

COUNCIL
16 JULY 2020

OVERVIEW OF LOCAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Local Services Portfolio.

Highway Maintenance Schemes

2. Due to the onset of COVID-19 all schemes were put on hold. Following a letter from Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Transport Minister for Roads, Buses and Places) to everyone working in the Highway construction and maintenance sector dated 24 April urging authorities to continue with routine highway maintenance and to try and maintain as close to a 'business as usual approach as possible'.
3. The Highway Asset Management team started to look at ways of ensuring works could start how the current programme of works could be constructed with safety to the general public and the construction workers being paramount. The following is part of the agreed programme:
4. Highway Maintenance schemes complete:
 - (a) Feethams: Carriageway reconstruction (0.100km)
5. Highway Maintenance schemes due to start:
 - (a) Carriageway Patching prior to Microasphalt (various – 31 locations)
 - (b) Estoril Road South (Full Extents): Carriageway reconstruction/recycling – (0.490km)
 - (c) Fenby Avenue (52 Fenby Avenue – Harris Street): Carriageway reconstruction/recycling (0.250km)
 - (d) Barnes Road (Claxton Avenue - Staindrop Road): Carriageway resurfacing (0.140km)
 - (e) A67 Merrybent (40mph sign heading east): Carriageway resurfacing – (0.460km)
 - (f) A67 Yarm Road (Morton Palms – Farmhouse): Carriageway resurfacing – (0.720km)

Highway Improvement Schemes

6. All construction sites were closed during the lockdown. Preparations began to reopen sites in the week commencing 25 May 2020. A review was carried out of the whole Capital Programme to identify schemes that needed to be prioritised. The B6280, Lingfield Way junction, the B6279, Haughton Road throughabout scheme and the Rethinking Victoria Road Project have been prioritised to start over the summer months.

Town Centre

7. Measures were introduced to assist with social distancing on some of the main pedestrian routes into the town centre to allow businesses to re-open safely. This included a number of measures, including reallocating parts of carriageways for pedestrians. The requirement for social distancing continues and the scheme has been reviewed and amendments made to assist business. This will need to be kept under review as guidance and circumstances changes. This has required the loss of a number of on-street parking bays and the repositioning of loading bays and a number of disabled parking bays. Provision was made for people with mobility issues to access the widened footway area by providing temporary dropped kerbs. The overriding consideration has been public health, whilst trying to balance the needs of the business. The measures are under review in the town centre and adjustments being made and measures are still being considered for the town centre.
8. Measures have been put in place to ensure that people queuing for buses do so in a socially distanced manner. This has involved placing information at bus stops, vinyls placed on the footway to show passengers where to queue and assistance from Arriva staff and Civic Enforcement Officers to help passengers and the general public to remain safe. Temporary bus stops and changes to stopping patterns were introduced to minimise queuing on the footways. No problems were reported from passengers.

Head of Steam

9. Events and Exhibitions for 2020 have been rescheduled to take place in 2021, which will mean a bigger and better programme.
10. The museum's presence on the internet and social media has been increased by positing the 'Street Wise: What's in a Name?' exhibition online, which has been well received. In addition, the museum hosted a 'Virtual Vintage Rally' and planning is being undertaken around any future events which can also be held virtually.
11. Accessible family learning materials have been made available online and on social media. Museum staff have been proactive in making contact with schools, detailing ways in which we can support them in their teaching.
12. Signposting has been provided towards DBC and other external providers for support and welfare and work undertaken to develop wellbeing activities for all ages. Collaborative work has been undertaken with Tees Valley Museums on joint resources and cross promotion, as well as planning for reopening the Museum.

Rail Heritage Quarter

13. Work has continued on the development of the Rail Heritage Quarter during the lockdown. The Architects, Space have moved forward the concept floor plans for the Goods Shed, Carriage Works, New Build Shed and 1861 Shed, as well as starting to think about and developing plans for the outside spaces. Meetings have continued using Teams and some site survey work has been carried out where it has been safe to do so. It is not anticipated that there will be any significant delay on the project and we are on target to complete RIBA Stage 3 by October/

November this year. A brief has been developed to engage a specialist interpretation design consultant to take the interpretation design start forward alongside the building design work.

