

COUNCIL
24 SEPTEMBER 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.

Tees Valley Joint Waste Management Contract

2. Cabinet welcomed an update on the Tees Valley Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) project; noting that Durham County Council and Newcastle City Council had committed to join the project. This would increase the ERF from a 250,000 tonnes per annum facility to a 450,000 tonnes per annum facility, reducing the cost of the contract through the gate fee to each authority.
3. Cabinet approved Darlington Borough Council to enter into an Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) with Middlesbrough Council, Stockton Borough Council, Hartlepool Borough Council, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, Durham County Council and Newcastle City Council in respect of the Tees Valley Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) project.
4. Cabinet also approved that the formal procurement for the project be commenced.
5. Cabinet authorised the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Assistant Director – Resources, Assistant Director – Law and Governance and the Responsible Member for Local Services to accept minor changes to the IAA.
6. Cabinet approved the extension of the existing waste management contract with Stonegrave Aggregates; and to the extension of the lease for the Household Waste Recycling Centre to tie in with the extension to the waste management contract.

Highway Maintenance Schemes

7. Highway Maintenance schemes ongoing:
 - (a) Patching Prior to Micro-asphalt (Various sites) – 31 locations
 - (b) Micro-Asphalt: 69 Sites – (16.025km)
 - (c) Fenby Avenue: Carriageway reconstruction/Recycling (0.250km)
 - (d) Barnes Road: Carriageway resurfacing (0.140km)
 - (e) A67 Merrybent: Carriageway resurfacing (0.460km)
 - (f) A67 Yarm Road (Morton Palms): Carriageway resurfacing (0.720km)
 - (g) Hercules Street (Back Lane): Reconstruction (0.070km)
 - (h) Surface Dressing: 4 Sites (9.650km)
8. Highway maintenance schemes due to start:
 - (a) Bates Avenue (Footway): Footway Reconstruction (0.230km)
 - (b) Cleveland Avenue: Carriageway Reconstruction/Recycling (0.490km)

- (c) Stanhope Road South/Coniscliffe Road, West Street: Carriageway reconstruction (0.260km)
 - (d) Victoria Embankment: Drainage/Channel Works (0.450km)
 - (e) A68 West Auckland Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (2.210km)
 - (f) C38 Sadberge Road / Middleton Road: Carriageway Haunching (5.210km)
9. Highway maintenance schemes complete:
- (a) Feethams: Carriageway reconstruction (0.100km)
 - (b) Estoril Road South: Carriageway reconstruction/Recycling – (0.490km)

Highway Improvement Schemes

10. The B6279 Houghton Road roundabout improvement scheme is substantially complete with some minor works outstanding including landscaping. The improvement scheme has been delivered by Darlington Borough Council and is jointly funded by the Council and Tees Valley Mayor and Tees Valley Combined Authority through the Department for Transport's National Productivity Investment Fund.
11. B6280 Yarm Road/Lingfield Way junction improvement scheme is now complete. This was also funded from the Department for Transport's National Productivity Investment Fund. The scheme assists traffic leaving Lingfield Way and compliments the works recently undertaken by Highways England at Morton Palms roundabout.
12. Work is underway on the Rethinking Victoria Road scheme following delays due to COVID-19. Following extensive engagement with local residents and businesses in late 2018 and 2019, the scheme was awarded £675,000 funding from the Combined Authority's Sustainable Access to Employment programme. A further contribution of £300,000 has been committed from Darlington's Local Transport Plan budget. The scheme will see the introduction of a 20mph speed limit, the signalisation of the Clifton Road/Park Place junction, widened footways on the northern side, improvements to the back lane which forms part of the cycle route, some new trees and lighting. The works are programmed to finish by the end of the financial year and are the first stage of improvements in the area around Darlington Station.

Head of Steam

13. The re-opening of the museum continues to go well, with positive feedback received from visitors. We are looking ahead to an event to mark the countdown to 2025 and also planning how we can still bring Christmas magic to the museum without having a large-scale Santa event.
14. Throughout the duration of lockdown and the summer holidays, the museum shared ideas and activities on a daily basis via social media channels for schools and families, to ensure that we maintained engagement.
15. Ideas continue to be explored and developed looking at how the museum can continue to work with schools in line with Government advice and social distancing requirements. This will include the development and production of new digital resources, including: Early Railways and George Stephenson, The Romans at Piercebridge, and creative writing and local history.

