
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 Town Centre Footfall Strategy

2. To ensure the Council has a focused plan to support the Town Centre, Cabinet has approved the Darlington Town Centre Footfall Strategy.
3. Town Centres across the Country have had to adapt to changing trading conditions and significant investment has been made in Darlington's Town Centre in recent years to improve what is on offer for visitors.
4. The latest strategy had been developed in consultation with Town Centre businesses and its key elements were to boost the reputation of Darlington as a Market Town and improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre.
5. The Council will also work with partners to reduce fear of crime and anti-social behaviour, improve Town Centre signage and review ease of Town Centre parking for short term collections.

Central Park Masterplan

6. In order to maximise the economic growth potential of Central Park and in the interests of achieving efficient and effective use of land, Cabinet endorsed the refreshed Central Park Masterplan which provided the development framework for the scheme.
7. Central Park continues to be one of the priority economic growth projects for Darlington and the Tees Valley as its location and the presence of existing site occupiers made it suited to attract further inward investment to the Borough and the wider Tees Valley.
8. In order to fulfil its full economic and commercial potential, the Council and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) had refreshed the masterplan to increase the space available for employment uses.

9. The Council and its partners recognised the potential of the southern portion of Central Park as a prime location for future employment and commercial uses, therefore, the main change between the new masterplan and the existing masterplan, was the removal of land for housing at Central Park South in favour of creating additional development plots for commercial development.
10. The proposed change also enabled the site to be designated as an Enterprise Zone and as such, the Council and Tees Valley Combined Authority can retain 100 per cent of business rates generated from the site. The Council allocated its share of business rates towards the development of Central Park in order to prepare the site for development and to remove one of the abnormal costs. In undertaking these works, the net land receipt generated at Central Park should be greater in the long run.

Environmental Health

11. Officers have worked for a number of years giving targeted advice and enforcement in food premises. As a result of this Darlington has a high level of compliance in food premises with hygiene and structural requirements consistently in the region of 95 per cent compliance.
12. Legislation introduced in 2014 requires food premises to provide consumers with information as to what is actually in their food. This is particularly important in relation to allergen information. Historically Officers have carried out some sampling with regard to meat substitution and vegetarian meals and found some breaches of legislation which has led to enforcement in the premises concerned. This has recently been supplemented with sampling to check allergen compliance, which again has resulted in some non-compliance.
13. Officers are keen to ensure that food businesses understand what the legislation requires and will be carrying out an initiative during 2018 focusing on allergen training and information provision to the customer during premises inspections.

Trading Standards

14. Trading Standards, in a joint operation with Durham Police (in April), seized illegal tobacco and cash from an individual in the Town Centre and a further quantity of illegal tobacco from his home. On 15 September 2017 he admitted offences under the Trade Marks Act 1994 and received a caution from Trading Standards in relation to the possession of illegal tobacco for sale. The individual signed over to Trading Standards 576 packs of cigarettes and 117 x 50 gram pouches of hand rolling tobacco. On 13 October 2017, Durham Police secured a cash forfeiture order under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 for the sum of £1,482.50. Trading Standards will receive a percentage share of these funds.
15. Trading Standards participated in a North East Trading Standards Association regional metrology project to check compliance with products packed to the 'average system' under the Weights and Measures (Packaged Goods) Regulations 2006. The checks were carried out on a range of goods with a breakfast theme and took place at retail level. Whilst compliance obligations mainly rest with

packers and importers of packaged goods, retail checks provide a useful indicator of potential problems elsewhere in the production chain. In Darlington, the spot checks pointed to overall compliance with the regulations.

16. Trading Standards is working hard to prevent older vulnerable adults from becoming victims of scammers and fraudsters. The service has supplied and fitted (free of charge) three call blockers to the telephones of Darlington residents who are suffering from dementia. These call blockers were allocated to the service by the National Trading Standards Scams Team as part of a national project to help residents who require protection from nuisance and scam telephone calls. There is a user survey to complete as part of the arrangement.