14. I have agreed with the Leader the installation of four train sculptures on the remodelled Haughton Road roundabout, one facing each of the four approach roads. The sculpture will be 4 metres wide 2.8m high and the trains will be cut in 5mm steel sheet with 3mm overlay for the detail. The four trains will be Locomotion No 1, Tornado, Derwent and The Price of Wales.

Creative Darlington

Response to COVID-19

15. Creative Darlington has distributed information on funding programmes offered by Arts Council England and other parties in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
16. We understand eight proposals from individuals, organisations and enterprises in Darlington seeking Emergency Funds from Arts Council England have been offered support of approximately £87,000 in total. Creative Darlington has also commented on the North East Cultural Partnership's North East Culture and Tourism Recovery and Resilience Plan and continue to liaise with various cultural organisations, enterprises and artists in Darlington regarding proposals in development responding to the pandemic.

Darlington @ Home

17. Following conversation between Tracks and Creative Darlington, Creative Darlington supported the first nine 'Darlo@Home' online concerts, which ran between 10 April 2019 and 2 May 2019 and encompassed a mixture of evening concerts on weekdays and daytime 'Big Little Gigs' concerts on weekends for a family audience. Musicians were paid to perform live and to share their performance digitally via the Tracks Facebook page, with Tracks curating and promoting the programme with support from Darlington Borough Council. As of 9 May 2020, Tracks advised the first nine online gigs had secured a total view count of 9,487 with a reach figure of over 20,000.
18. Darlo@Home programme received ongoing backing beyond 2 May 2020 within Darlington's events programme and has been promoted within #LoveDarlo. Darlo@Home concerts have offered people an opportunity to enjoy live music safely in Darlington as part of a diverse programme, providing artists a paid opportunity to share their music, including artist Nadeja whose performance was watched by family members in Brazil.

Stay at Home Stories

19. Creative Darlington approached Undivided Pictures and agreed a call out to people either living or working in Darlington to create their own original short film (five minutes or less) within social distancing guidelines. A panel shortlisted the films submitted and a public vote to followed to select the most popular film, with the producer of that film offered vouchers for use at Darlington Hippodrome as a prize. 1,609 Votes were cast for the shortlisted films and 21 year old Julia Moss created the most popular film, based around a poem she wrote – The Great Unknown – which captured some of the emotions she felt during lockdown.

Abode in a DL Postcode

20. This programme is a modification of an artist in residence model, through which artists would usually be invited to propose how they would react to a period of developing their practice in a particular setting or location. Instead, Abode asked artists to generate proposals regarding how they might work with one of a number of digital programmes within their own residence, offering an opportunity to safely explore and continue their practice. The Auxiliary approached Creative Darlington with a proposal to support the Abode idea in Darlington, having initiated the programme elsewhere in Tees Valley. Creative Darlington offered a budget and backed a Call Out, which enabled four proposals involving Darlington artists to be taken forward.

It's All Happening – ODDMANOUT

21. Darlington based ODDMANOUT Theatre Company were offered 'New In Town' support for a programme of creative community engagement which will involve people in Darlington and has been launched recently offering opportunities for creative engagement online. 'It's All Happening' is also being supported by Arts Council England through project funding.

Libraries

Interim Home Delivery Service

22. Since the library closed its doors on the 17 March, staff have been working hard behind the scenes to offer services to those people staying safe at home during Lockdown. An interim home delivery service was offered to Darlington Library members aged over 60 whereby the library would deliver a selection of books to the doorstep, (maintaining appropriate social distances), which was replenished every 4 weeks. This has been incredibly well received with 233 people currently benefiting from the scheme and we have decided to continue the service indefinitely due to its popularity and the continuation of social distancing.
23. Darlington Library was the front runner of our peers in offering home deliveries, with libraries around England and Wales making contact and replicating our model.

Reminiscence Gift for Care Homes

24. During Carers Week we delivered a free Reminiscence Book to Care Homes in Darlington aimed at sparking reminiscence and opening discussions between carer and resident about their early life and tales of the past. The books have been created by Darlington Libraries Centre for Local Studies and are themed around the 1940's to tie in with VE Day celebrations.