Rail Heritage Quarter

16. Work has continued on further developing the plans for the Rail Heritage Quarter over the last four months, working with partners on site. The intention is to submit a planning application late this year/early next year to enable the scheme to progress.
17. Alongside the work on the Rail Heritage Quarter, Officers have been working with colleagues in Stockton and Durham on developing proposals for the 2025 celebrations of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. Work is currently underway in developing a proposal around a number of strands:
 - (a) Live outdoor theatre performance
 - (b) Young Inventors Programme
 - (c) Young Inventors Programme
 - (d) Live steam in Darlington and Stockton
 - (e) Mounting an exhibition of early locomotives in Darlington and Stockton
18. The 200 Year Celebration of the Stockton and Darlington Railway presents an opportunity to put Darlington and Stockton and the wider Tees Valley on the international map. I am looking forward to the outcome of the work currently taking place which will help us form the scale of our ambition for 2025.

Creative Darlington

19. Creative Darlington has distributed information on Arts Council England's Cultural Recovery Fund programmes, developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The fund aims to help sustain cultural organisations and enterprises between October 2020 and March 2021 by supporting them to develop sustainable models of operation. There is expected to be a high level of demand on these programmes.
20. Creative Darlington supported artist, Paul Theo Murray, in developing a proposal to progress a guerrilla graffiti campaign in the Town Centre from late July 2020 to Pride weekend and beyond. The 'Now Then Darlo' programme has subsequently been developed and taken forward by Paul and supported by the Council's Town Centre and Events teams. The programme incorporates aspects of local heritage; everything from the Stockton & Darlington railway, to famous names past and present who have traded in the town, and reflections on the disappearance of Jimmy Hendrix's guitar here. In addition, the programme celebrated Pride and offered people the opportunity for their messages of thanks to the NHS and key workers to be shared in the Town Centre.
21. Creative Darlington offered budget support to Theatre Hullabaloo for the creation and distribution (through health visitors) of up to 775 Baby Play Packs to families in Darlington and the commission of a small number of short films, featuring artists, encouraging creative engagement which is accessible online.

The programme was designed to offer another opportunity for creative play to those families with young babies whose opportunities for creative play may have been limited during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

22. Creative Darlington offered support to Darlington based company, 'Unforgettable Experiences', to develop a pilot programme of digital engagement exploring the health and social benefits arising from engagement in creative activity. Creative Darlington offered advice and guidance on the selection of artists to deliver digitally accessible activity and provided some budget assistance to cover their fees during the pilot period. Unforgettable Experiences will also be undertaking a feasibility study to market test and gather evidence to see whether their service can support older people with dementia and neurological conditions to improve emotional wellbeing, stimulate cognition, improve independence and quality of life by providing access to arts, culture and heritage activities in person and online.
23. Following the success of the Last Train Home music festivals in Darlington in recent years, Creative Darlington has offered budget support to Tracks to create a series of films of bands performing which will be promoted in a digital campaign. We have also offered budget support to Tracks to programme a digital Hark! event which will explore the connections between music, literature and poetry.
24. The first Hark! event staged at Darlington Library in November 2017 was ticketed and attracted around 80 people to enjoy live readings by authors and short sets from a number of singers and bands with music connected to literary themes, however, both the digital Hark! event and the Last Train Home film series will now be digitally accessible in 2020.

Libraries

Re-opening COVID Secure

25. Crown Street Library has re-opened to the public for Quick Pick Book Borrowing and returning of books. Initial customer feedback suggests that our new policies have provided a comfortable and welcoming visitor experience and users have been happy to utilise our self-service machines with the support of staff.
26. Cockerton Library has also re-opened with reduced hours for book returns only and we look forward to extending this to include the Click and Collect Service, in addition to beginning the next phase of opening Darlington Library, by exploring safe and manageable ways to re-establish access to computers and visits to the Centre of Local Studies.

Library App

27. The library has updated its Library Management System and introduced a Library App. The App allows users to self-manage their account from home: browsing the catalogue and choosing reservations, renewing books and delving into our online resources. It also allows them to borrow and return stock using their mobile device, which is increasingly desirable as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 landscape.

Support for disadvantaged children

28. We worked with Kings Church and their network of foodbanks around Darlington to gift quality book resources to around 250 preschool and primary aged children. The books, supplied by the library, were distributed to those families around Darlington in receipt of food parcels.

Reading Rollercoaster

29. We recognise that education and literacy skills have taken a dip recently due to Coronavirus. Schools have been closed and home learning has been a challenge for many parents; the libraries have been closed and groups which proactively develop speaking, listening, language and literacy skills have been on hold. To help address this, we have set children aged 0–16 years of age a challenge aimed at boosting their reading skills and helping them to be “back to school ready.”
30. We have incentives such as mascot and gaming parties, which children can win simply by borrowing books over the school holidays. We hope by encouraging children to read and share books as a family that children are better prepared for returning to school and that younger children are given as much help as possible to develop early language skills, which are being affected by the use of face coverings and limited interactions outside of the home.