Warmer Homes Funding

17. External grant funding has been obtained to provide central heating systems across the Borough for residents who don't have heating. The Council was part of a North East consortium bid including six other Councils and two registered housing providers. Nearly £1.8m was given to the project members to provide first time heating. Other funding including Government grants will be used to top up the existing funding and the initial funding represents an opportunity to set up management systems and a call centre to support the project and partnership over a three to four year project period (subject to additional funding being obtained).
18. The focus of the bids is to provide gas central heating to those qualifying residents living in areas where there is a mains gas supply and also to residents living in areas where there is no mains gas supply. Residents living in 'off gas areas' will receive an alternative central heating option including air source heat pumps and oil central heating. Residents will need to be in receipt of certain benefits, be on low incomes or be in fuel poverty. Properties will need to be without existing central heating but those with electric storage heaters could still qualify for help. Properties situated in and residents living in the 25 per cent most deprived areas measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation will automatically qualify for help if the properties need central heating. In total £150m of grant funding is available from The National Grid over three years and the consortium will be bidding for larger amounts of funding in years two and three.

The Noise App

19. Following a successful trial, local residents with a smartphone can now download the free Noise App and use it to submit evidence to Environmental Health in relation to their reported complaint about noise disturbance.
20. Environmental Health receives over 500 noise complaints per year about loud music, barking dogs etc. and it is hoped that the Noise App will make it easier for residents to provide evidence to support their allegations. The app is straightforward to use and makes it easy to log dates and times, as well as to take recordings if people wish to submit them electronically.

21. Reporting a noise nuisance to the Council is still done in the same way with complaints being made via the Customer Contact Centre. However, residents now have the option of using the Noise App once noise disturbance diary sheets have been submitted and after discussions with their Case Officer.
22. Using the app does not replace noise monitoring visits or installation of monitoring equipment by Officers to determine whether a statutory noise nuisance exists, but will assist with issuing Community Protection Notice Warnings for noise which is unreasonable and impacting on the quality of life of residents.

Conservation Area Character Appraisals

23. To support the development of the Local Plan and to ensure better planning outcomes in three of Darlington's Conservation Areas the programme of Character Appraisals (CACA) has been extended to the villages of Heighington, Hurworth and Sadberge. Conservation Area Character Appraisals are an important tool to ensure that the quality of development expected in these areas is achieved. The Appraisals are being developed with the assistance of the North of England Civic Trust and the draft CACA will be consulted on in the Spring.

Development Management

24. The Planning Applications Committee have recently granted planning permission for nine dwellings at Cobby Castle Lane Bishopton, subject to Section 106 Agreement, and three dwellings to the rear of Roundhill Road, Hurworth.
25. The Committee has also approved the Conversion of St Clares Abbey to ten dwellings; erection of 25 dwellings at Middleton Road, Sadberge; 37 detached dwellings at Low Coniscliffe; 101 houses at School Aycliffe; and 55 dwellings at Lancaster House.
26. Key applications currently being considered include:
 - (a) Outline planning permission for 370 houses at Coatham Mundeville 15/00804/OUT;
 - (b) Outline planning permission for up to 380 houses at Burtree Lane 15/01050/OUT;
 - (c) Full planning permission for 43 houses at Heighington 16/00820/FUL;
 - (d) Outline planning permission for up to 226 houses Station Road, Middleton St George 16/00976/OUT;
 - (e) Outline planning permission for 280 houses at Lingfield Point 16/00985/OUT;
 - (f) Full planning permission for 20 houses at Woodland Road, Cockerton 17/00237/FUL; and

(g) Outline application for housing at Coniscliffe Park.

