
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.

Schemes of Work

2. Highway maintenance schemes due to start:
 - (a) C39 Walworth Road – Walworth Gate to B6279 Staindrop Road: Carriageway hunching and part resurfacing;
 - (b) Tubwell Row/Crown Street Roundabout – carriageway refurbishment; and
 - (c) Carriageway Micro Asphalt Programme – numerous throughout Borough
3. Highway maintenance scheme currently ongoing:

Hollyhurst Road – Woodland Road to Orchard Road – carriageway refurbishment
4. Highway maintenance schemes recently completed:
 - (a) Greenbank Road - Woodland Road to Gladstone Street – carriageway refurbishment;
 - (b) Portland Place and Larchfield Street to Duke Street – carriageway refurbishment;
 - (c) School Summer Holiday schemes – carriageway refurbishment;
 - (d) Inner Ring Road - Northgate Roundabout – carriageway refurbishment;
 - (e) B6275 Piercebridge Phase 1 – through the village – carriageway refurbishment;
 - (f) C46 Houghton Road Phase 2 - McMullen Road to Darlington Eastern Transport Corridor (DETC) – carriageway refurbishment; and
 - (g) A167 Croft Road Phase 6 – carriageway refurbishment.

Town Centre Parking

5. We have started the installation of new parking meters in all Council operated town centre pay and display car parks. They replace older equipment that was becoming unreliable being 15-20 years old. The new equipment offers flexible ways of payment and provides information on levels of usage. The majority of the machines are solar powered with mains powered machines in the busier car parks such as Commercial Street and East Street where solar is not an option. They

should be fully installed by November 2017.

A68 Rotary Way Improvement Scheme

6. Works are progressing well on this scheme which was programmed for completion towards the end of November 2017. It is now anticipated that it will be complete earlier in that month. The scheme involves the provision of a third lane on the south bound approach of Rotary Way and the widening of the circulatory lane around the roundabout. It is funded from the Highways England Housing and Growth Fund.
7. 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 will include a link road from Edward Pease Way to Newton Lane and improvements to Cockerton roundabout and Woodlands Road roundabout. The net effect of these schemes will be to improve traffic flow in the area in the short to medium term.

John Street Cycleway

8. The John Street Cycleway was officially opened on 27 September by the Mayor. A ribbon cutting ceremony was held underneath the new archway which provides a gateway to the cycle route and the Skerne Bridge heritage area. Two interpretation panels provide visitors with information on the history of the site and the Bridge. The new section of route, which is lit and monitored by CCTV, has been signed as part of the Harrowgate Hill cycle route and connects Harrowgate Hill and also Red Hall and Haughton Green to the Town Centre mainly on off road cycle way. The new route is already well used and, as it becomes more widely known, this should increase. A programme of activities is being planned for the October half term to draw more people to the area and to the Head of Steam Museum.
9. The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership applied for a Transport Trust 'Red Wheel' plaque for Skerne Bridge. These heritage plaques commemorate Britain's rich and globally important legacy in the development of transport and the Transport Trust granted one for this important piece of railway heritage. The Council, as a partner in the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership, has assisted with the installation of the plaque which was unveiled on 27 September. The wording on the plaques reads 'Skerne Bridge, Built 1825 Designed by Ignatius Bonomi for the Stockton and Darlington Railway, The oldest railway bridge in the world still in use as such'.

Sustainable Transport

10. The 2017 'Big Summer' campaign ran for the duration of the six weeks school holidays. As with previous years, the Access Fund funded the campaign aimed to get people out and about over the summer holidays using either active travel or public transport. The campaign used a variety of channels to reach residents including radio, adverts on the sides of buses and digital advertising. Final

webstats for the Big Summer directory are not yet available, but figures obtained close to the mid-point of the campaign were encouraging with over 2,600 visits to the site and almost 9,000 page views. The directory promoted walking and cycling activities as well as special offers for public transport users that were negotiated with local attractions which included the Head of Steam Museum (2 for 1 offer), the National Museum of the Royal Navy and Bowes Museum.

