
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.

Central Park South Junction, Link Road and Car Park

2. 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 create the highway infrastructure required to enable the commercial sector of Central Park to be delivered. Two premises are already in operation – Business Central and the National Biologics Centre. Two further developments are in the pipeline – National Horizons Centre and the Healthcare Futures Centre.

A68 Rotary Way Improvement Scheme

3. Works are programmed to commence on the main section of this scheme in June 2017 with a completion date towards the end of November 2017. The scheme involves the widening of the dual carriageway approach to the roundabout to accommodate a third lane. The circulatory lane of the roundabout will also be widened. The works are funded as a result of a successful bid of £1.01m to Highways England.
4. This forms part of a package of works to increase capacity on the A68 in order to accommodate the additional development trips from the proposed extension to the West Park Garden Village and Commercial development at Faverdale. The further works include a link road from Edward Pease Way to Newton Lane and improvements to Cockerton roundabout and Woodlands Road roundabout.

John Street Cycleway

5. John Street Cycleway is now substantially complete. This cycleway 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. It opens up an important national and international asset in the form of the '£5 note bridge' and much improves what was a previously misused former industrial area.

Parkgate Improvement Scheme

6. This scheme was funded through a mixture of Tees Valley Combined Authority Local Growth Fund and Local Transport Plan funding. The works on Parkgate are now complete. A second phase to provide an improved cycleway/footway linking Parkgate to the Feethams Leisure development is due to commence in the summer.

Schemes of work

7. Highway maintenance scheme recently completed:
Park Lane East Back – Resurfacing
8. Highway maintenance scheme currently ongoing:
Bates Avenue Phase 1 – Footpath renewal

Public Transport

9. From May Arriva are be offering a £1 anywhere in Darlington Town Zone single evening are to try and encourage more people to make use of evening bus services. We are working with Arriva and leisure/restaurant operators in the Feetham's development to promote this via a direct mailer to households living along routes that have evening bus services. We are funding this through the transition year sustainable transport fund. Vue cinema, Chinese Buffet, Bella Italia and Mangobean are participating and providing special offers. Arriva will trial the £1 evening fare until July and then assess its impact on revenue and ridership.
10. The results of the Autumn 2016 bus passenger survey undertaken by Transport Focus across England were published in March. For Tees Valley overall satisfaction with bus services improved to 91 per cent which is higher than the national average of 87 per cent and is 5 per cent higher than 2011 when the survey was first carried out, having shown consistent year on year improvement. Satisfaction with punctuality and journey time fell slightly to 78 per cent and 87 per cent respectively; this is broadly in line with falls seen at the national level. However satisfaction with Value for Money increased to 67 per cent from 64 per cent.
11. On these three main indicators satisfaction in Tees Valley was above the national average. Tees Valleys results for the main indicators are broadly comparable with our near neighbours County Durham and Tyne and Wear, this is not unsurprising given we have the same operators, however there is a significant divergence in satisfaction with value for money, which is 67 per cent in Tees Valley, but significantly higher at 74 per cent in Tyne and Wear and significantly lower at 58 per cent in County Durham. This is possibly because of the wider availability of comprehensive multi-operator and multi-modal tickets in Tyne and Wear, while the low figure in County Durham could be attributed to generally longer and consequently more expensive journeys given the more rural nature of the County and a near complete absence lack of multi-operator/multi-modal tickets.

12. With the passing of the Bus Services Bill the Combined Authority is reviewing bus policy alongside its general review of wider transport strategy. Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council is leading on this work stream. While work is still underway, it is likely that the review will recommend Tees Valley formally adopt a bus strategy which will set out what the area wants from its local bus network and provide a strategic vision. The development of this bus strategy will include a Tees Valley Bus Summit, which will offer key stakeholders the opportunity to discuss aspirations for local bus services with the areas main operators. It will help inform the development of a bus strategy against which the Combined Authority will then be able to assess which delivery mechanism in the new Bus Services Act is most likely to deliver the strategic vision.

Sustainable Transport

13. The Personalised Travel Planning project (PTP) finished in Darlington on 31 March. During this time we targeted households within one mile walking distance of Darlington Station and residents received tailored advice on the doorstep. Over a hundred jobseekers were engaged at JobCentre Plus enabling them to look at various employment sites that are accessible by bus, train, cycle or walking. Results of engagement are currently being monitored. Staff engagement at local employers such as Capita, Memorial Hospital and Student Loans Company saw an impressive 70 million steps logged, increasing the health and wellbeing of employees.
14. As part of the Access Fund, PTP will continue in Darlington until early June. During this time we will be focusing our residential engagement North of North Road Station where we will be promoting John Street Cycle Path, alongside travel planning advice. We will continue our jobcentre work and will be expanding to Youth Employment Initiative projects in the area. We have already signed EE up to a workplace step challenge and will be targeting 1700 staff at its premises off Yarm Road.
15. The sustainable transport team has been working with Groundwork and Walking for Health to deliver a programme of volunteer walk leader training in Darlington. A total of 17 people have undergone training to be able to lead free, regular walks throughout the Borough, ranging from ten to 90 minutes in length and accessible to all levels of fitness and experience. The training will be completed by the end of April and new walks will be advertised via the Walking for Health website in early Summer.