Educational Support to Looked After Children

25. We recognised that children living in care may be more affected by the disruption in learning and their routine so we teamed up with Darlington Virtual School to supply and deliver an exciting gift to all 113 children in long term care. The BookTrust Letterbox pack contains carefully selected books, learning resources and games designed to spark imagination and excite children to ensure learning at home is fun and interactive.

Virtual Library Activities

26. The library is usually bustling with activities for children and families so in the wake of our closures we took to social media and provided story times, arts and crafts and learning related content by video. We are now transitioning to providing a Summer Reading Challenge scheme online to encourage reading and book sharing at home. The Bookstart in Darlington Facebook page has attracted 2309 followers.

Boxes of Imagination

27. For schools who were maintaining teaching for the children of Key Workers, we put together an offer of a 'Box of Imagination'; a box full of fiction, non-fiction, picture and audio books, which we delivered alongside a box of props and costumes supplied by the Hippodrome. These were delivered for loan free of charge.

Darlington Hippodrome

28. Since closing to the public on 16 March 2020 due to COVID-19, our focus has been on the re-scheduling of shows where possible into autumn 2020 and spring 2021 and in some cases the announcement of cancellations. Work has been on-going to communicate updates to customers and issue ticket transfers and refunds where appropriate. At point of refund, the Hippodrome team also presented the option of donating the full or partial value of their ticket to support the theatre and the show's producers during this difficult time. £12,000 has been donated to date.
29. The theatre's online engagement has been active throughout the closure period. Highlights include:
- (a) Youth theatre and dance classes quickly moved into online formats.
 - (b) Successful trial dance sessions for adults, which we plan to introduce into the theatre when we re-open.

- (c) The Theatre's twice weekly online quiz has an average audience of 1,500 people joining in.
- (d) Our recent backstage tour of the theatre has already been viewed by over 3,000 people.
- (e) The Theatre's vast collection of online heritage learning resources has supported the current home learning environment many families find themselves in.
- (f) We continue to explore new and exciting ideas for online engagement, recognising that it may be sometime before audiences can physically join us in the theatre.

Events

- 30. To support Creative Darlington's contribution towards 'Tracks of Darlington', providing live performances of local musicians via social media in April, the events team continued the sessions during May and June, which included the first duo performance from the Unplugged Beatles.

Town Centre Entertainment Programme

- 31. The Events team have devised an entertainment programme which commenced in July to coincide with Darlington's recovery plan, including: walkabout street theatre, (that doesn't attract a crowd and can cover numerous locations) on Saturdays and Mondays and local buskers will also complement the street theatre to adding a vibrancy to the town centre during the transitional period.

Environmental Services

- 32. From the 24 March 2020, the majority of Street Scene services were stopped with the exception of Refuse and Recycling collection and a response crew for street cleaning to deal with health hazards. To enable these services to operate, safe systems of work were introduced, which included additional vehicles and staff so that a safe 2 metre distance could be maintained.
- 33. Street Cleansing and emptying of dog and litter bins was reintroduced on 20 April 2020. Further Street Cleansing and Grounds Maintenance services were partially reintroduced from 27 April 2020 and services were fully reinstated from 1 June 2020.
- 34. The Household Waste Recycling Centre was closed from 24 March 2020 and reopened on 28 April 2020 with appropriate social distancing measures in place, which had an impact of successfully reducing capacity on the site but resulting in queuing traffic on Whessoe Road. An appointment system was introduced from June, which is proving to work well, ensuring social distancing can be maintained and reducing any queuing traffic on Whessoe Road.
- 35. The Arboricultural service was initially suspended upon commencement of the lockdown, however the service is now back to full resource as of 1 June 2020.

36. The Building Cleaning service continued throughout this period with staff operating safe systems of work to ensure social distancing is maintained.
37. The Cemeteries and Crematorium service continued throughout this period, providing increased capacity when required.

Councillor Andy Keir
Cabinet Member with Local Services Portfolio