerable changes since LTP3 was written :
 - (a) the establishment of the Tees Valley Combined Authority and new governance and funding mechanisms for transport;
 - (b) changes to the emerging Local Plan (land use planning until 2036) and a greater focus on growth and expansion in terms of job creation and house building, and the resultant anticipated increases in travel and traffic; and
 - (c) changes in public transport, including new rail franchises and the forthcoming Local Buses Bill.
9. It is proposed that the new LTP4 will cover the period until 2036 in line with Darlington's Local Plan and will incorporate the Tees Valley priorities outlined in the framework for the Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan. The consultation is focusing on the key measures to achieve the following outcomes:
 - (a) Assist economic growth – by opening up new development sites for employment and housing; by providing better access to jobs and a larger pool

- of labour for employers through better transport connections; and by providing attractive alternatives to car use that reduce congestion.;
- (b) Create opportunity – by helping people (whether or not they have access to a car) to access employment or training places both in the Borough and across the wider region;
 - (c) Monitor the impact of traffic and seek to improve air quality – by reducing car journeys through encouraging the use of public transport, walking and cycling; and encouraging the use of lower emission vehicles; and
 - (d) Improve public health – by encouraging healthy, active travel; and by maintaining a good road safety record through engineering, education, encouragement and enforcement.
10. In line with the adopted Parking Strategy a contract will be awarded by the end of March to provide new Pay and Display machines in the Council's car parks. The new machines will accept payments by credit and debit cards and will accept the new £1 coins (in circulation from 28 March). The machines are solar powered with a back-up mains supply to minimise operational costs. Until the new machines are in place the existing £1 coin will still be in circulation and customers will be advised to use these coins or pay by phone.

Public Transport

11. Arriva has started to roll out 'contactless payment' on its services operating in Darlington following a successful pilot on service X5 in Middlesbrough in January. Any ticket can be purchased up to the value of £15, which will increase to £30 once the system is fully operational. This has benefits for passengers, many of whom use this type of payment method for low value purchases and negates the requirement for carrying cash. It benefits the bus operator as passengers can board more quickly. M-tickets bought by mobile phone are also becoming more popular but cash will still be accepted as a means of payment.

Sustainable Travel

12. The Tees Valley Combined Authority has been successful in a £3.322m bid to the Department for Transport's Access Fund. The three year programme will enable the five local authorities to continue the delivery of its successful sustainable travel to employment initiatives and this will expand to include a Wheels To Work Scheme, providing bikes or mopeds to job seekers in areas where there is no or limited public transport. In addition there will be a new focus on travel to school, with links to existing road safety initiatives and a focus on pedestrian and cycle training. For Darlington this enables the successful marketing and Personalised Travel Planning programmes that are delivered across the Tees valley to continue. There will be ongoing support for active travel in the Borough and the introduction of Independent Travel Training to support more young people to travel sustainably.
13. Virgin Trains has installed new cycle parking at the Victoria Road entrance to Darlington Station following feedback as part of the development of the Station Travel Plan. This has also improved access to the existing motorcycle parking.

14. The Personalised Travel Planning programme has been completed in Middlesbrough and the team of Travel Advisors are now working in Darlington until the end of March. Their work will include:
- (a) visiting 3090 households within a one mile walking distance of Darlington Station to provide one to one advice and information on travel options in and to/from Darlington;
 - (b) 8000 households within one mile of the Station will receive a 'Rediscover Rail' booklet;
 - (c) training of Jobcentre staff, looking at transport barriers/travel planning and providing travel planning to jobseekers;
 - (d) training of Learning and Skills Tutors, looking at transport barriers/travel planning for young people accessing education, training and employment;
 - (e) a walking challenge for staff at Memorial Hospital, following similar challenges at Capita and Student Loans Company;
 - (f) onward travel training sessions for Virgin East Coast staff; and
 - (g) attending a Healthy New Towns event at Red Hall.

Proposed Waiting Restrictions Hirst Grove – Objection

15. A request had been received from a resident of Hirst Grove to introduce waiting restrictions at the junction of Hirst Grove and Harris Street to improve road safety.
16. A subsequent objection had been received to the proposal from a resident of Hirst Grove who considered that the proposed restrictions would merely move cars further into Hirst Grove and these drivers may park on the verges causing damage.
17. We have given consideration to this objection and agreed to set it aside and authorise officers to proceed with the proposal as originally planned.

The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts Operation from 2017/18

18. Representatives from The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts attended Cabinet and outlined the Business Plan for the future operation of the Centre beyond 2016/17 and highlighted the work of the organisation.
19. We agreed that The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts organisation has generated a business case which indicates its capacity to operate the building without a requirement for ongoing support from the Council while recognising gaps in organisational and capacity as a risk.
20. Therefore, we have granted a 25 year lease with The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts organisation, to operate a multi-purpose visual arts service, with the first five years on a peppercorn rent and with annual break clauses written into the arrangement.
21. In the event of funding becoming available to support a longer term future for the Centre, the option of a 99 year lease or disposal, be volunteered and progressed.

