
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.

Darlington Local Plan 2016 – 2036 – Sustainability Appraisal Framework

2. Cabinet approved the revised Sustainability Appraisal Framework as the basis for the assessment of all development strategy, policy and site options for the emerging Local Plan, in order to meet the requirements of Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requiring local planning authorities to carry out a sustainability appraisal of each of the proposals in a Local Plan during its preparation. Planning Practice Guidance identifies that the scoping stage should set out the context, objectives and approach of the assessment; and identify relevant environmental, economic and social issues and objectives.
3. In April 2016, Cabinet approved various documents as the basis for beginning to prepare and consult on a new Local Plan for the Borough including a Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and in November 2016 Cabinet approved a Sustainability Appraisal Framework for the emerging Local Plan.
4. Following a review of the content of the Sustainability Appraisal Framework against the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), the framework document has been updated and added to, to ensure that it is fit for purpose. This includes revised sustainability objectives, an updated statistical baseline and a full review of relevant plans, policies and programmes.

Housing White Paper and Local Plan Progress

5. The Government has published a proposed new methodology for consultation and whilst this is only a consultation at this time if adopted, it may have significant implications for minimum housing targets across the Country. In this context officers are assessing the implications of the methodology and will report to the January Cabinet to agree the housing targets to be incorporated in the plan.
6. January Cabinet will also be asked to consider a revised timetable for the Plan having regard for the process to agree housing targets, Planning Inspectorate advice to introduce a consultation process on the draft plan and the need to complete validation and testing on highway modelling.

7. Cabinet also agreed to the submissions of an Expression of Interest to Tees Valley Combined Authority for Greater Faverdale and Skerningham Garden Village to the Forward Funding strand of the Housing Infrastructure Fund for up to £250m; and of applications to the Homes and Communities Agency to the Marginal Viability Funding strand of the Housing Infrastructure Fund. The Tees Valley did submit a bid combining the growth areas of Western Stockton and the Greater Faverdale and Skerningham Garden Village. The Developer Consortium for Skerningham Garden Village held publication events in October and they are now considering these representations made.
8. The Director of Economic Growth submitted two applications for the Housing Investment Fund for West Park and Great Burden schemes. An announcement is anticipated in the Autumn Statement.

Disposal of Land Held by the Poor Moor Fund

9. Cabinet agreed to the disposal of land, held by the Poor Moor Fund for the benefit of the charity, subject to the requirements of trust law on land disposals and to the production of an independent valuation confirming the transaction represents good value.
10. The Assistant Director of Law and Governance was granted delegated authority to enter into and seal such legal documents as required.

Heritage Action Zone Proposal for Rail Heritage associated with the Stockton and Darlington Railway

11. The Council, along with Tees Valley Combined Authority, Durham County Council and Stockton Borough Council, submitted a joint application (with support from key partners such as the A1 Trust, Network Rail, National Railway Museum and the Friends of the Stockton and Darlington Railway) to form a 'Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Action Zone'. This would enable more research, designation and protection of assets, capacity to deliver Rail Heritage agenda, better enforcement and the removal of assets from the national at risk register. The bid is unique in that it goes through three local authority areas and it is theme based rather than area based.
12. The bid was selected by Historic England's regional panel for submission to Historic England's national panel. The outcome of the panel's decision is anticipated this month.

Conservation Area Designation Assessment: Whether or Not to Designate Low Coniscliffe

13. Cabinet considered a request by Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish Council to designate Low Coniscliffe as a Conservation Area and in doing so took into account guidance on the designation of Conservation Areas and to the assessment of Low Coniscliffe's case for Conservation Area Status.

14. Cabinet concluded that Low Coniscliffe does not have the 'special' architectural or historic interest to justify its designation as a Conservation Area under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and as such Low Coniscliffe was not designated as a Conservation Area.