Community Sport Activation Fund Project

16. An application for extension funding for the Active Darlington project of £38.713 has been successful. This will enable the Move More Team to deliver another year of activities carrying on our past three years of success in delivering sessions for people coming back to sport and for families.

Sportivate

17. The Move More Team received confirmation that it has been successful in obtaining a grant of £3,251 to deliver 14 blocks of sport and physical activity to young people aged 11-25. The programme- commenced April 2017 and work up until March 2018.

Civic Theatre Name Change

18. From April 2017, to mark the dawn of a new era for the Theatre, there has been a return to a derivative of the Theatre's original name which was 'The New Hippodrome and Palace Theatre of Varieties'. The new name, 'Darlington Hippodrome' celebrates the rich heritage of the Theatre and alludes to its Edwardian character. New branding for the Theatre reflects the name change and will support the Theatre's ambitious business plan.

New Website and Box Office System

19. A new website for the Hippodrome has been created by the Theatre's team, along with the Council's web team. The new website incorporates the heritage rooted branding with contemporary web features, and will provide comprehensive information with a much better online booking facility.

South Park Play Area

20. The Events team assisted Groundwork in holding two fun filled activity days during the Easter holidays to raise money for the fire damaged play area. Punch and Judy, face painting, footy skills, craft sessions and bird box making workshops were a few of the activities taking place.

Darlington 10K Race

21. Sherwoods has agreed to an additional £500 for the first male and female to break the current course records with the aim to attract more elite athletes and make the 30th anniversary a memorable run.

Tees Valley Great Places

22. Tees Valley Combined Authority has secured £1.5 million as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England Great Place scheme to fund activities which will put arts, culture and heritage at the heart of the community. The Tees Valley is one of only 16 areas chosen to pilot the scheme. Led by Tees Valley Combined Authority, the Great Place - Greater Tees project, will provide funding for a number of arts and cultural organisations across Tees Valley and support popular existing events as well as new initiatives. Activity is expected to begin in 2017/18 and to run over three years. Darlington Borough Council expects to lead on project focused on railway and community heritage and well-being in Darlington.

Head of Steam

23. Following a review of the Museum's Accredited status, considered by an Accreditation panel appointed by Arts Council England on 9 February 2017, the panel agreed to award the Museum the status of 'Full Accreditation'.

Exhibitions and Collections

24. Two new exhibitions have been installed: 'Travels with a Sketchbook' showcases the work of local artist Rita Smith, through mixed media pieces and her original sketchbooks and 'A Return to Ripon' marks the 50th anniversary of the closure of the Harrogate to Northallerton line, in 1967. The exhibition has been curated by the North Eastern Railway Association.

Red Wheel Plaque Unveiling 7 April 2017

25. A plaque was unveiled on 7 April by Lord McAlpine on the carriage works building, which marks the significant role of the carriage works in the history of transport. The Museum supported onsite partners, A1 Steam Locomotive Trust and the North East Locomotive Preservation Group.

Street Champions

26. There are now 55 active Street Champions who are cleaning various areas of the town at least once a month. The work these individuals undertake is fundamental in assisting the Council to keep the Borough clean in light of the significant cuts to the street cleaning service. Members in the Bank Top and Lascelles, Eastbourne, Haughton and Springfield, Heighington and Coniscliffe, Mowden, North Road, and Whinfield Wards, volunteered to be part of the pilot to develop the Street Scene Members Toolkit for Volunteering. Members in these Wards have been extremely active and have developed particular approaches that meet the requirements of their Wards. Following the completion of the pilot later this year, the intention is to roll out this new approach to all Members across the Borough.

Litter Free Durham and Darlington's Big Spring Clean

27. Litter Free Durham and Darlington's Big Spring Clean 2017 ran from 27 February to 16 April. The total rubbish collected this year was 942 bags and approximately 3 tonnes of bulky waste. 1,005 volunteers took part in the event involving various companies, organisations and schools. Ward Members supported the campaign along with Friends and Residents groups. A total of 1539.5 hours of litter picking were carried out.

Durham Tees Valley Community Rehabilitation Company

28. Through the Community Payback Team, a number of sites within the Borough have been improved.

- (a) The Denes – spruce-up over the winter including clearing shrubs, self-seeded trees, brambles and overgrown areas, as well as regular litter picking
- (b) Maidendale Nature Reserve - general clear-up of the site, including litter picking and resurfacing of access roads
- (c) Brinkburn Nature Reserve – general clear-up, the work being undertaken in conjunction with Durham Wildlife Trust and Council staff.
- (d) Allotments - tidying up and making general repairs

Darlington Cares

29. Street Scene Officers continue to work with Darlington Cares where more than 800 hours have been dedicated to environmental activities across Darlington, including areas such as the memorial garden at St Andrew's Church, involved in the Big Spring Clean, restoring the trails at West Park, bulb planting, painting benches and play equipment, general clearance and path edging across various parks and other locations.

Durham Wildlife Trust

30. Officers have been working with Durham Wildlife Trust to transfer management of a number of nature reserves over to its stewardship. The process is nearly complete for The Whinnies, Geneva Wood and the Brinkburn. This will ensure that these sites continue to be managed to a high standard, enhancing the local bio diverse nature of the sites. Officers are also working with other groups and organisations to find similar solutions for other nature reserves across the Borough.

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