22. The responsibility for exterior maintenance and repairs of the building will be retained by the Council and The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts organisation to accept responsibility for interior repairs and maintenance of the building, supplies and services to the building and statutory checks.
23. A subsidiary agreement, covering key Council assets held at The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts building (a kiln and a printing press), for this five year period, was also agreed.

Eastbourne Pre-School New Education Facility

24. Eastbourne Pre-school's capital project, which was part of Darlington Local Authority's submission to the Department for Education's 30 Hours Free Childcare Capital Bidding Round, has been successful and the Department for Education has approved a capital award of £30,000. The works will include renovating the changing space on site at Eastbourne Sports Complex, with work having commenced in February for a May start date. This is a superb addition to the site and will mean the pre-school can offer further high quality education placements for the local community.

Active Darlington Project – Final Figures and Extension Funding

25. Over past three years 3197 Darlington residents have been engaged in the Active Darlington project with a throughput of 23,000 visits and activities being delivered across the town. Post code mapping throughout the three years has changed the way we approach different demographics of potential new participants and customers. Sport England has been delighted with the project and invited a submission for a further years funding of £40,000; this decision is due to be finalised imminently.

Middlesbrough Football Club (MFC) Foundation Building Better Opportunities

26. Newly launched and targeting people aged 29+ who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). This allows free access to the new 3G pitch at Eastbourne with a member of staff from MFC Foundation and aims to encourage people back into employment, education or training through use of a navigator.

Sportivate Funding Bids

27. Successful bids for over three different activities and over £4000 of funding towards setting up these activities. This money enabled over 100 people to access Archery, Tennis and Back to Netball.

Events

28. The Sherwoods Vauxhall 10K, held on 11 March with activities in Joseph Pease Place, marked the 30th anniversary of the Darlington 10k, which will take place on 13 August 2017. The event will include the family fun run and junior 3k race.

29. The second Mayor's Darlington Schools Eurovision Song Contest took place on 10 February 2017 in the Dolphin Centre, following the tremendous success of last year's event which was launched by former Mayor, Councillor Tom Nutt, and held in the Civic Theatre.
30. 21 school choirs participated to help raise money for the Mayor's chosen charities, and St Augustine's RC Primary School, were the winners with St Mary's CE Primary School and St Bede's RC Primary School runners up.

Civic Theatre Hard Hat Tours

31. 160 people have attended hard hat tours since construction began on the Theatre site in June 2016. This included young people, school groups and looked after young people and their families. Feedback has been excellent with participants praising the tour guides (Theatre staff and the Construction Manager from Wilmott Dixon). The site has been nominated to take part in the Open doors Event, which is an event for anybody that is interested in construction, particularly school leavers. This is an opportunity for them to discover the trades and skills that are involved within the project and be given advice on various routes into construction careers. A programme of taster sessions and master classes is also being planned for people to experience and try out heritage skills.

A Christmas Carol

32. A production of Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol by Chris Connaughton was staged by the Theatre in St Cuthbert's Church, Darlington in December 2016. It was attended by 164 people and it raised £1,565 for the Theatre restoration fund. It was the final event in the Dickens in Darlington season which was created by the Theatre to retain and develop audiences for when the Theatre reopens. During the season:
- (a) A community cast of 30 people worked with a professional production team for three months to create a production of Charles Dickens' 'A Tale of Two Cities' in the Central Hall, Darlington.
 - (b) 23 people volunteered to create the costumes for the production.
 - (c) Nine students from Cleveland College of Art and Design, BA Production Design for Stage and Screen course, volunteered to help create the set for the production.
 - (d) Volunteers from Darlington for Culture helped to promote the production and 12 volunteers acted as stewards for the performances.
 - (e) There were four performances and a total of 600 people saw the show.
 - (f) In addition 188 people attended the workshops and talks.

- (g) Approximately 3,500 people attended the 'Dickens in Darlington' exhibition in Crown Street Gallery.

Darlington Culture Volunteers

33. At the Volunteer Fair on 2 February 2017 a new cultural volunteering scheme was launched which is a partnership between the Theatre and Darlington for Culture. The aim of the scheme is to recruit a group of volunteers who can support arts and cultural events in the community and also carry out new volunteer roles within the Theatre when it reopens; such as helping to create an archive for the Theatre and to digitise it. Once the Theatre reopens the new scheme will be based within the Theatre.

Head of Steam

34. Within the context of Experience Darlington work the Council is commissioning the development of a Business Case for improving the heritage offer in and around the complex of buildings and land at North Road. This work is being supported by the Tees Valley Combined Authority. It is anticipated that this will inform any action plan underpinning the wider tourism/visitor strategy.