27. Further progress has been made in upgrading the ICT systems that support the planning service. The Idox 1App connector is now live to automatically create cases in the Uniform system when customers submit applications through the Planning Portal. Following a significant amount of data cleansing work on the planning data we are now utilising the Auto Constraint checking features, which is already improving the efficiency of the service and performance management improvements will follow. The Public Access software is still targeted for completion in Summer and that will realise significant benefits for the public and Members. Mandatory training has also been completed with Members of the Planning Committee to enable them to continue to make informed decisions on planning applications.

Heritage Action Zones (HAZ)

28. Historic England recently announced that the bid for a Stockton and Darlington Railway (S&DR) Heritage Action Zone has been successful. The S&DR Heritage Action Zone will be one of only eight commencing in 2018. The Heritage Action Zone scheme will help to restore some of the historic features, such as railway bridges, buildings and structures, along the line with the aim of boosting tourism and creating jobs in the build-up to the S&DRs 2025 bicentenary. The S&DR Heritage Action Zone partnership, led by Darlington, includes Stockton Borough Council, Durham County Council, Tees Valley Combined Authority, Friends of the Stockton and Darlington Railway and Historic England.
29. The S&DR route runs 26 miles from Witton Park in County Durham through Darlington and Stockton Boroughs terminating at the River Tees. Along the route there are a number of heritage assets that require research, conservation, maintenance, repair, investment and potential re-use. This new regeneration programme, which Historic England launched in 2017, aims to breathe new life into historic places by unlocking economic potential. The HAZ will run for three to five years during which time a number of projects will be delivered. The scope of the projects will be set out in the HAZ Delivery Plan but are likely to include a Conservation Management Plan, listing enhancement, skills and training, promotion and events, building research and condition surveys, archaeological investigations, urgent repairs and addressing Heritage at Risk, heritage crime and enforcement.

Local Plan

30. **Housing Numbers:** A report was presented to Cabinet on 9 January to consider and agree the housing requirements for the Local Plan. This is reported separately to this Council meeting for decision.
31. **Employment Forecast:** A review of employment forecasting has been carried out. The previous forecast on job creation was an estimated 6,000 jobs up to 2036. The recent review has taken into account past performance of job creation which has identified a realistic figure of over 7,000 new full time equivalent jobs over the plan period.

32. **Village Consultations:** In December, consultations were carried out in both Heighington and Middleton St George to seek views from residents and other interested parties on a spatial plan for the villages. More than 100 people attended the Heighington event, whilst between 60 and 80 attended the Middleton St George event. This will advise the Local Plan work prior to housing sites being considered by Members in the coming months.
33. **Local Development Scheme:** A revised Local Plan Timetable was presented to Cabinet on 9 January. One of the main changes is to introduce a 'Draft Plan' stage, this gives residents in particular an extra chance to voice opinions rather than just comment on the soundness of the Plan at 'Submission' stage. It is still the intention that the Plan will be submitted for Examination before the end of 2018.
34. **Next Steps:** The next steps in the local plan process will be to agree the housing sites to be included in the Draft Plan to ensure we can meet the Objective Assessment of housing need and the Local Plan housing target. This would also ensure the Council could maintain a five year housing supply.

Brownfield Register

35. The Council has published a Brownfield Register, which was a legal requirement of the Town and Country Planning (Brownfield Land Register) Regulations 2017. The completion of this requirement by 31 December met a statutory requirement and secured a payment from Government of £15,000.
36. Brownfield Registers provide up-to-date, publicly available information on brownfield land that is suitable for housing. This improves the quality and consistency of data held by local planning authorities which provide certainty for developers and communities, encouraging investment in local areas. Brownfield Registers should include all brownfield sites that are suitable for housing development irrespective of their planning status.