11. Promoting discounted bus tickets to young people was a commitment included in the Tees Valley's successful Access Fund bid. A campaign using a short 20 second cartoon promoted via social media formed the centre piece of this year's campaign. The campaign was launched to coincide with the A level results in August and ran until 20 September during the period that young people made choices about their next steps for learning, training and employment. The cartoon directed young people to a landing page on the Connect Tees Valley website which detailed all the offers available to young people from the two main bus operators in the Tees Valley. College funded special offers were also detailed on the website. It is envisaged that new multi-operator and multi-modal discounted young people's public transport tickets will be developed as part of a reinvigorated partnership with local bus operators as part of the ongoing Bus Network Review project for inclusion in next year's campaign.
12. A planning application has been submitted for a new footway/cycleway bridge over Parkgate to link Central Park to the existing bridge at Darlington Station. The project is to be funded from the Tees Valley Combined Authority's Local Growth Fund Sustainable Access to Employment programme, with a local contribution from the Local Transport Plan. A design and build contract has been awarded to Esh Construction Limited. Subject to planning approval and due diligence the bridge should be constructed and installed by July 2018.

YMCA

13. The Move More Team recently formed a new partnership with the YMCA, which has offered young people the chance to access both the gym and the 3G football pitch at Eastbourne Sports Complex. This project has been possible through the Sportivate and Active Darlington funding pots, which target young people over the age of 14. So far 15 young people have accessed Eastbourne Sports Complex. It is hoped the young people will also be able to access the Dolphin Centre to use the swimming pool.

Pick Pie and a Pint

14. On 14 July I had the pleasure of joining a 'Pick Pie and a Pint (or soft drink and something healthy) session arranged by Darlington Cares. Forty volunteers gathered on the Town Square, split into teams and then litter picked across the Town Centre and surrounding areas. This was followed by refreshments in The Hole in the Wall which had been sponsored by Darlington Building Society.
15. These sessions are being held monthly supported by a different private sector sponsor for each. Not only was the event enjoyable but 44 bags of litter were

collected. Having that number of volunteers litter picking at one time made a visible statement which won approving comment from passers-by.

Playmaker Leadership Day

16. The Playmaker Leadership Day was delivered on site at Eastbourne Sports Complex on 13 June 2017, for the third year running, in partnership with School Games. Eighty primary school age pupils, from ten schools, were trained in a series of workshops and rewarded with a nationally recognised leadership award from Sports Leaders UK. The children were then encouraged to apply their newly attained skills in developing sports and other opportunities in their schools. This is the first stage of the wider Leadership Academy running in Darlington via the School Sport Partnership.

Secondary Town Sports

17. On 19 June 2017, Eastbourne Sports Complex hosted the Secondary Town Sports, a fantastic event involving the majority of secondary schools in the Borough. Competitors took part in track and field events, with several records broken on the day. The event is high profile for the schools in the Borough and we hope to welcome the schools back in 2018.

Sheltered Housing Update

18. As well as the physical activities throughout the week, we have provided the residents with different events/activities, including choirs, dance shows, dogs trust visits and beauticians. A total of 306 residents have attended the events.

Darlington Dolphins Small Grants Application

19. The Darlington Move More Team has supported the Darlington Dolphins with a successful £10,000 funding application to the Sport England Small Grants scheme. The newly formed club will use the funding to grow the club and provide more sessions at the Dolphin Centre and Eastbourne Sports Complex.

Eastbourne Sports Complex 3G Pitch

20. The 3G business plan has performed extremely well since its inception in October 2016. During the football season, the pitch has been utilised at 85 per cent capacity.

Darlington Cycle Castle Ride

21. The annual 70 mile cycle ride on 2 July and the 80 mile castle ride on 6 August, saw over 200 cyclists take part across the two rides. All participants took part in preparation for the 100 mile 'Hell of the North' ride which took place on 3 September 2017.