2025

35. I have hosted meetings between my portfolio equivalents at Durham County Council and Stockton Borough Council together with senior officers to develop a collaborative approach to a 2025 celebration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of the modern railways. Officers will report to Cabinet when proposals and resource implications become clearer across the three Councils.

Schools

36. The Museum has been partnered with the Federation of Abbey Schools in Darlington (facilitated via Culture Bridge North East). This will embrace the Arts Council's Quality Principles and will include using loan boxes, outreach sessions and engagement in the Arts Awards Discover Project.
37. The Museum Manager has agreed with Peter King (Headteacher of Mowden Junior School) to use Piercebridge Roman Fort for school workshops, either at the Fort or in school. This is part of the River Tees Rediscovered Project. We also consulted with him regarding possible CPD for teachers at the museum. The aim is for the first session to be held at the end of March 2017.

Exhibitions and Collections

38. The North Road Works Memories exhibition opened on 14 January with a preview attended by the Mayor and former employees of the works. The exhibition is the culmination of a yearlong project and further events are planned for North Road and other railway employees for 2017.

39. The Museum has developed an expression of interest bid for funding from the Esmée 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.
40. The Museum is working with Stockton Borough Council and the Tees Valley Combined Authority to develop a funding bid to the Arts Council; the 'National Portfolio Organisation' bid will be further developed.

Centre for Local Studies

41. Displays in the Centre for Local Studies have engaged a wide audience with 'Flat out to York': a railway display on loan from the North Eastern Railway Association. Also, there is a display on loan from the Durham Amateur Football Trust: a 'Tribute to Mike Amos - Northern League Chairman 1996-2016'. Darlington artist G. A. Fothergill's work was also very popular resulting in full page articles about him, and the large collection of his work held in Local Studies, in The Northern Echo and The Darlington and Stockton Times.
42. Photographs from the Local Studies collection were used by the BBC for the 'Great British Rail Journeys' programme with Michael Portillo and televised in January.

Street Scene

43. As stated in the last report, cuts experienced by Street Scene were implemented in October and as a result the past few months have been tough. Leaves have been a significant issue over the winter period due to the reduced level of resource allocated to remove them from hard standing areas.
44. Also an issue of late, is the condition of rear lanes; these are only being serviced on a fortnightly basis now. The team are aware of the concerns and are attempting continuously to adjust service schedules with the aim of delivering the best levels of cleanliness across the Borough with the significantly reduced resources available.

Waste Services

45. Waste Services continue to operate on an efficient basis and we are conscious that we need to continually push the Waste Minimisation and Recycling Agenda. To this end, the Council is currently running a recycling campaign to remind residents of what can be recycled and how, whilst rewarding those residents who are recycling correctly via a weekly prize. It is hoped the campaign will increase recycling across the Borough.

Grounds Maintenance

46. The winter programme of pruning shrubs, bushes etc. is on course to be completed in time prior to the forthcoming growing season, when new grass cutting schedules are implemented. Members will be aware, that as part of the recent cuts experienced by Environmental Services, grounds maintenance, in particular grass cutting, experienced resource reductions and therefore grass cutting will be undertaken on 25/30 working day programme, as opposed to a 15 working day

programme.

47. As a result of the cuts it was also expected that there would be no floral displays throughout the town. However, the Council, working in collaboration with the BID and businesses, have managed to seek agreement from businesses within the town centre to maintain floral displays and therefore retain as many displays as possible throughout the summer. The Council will plant the displays and businesses will then water and weed the planters to ensure they are in satisfactory condition.

Street Champion Initiative

48. At the time of writing, I have chaired the first meeting of Councillors from those wards where a new Street Champion initiative is being trialled.
49. Each Councillor in the trial is allocated up to 20 litter picking sets initially, to distribute to individuals or groups within their wards who are prepared to become Street Champions, and undertake at least one litter pick a month on average.
50. Anecdotally, good progress is being made in a number of Wards, and I will update Members verbally at Council.

Countryside

51. Officers are currently working with various groups on the transfer of a number of nature reserves to ensure public open spaces are still maintained to a high standard, whilst still allowing access to the general public.

Community Involvement

52. Further to the above, I am working with a group of Members on a trial scheme in selected Wards across the Borough where Members are given a 'Members' Pack' advising on ways to work with the community in regards to litter picking, maintenance of open space and issues in rear lanes. Should the trial be successful, then it is intended all Members will receive the pack and work with the community in their wards to enhance the aesthetics of the area.

Probation Service

53. The Council is seeking closer links with the Probation Service. As a result, work has been undertaken in Maidendale Nature Reserve and The Denes by the service. Work in The Denes in particular will be undertaken on a regular basis, where members of the Probation team will litter pick, undertake grounds maintenance activities and also minor repairs.

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