Economy Update

37. From July 2016 to June 2017 (the latest information available from the Office of National Statistics) 52,300, or 78.4 per cent of Darlington residents were 'economically active'. Economically active is the term used to describe the fraction of the population that is either in employment or seeking employment. This compares to a figure of 75.2 per cent for the North East as a whole and 78 per cent nationally.
38. For the same period from July 2016 to June 2017, 13,800 residents were economically inactive. Of those economically inactive, 20.3 per cent (2,800) of these residents were students. This figure is behind the North East as a whole, where for the same period 24.3 per cent of those described as economically inactive were inactive, and even further behind the national figure of 26.8 per cent.
39. Darlington also had a higher percentage of residents on long term sick in the economically inactive bracket; a figure of 4,100 representing 30 per cent. This compared to 22 per cent nationally and 28.5 per cent in the North East as a whole.

40. In addition, Darlington also had a higher than average percentage of working age residents that were retired, 19.3 per cent (2,700 residents) compared to 14.4 per cent across the North East and 13.5 per cent nationally.
41. Unemployment levels from ONS for the period showed Darlington had 3,100 residents, a figure of 5.9 per cent out of work. 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.
42. The number of unemployed claimants aged 18 to 24 years old has fallen slightly in November, from 530 in October to 525 in November. This represented 6.7 per cent of this age group in Darlington being Not in Education, Employment or Training in November. This is largely representative of the Tees Valley as a whole, where the figure sits at 6.5 per cent, but is still higher than the national average which sits at just 2.7 per cent, and also saw a 0.1 per cent drop in November from October.

Foundation For Jobs (FFJ)

43. FFJ, the programme that was originally introduced as one of a number of measures to try to tackle youth unemployment in Darlington (by bringing industry and schools together to promote work opportunities and apprenticeships), has delivered seven events to over 650 young people since the start of the academic year in September.
44. This year FFJ is being funded in the main by the Careers and Enterprise Company (£50,000), which is part of the Department for Education, with a small contribution from County Durham Community Foundation (£5,000).
45. The terms and conditions of this funding require that FFJ activity and events are open to all secondary schools across the Tees Valley and not just Darlington based schools. Funding will only support activities and events for 11 to 16 year olds.

Business Stock

46. Darlington currently has 3,215 business enterprises. This figure does not include multi-sited businesses of which 87.6 per cent are described as micro businesses, (1 to 9 employees), and 9.8 per cent (315) are small businesses (10 to 49 employees).
47. Darlington has a figure of 362 enterprises per 10,000 adult population. This figure is better than the Tees Valley average, which has a figure of 318 enterprises per 10,000 adult population and 315 when comparing against the North East as a whole. The national figure however is 487 enterprises per 10,000 adult population, which shows the importance of continuing to attract more inward investment and new business start-ups into the Borough.
48. The Economy Team responsible for supporting business growth and investment in Darlington, and managing the Council's Invest in Darlington website has continued to both proactively and reactively seek new business investment opportunities that would lead to job creation. The Team has attended a variety of face to face

meetings with businesses (referred to as Strategic Account Meetings), exhibitions and networking events with an aim of achieving higher levels of engagement with key decision makers in businesses (both in and out of Darlington).

49. There are now over 40 potential investment projects in the pipeline, which are at various stages of the investment process. Not all projects come to fruition but the Economy Team qualify leads, connect with partner organisations such as Tees Valley Combined Authority and then works alongside key decision makers in the business to remove barriers to growth and investment.
50. Recent investment wins for Darlington include:
 - (a) Cress Systems, which design and manufacture energy storage systems and was the recipient of a £400,000 Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund (NPIF) equity stake;
 - (b) Stable Hearth Pizzeria, supported by the Council and being the recipient of a High Street Innovation Fund grant, taking on two empty units in Duke Street; and
 - (c) Myco Foods (trading as Hooba Foods), which produce a sustainable mushroom based meat substitute product and was the recipient of a £250,000 NPIF Capital Debt Finance sum.
51. Other investment projects expected to complete shortly include an expanding Darlington warehousing and distribution company. The Economy Team sourced the enquiry and then worked with the company to secure a sum of £100,000 grant assistance from the Tees Valley administered Capital Grant Scheme. In addition, this project will generate a land receipt of £300,000 for the Council, through the sale of a plot of land at Faverdale.

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