Darlington Sherwoods Vauxhall 30th Anniversary 10K

22. The 30th anniversary of the Darlington 10K saw over 2,200 participants take part in one of the most prestigious and highly regarded 10K events in the North East. Every effort was made to make this year's event a memorable one, by attracting additional prize money from event sponsors Sherwoods, for those attempting to break the male and female course record. The men's course record was successfully broken.
23. The accompanying Fun Run attracted 220 entrants and the Junior 3K 195 entrants, all contributing to the overall electric atmosphere. Hundreds of people lined the streets to watch the event.

Gold Tea Dance

24. The events team supported this year's Tea Dance and Darlington-by-the-Sea, which took place on 18 August.

Darlington Culture Volunteers

25. Darlington Culture Volunteers (DCV), a partnership between Darlington Hippodrome and Darlington for Culture, currently has 60 active volunteers. From its inception in February to end of June 2017, the partnership has provided 851 hours of volunteer time to support arts and theatre activities in Darlington.

School Partnerships

26. The Theatre's Audience Development and Participation Officer supported three Arts Award projects, for a total of 44 young people, 39 students at Explore Level and five students at Bronze. Arts Award provides opportunities for children and young people to develop their skills as young artists/arts leaders. The 39 consist of six from Marchbank Free School and 33 from Springfield Academy.
27. The young people have completed their Arts Award as part of the Theatre's partnership schools scheme, exploring discovery boxes, attending a hard hat tour and learning all about the heritage of Darlington Hippodrome and its founding Managing Director, Signor Pepi.
28. All 39 children will receive a nationally recognised qualification, the Trinity Entry Level Award in the Arts (Entry 3). The five students who have completed their Bronze Award are members of the Theatre's Youth Theatre and they will receive a nationally recognised qualification, the Trinity Level 1 Award in the Arts.

Moving Forward, Looking Back: A History of the Hippodrome

29. A new exhibition is currently on display in Crown Street Art Gallery which explores the design of the Hippodrome, its succession of managers and the impact they and their times have had on the evolution of the Theatre. There are also some images of the restoration as it has taken place on site.

Hippodrome Launch Brochure

30. The first What's On brochure for the Hippodrome was launched in early July with sales opening to the general public on 17 July 2017. The top selling shows at the moment are Snow White, The Play That Goes Wrong and Blood Brothers.

Darlington Theatre Town

31. Cabinet approved the Experience Darlington – A Visitor Economy Strategy on 12 September 2017. This sets out the Borough's ambitions to build on its world class railway heritage, its theatre culture and other assets. The Strategy is supported by key stakeholder organisations and Tees Valley Combined Authority has agreed to allocate resources and play a leading role in the 2025 anniversary celebrations of the 1825 first passenger railway journey and into the regeneration of the North Road area as a Rail Heritage Quarter.
32. On 19 September 2017 the first Railway Heritage 2025 group met to oversee the delivery of the strategy and the projects within its scope. The group has representations from the four local authorities, Network Rail, Northern Rail, A1 Trust, Virgin Trains, Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway and Historic England.
33. The publication of the Strategy marks a watershed not only for the Council's ambitions but the broader community ambitions. It will deliver real benefits for the area in terms of enhanced visitor facilities and experiences, more jobs, increased investment and spending in the area, more footfall to the town centre and enhancing the reputation and perception of Darlington both regionally, nationally and internationally.
34. Darlington Borough Council and Arts Council England are supporting a programme of theatre activity, featuring spectacular free outdoor events, such as 'Micro-Shakespeare': fun, interactive events condensing some of Shakespeare's most popular plays into eight minutes. The project brings together the expertise of partners, Creative Darlington, Darlington Hippodrome, Luxi, Theatre Hullabaloo and ODDMANOUT, to cement Darlington's place as a Theatre Town and a place where theatre thrives.
35. Darlington based Odd Man Out delivered a fantastic 'pay what you decide' Chilli Sauce event, at the Friends Meeting House on 30 June. The event incorporated theatre, song, discussion and kebabs. The Audience Agency also led a training activity at the Dolphin Centre in July 2017.