Blackwell Grange Planning and Development Brief for Sites He1, He1a, He2 and He3

15. Cabinet noted the outcome of the consultation process for the Blackwell Grange Planning and Development Brief for Sites He1, He1a, He2 and He3 and agreed to the adoption of the Brief as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
16. The SPD will inform planning decisions for the site, restoration of the Parkland and disposal of land and had been amended following feedback from the consultation process including comments from Historic England and Place Scrutiny Committee.
17. Cabinet also agreed to the submission of the planning application for the Parkland Landscape and Restoration Plan.
18. Delegated authority was granted to the Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources, the Director of Economic Growth and the respective portfolio holder to progress and finalise works to the Parkland, to release funding for the Council to undertake the works, if required, and to progress and finalise all works or agreements relating to the disposal of the sites and future maintenance and management of the Parkland.

Morton Palms Business Park, Proposed Development and Freehold Land Disposal

19. Cabinet agreed to terms for the freehold sale of approximately 3.24 acres of land at Morton Palms Business Park subject to the outcome of a planning application for a retail development.
20. Cabinet also authorised the Director of Economic Growth to use the sale proceeds to settle the terms of the Joint Venture with the Homes and Communities Agency in respect of the land at Morton Palms which remains unsold, with any remaining monies being retained by the Council.
21. The Assistant Director Law and Governance was also authorised to document the sale of the land and settlement of the Joint Venture accordingly.

Morton Palms Car Park

22. The Morton Palms Business Park situated to the west of the A66 which benefits from a Local Plan allocation and planning consent for a range of employment uses, with a focus on office development.

23. In order to attract new investment to Morton Palms infrastructure improvements are required, a key component of which is a new car park to remove parked vehicles from Alderman Best Way, improving the approach to the employment site and therefore its marketability.
24. Cabinet approved the proposed car park solution and supporting business model and in doing so also agreed that the Director of Economic Growth be given delegated authority to conclude negotiations with Tees Valley Combined Authority to supplement the Council's capital contribution.

Economic Update

25. Darlington has 52,300 economic active residents, representing 78.4 per cent of the local population. This is roughly in line with national levels which sit at 78 per cent, and above the North East level of 75.2 per cent
26. Unemployment levels for the period June 2016 to June 2017 (latest figures available) are at 5.9 per cent or 3,100 individuals. This is below the North East as a whole, which sits at 6.5 per cent but above the national average of 4.6 per cent.
27. There are 530 18 to 24 year olds unemployed, which represents 6.9 per cent of this age group in Darlington. This is above the North East percentage of 4.8 per cent and 2.8 per cent nationally.
28. The Tees Valley Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) aims to support 16-29 year olds into employment and training. The programme started in mid-2016 and runs until the end of July 2018. There are three main delivery partners in Darlington, the Council, Morrison Trust and the Citizen's Advice Bureau. Since the start of the programme until June 2017 there have been 303 Darlington residents start on the programme, of which 113 have already progressed into education, employment and training. All three of the main providers are delivering above profile.
29. Darlington currently has 3,215 businesses, up from 3,100 in 2016. Of this figure, 87.6 per cent are micro businesses, employing up to nine people. Another 315 are small businesses (10 to 49 employees) representing 9.8 per cent of total businesses.
30. Gross Value Added figures are collated annually and will be released in December.

Economy Team Update

31. Since the last report, there have been 27 business engagement meetings with businesses and intermediaries, and attended a range of expos and networking events with partner organisations, including North East England Chamber of Commerce, Clive Owen and the Federation of Small Businesses.
32. The outward facing 'Invest in Darlington' website has attracted 16 external property and sites searches.

33. A number of investment projects are due to complete in the coming months, including an indigenous plumbing merchant supplies distribution company, which is being supported by the Team, to purchase a plot of Council-owned land at Faverdale for the design and build of new premises. The Team has helped the company to be successful in securing £100,000 of grant funding from the Tees Valley Business Compass scheme, to enable the company to take on additional staff and cover costs towards capital expenditure costs.
34. The Foundation For Jobs (FFJ) programme which works with schools and businesses to introduce young people to the world of work by giving them practical taster sessions with real-life businesses has now commenced contract with the Careers and Enterprise Company. The funding has enabled FFJ to continue delivery of FFJ activity with schools up until August 2018.

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Economy and Regeneration Portfolio