Library Home Delivery Service

31. The Library Home Delivery Service continues with 235 households benefiting from a free delivery of books. This service aims to decrease the feelings of isolation and loneliness in those aged 60 and above by providing books monthly, alongside a doorstep chat. The scheme is now being supported by Darlington Support who are delivering the books which have been specially handpicked by library staff.

Darlington Hippodrome

32. The Hippodrome continues to follow government updates on theatre and live performance and awaits an announcement for when live theatre can be safely presented inside again without the need for social distancing. In the interim period, the Hippodrome continues to re-schedule upcoming shows to retain customers and secure a strong show programme for 2021/2022.
33. The Hippodrome re-opened to the public on Monday 7 September with an exciting programme of engagement activities and events to welcome the public back. The Hippo Lounge, Box office and galleries are open 10.00-14.00, Monday to Saturday, with events including backstage tours, ghost tours, life drawing, quizzes, adult dance classes and classic cinema nights complementing the programme of already established youth dance and theatre workshops. Going forward, space will also be made available for wider community use of the building, working with partnership schools and groups.

Events

Pease Pudding Market

34. The Pease Pudding Market commenced on Thursday 6 August in the Market Square. The market featured food and drink outlets with musical accompaniment provided by a DJ. This is a regular event, which is scheduled to take place fortnightly until the end of October.

Video Production

35. A number of promotional videos have been produced to showcase the re-opening of businesses in Darlington. The videos feature Darlington's retailers, restaurants and pubs, and can be viewed on the Love Darlo website and the Council's social media channels.

'Darlo' Solo Run

36. The annual Darlington 10K moved online during the summer as the virtual 'Darlo' Solo Run'. Those who wished to participate had 3 options to select from, which enabled them to complete 10km of running; either as one 10km run or a number of shorter runs which totalled 10km. These runs were completed in the participants' own time and in a place of their choosing during the period of 9 August and 6 September, with the option to register via the Race Beast website to receive a medal on completion.

Darlington Pride Weekender

37. This year would have been the first Darlington Pride Weekender (a community event supported by the Council) comprising of a Saturday daytime event, Sunday picnic in the park and the traditional Monday night Gay Pride event. In place of public gatherings, a programme of virtual content was produced, including: music, dance, short films, speeches and messages. A wide range of community groups and organisations were involved over the 3 days, including: Councillors, CDDFRS, NEAS, Darlington OS, the Alzheimer's Society, YPOP, Stonewall, Arcus, More in Common and many more.
38. The Council also commissioned Tracks Darlington to produce three virtual gigs involving local singers, a band and a poet. Each gig incorporated messages on why Pride is important and signposted to relevant LGBT+ services.

Street Theatre

39. Live street theatre performances and buskers have supported the re-opening of businesses in the Town Centre, with the aim of enhancing the visitor experience for the public. The entertainment continues to take place weekly on Saturdays and Mondays.

Darlington Summer Reunion

40. The launch of the Summer Reunion evening initiative commenced on 6 August and ran throughout September every Thursday to Sunday, between the hours of 17:00-22:00.

The initiative was designed to support the hospitality sector with extending outside seating areas.

Mini Mish Mash Online Festival

41. The Council, in collaboration with the music collective, Tracks, produced the Mish Mash Online Festival, which took place on 30 August. The family friendly festival featured online workshops for all ages, plus over three hours of exclusive performances from local bands.

Environmental Services

Waste Services

42. During the lockdown period, Waste Services was identified as an essential service and has continued to operate unhindered throughout the current pandemic. Staff absence levels did not present significant difficulties and the service was able to operate smoothly as a result.

Garden Waste Collection Service

43. The popularity of the Garden Waste Collection service continues to grow with the number of properties subscribed to date just under 7,000; an increase of 2,200 on last year.

Street Cleansing

44. Street Cleansing Services returned to normal levels of resource in June. This was subsequently complemented by a further vehicle and crew commencing on 1 July to focus specifically on back lanes and fly tipping only, for a three-month period. Initial indications are that this additional resource has led to significantly improved standards of cleanliness in rear lanes.

Grounds Maintenance

45. Staff continue to undertake grass cutting duties as per the stipulated frequency and other than the occasional difficulty arising from inclement weather, have achieved the frequency as required.

Cemeteries and Crematorium

46. Numbers of burials and cremations as a result of COVID-19 are now reducing and therefore the Crematorium has reverted to the normal working practice of up to 12 cremations per day, as opposed to 15 per day during the initial period of the pandemic.

Arboriculture

47. The Tree and Woodland Strategy 2021-2031 is currently being consulted upon.