36. Funded by the Arts Council and Darlington Borough Council, the project grew from the opportunity presented by the redevelopment of the Civic Theatre (opening as Darlington Hippodrome this autumn) and the exciting development of Theatre Hullabaloo's new theatre for young audiences. Momentum around the Theatre has built over the last couple of years, often in unusual places, as a result of events such as the award-winning 'Jabberwocky Market'.

Visual Art

37. A total of 4,402 visits were recorded to the Spring 2017 exhibition by Darlington's Community Arts Project during the period of 21 April to 26 July 2017. The exhibition comprised a selection of new work from the 32 people who currently attend the project, in a range of media from paintings to digital art. The exhibition was extended by popular demand, attracting comments, including: 'Brilliant! I could buy all the pictures' and 'Great exhibition CAP'.

38. The Northern Echo Camera Club exhibition was on show at the Town Hall exhibition space until late August.

39. The Bridge Centre for Visual Arts, now established as a charity, has recently rebranded and held an event on 8 July 2017 to mark its fifth year.

Head of Steam VisitEngland Accreditation

40. The Museum has recently passed its latest VisitEngland accreditation in the Visitor Attraction Quality Scheme, with an improved score enabling it to continue to display the Quality Rose Marque. It scored an impressive 130 marks out of a possible 155, giving a total score of 84 per cent, with staff performance scoring particularly well at 34 out of 35 marks for an almost perfect 97 per cent score.

41. As part of the scheme, all aspects of the visitor experience were examined by experienced assessors; from the Museum's website and promotional leaflets, to the cleanliness of its buildings and customer care.

42. In its report VisitEngland states that the Museum's score was 'an impressive increase of seven per cent on the last assessment in 2016', adding 'stronger elements include the consistently high levels of customer service and the range of themed merchandise in the shop'.

Libraries

43. The Summer Reading Challenge was held at Darlington Libraries. This aimed to prevent the 'reading dip' noticed by teachers on the return to school in September. The challenge encouraged children to borrow and read books over the Summer holidays, maintaining their reading skills and confidence.

44. The Libraries Summer Activity Programme for children was launched with many activities selling out on the first day. Events included science workshops and animal encounters.

Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Impact - Street Scene

45. Since the significant reductions in resources for both street cleaning and grounds maintenance as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan, the impacts are now clearly visible. The grass cutting cycle reduced from a 12 to 15 working day cycle to a 25 to 30 day working cycle, which was described in the MTFP report and has resulted in significantly longer grass prior to cutting and significant clumps of grass left following cutting. This obviously has a negative impact on the appearance of areas across the Borough.
46. The main impacts of the cuts within street cleaning are clearly visible within some back lanes, which are now only cleansed on a fortnightly basis. There is also a deterioration in the cleanliness of road channels, with increased litter, detritus and therefore weeds as a result of reductions in mechanical sweeping as well as increases in litter in hot spots across the Borough.
47. Staff continue to do their best to mitigate the impacts of the cuts however, due to the severity, there is limited capacity to address the issues detailed above.

Environmental Volunteer Celebration Event

48. Members will be aware that Council has been actively recruiting volunteers to assist in maintaining the environment across the Borough, including litter picking, basic grounds maintenance tasks, verge cutting and general tidying up activities within parks and nature reserves. This has been extremely successful through the recruitment of Street Champions, the work that the Friends groups do alongside support from Darlington Cares, as well as numerous other partners.
49. To acknowledge and show appreciation to those individuals who have provided their time, a celebration event was held on 25 September at the Dolphin Centre, attended by the Mayor, and Senior Officers as well as myself to celebrate the contributions made by the range of volunteers.

Councillor Nick Wallis
Cabinet Member with Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio