

COUNCIL
26 NOVEMBER 2020

OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY PORTFOLIO

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

Borough of Darlington Local Plan 2016 – 2036 Updated Local Development Scheme 2020-2023

2. The Local Development Scheme, which sets out the programme for the Local Plan preparation and previously approved by Cabinet and Council in February 2020, has been updated to reflect delays of up to four months to some target dates due to the Covid19 pandemic, in particular the Regulation 19 representation stage.
3. Cabinet has approved the updated Local Development Scheme 2020-2023 August 2020 with immediate effect.

Climate Change

4. Work is progressing on the rolling climate change action plan. Discussions with Lead Officers tasked with developing actions for their area has resulted in an early draft of the action plan being produced. Work is progressing to firm this up into something that can be placed in front of the Chief Officers Board. Potential funding sources are being explored e.g., the recently announced Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund.
5. Mandatory e-learning for staff will be launched shortly alongside the Council's revised e-Learning Programme (Academy 10).
6. The Business Resilience Manual has been produced to guide businesses towards greater resilience to climate change, which is available on the Sustainable Darlington page of the Council's website. This will be disseminated to businesses through the Business Growth team.

Estate Management

Delivery of New Homes at Neasham Road Joint Venture Proposal and Land Disposal (Sept Cabinet)

7. Cabinet has approved the establishment of a new Joint Venture Company (JVC) to build and sell new homes on Neasham Road development site with the release of £8.5m from the Investment Fund to fund the JVC.
8. Cabinet also agreed that an area is allocated to the Council's new build affordable housing scheme. The scheme will deliver 150 Council owned affordable homes.

Cattle Mart

9. The Council has taken control of the site from Darlington Farmers Auction Mart (DFAM), who are now operating from their new facility in the NW of the borough. The area has been secured and we are demolishing the buildings. These works will begin in November 2020 and will be concluded early in the New Year.
10. An assessment of the possible future uses of the site has been undertaken, illustrating that it may support between 100 and 160 housing units, if the full site was built on. Any future development cannot be completed until the new station gateways are operational and once the proposed multi-storey car park has been built on the east side of Bank Top Station.

Land to the rear of Tandridge Court, Woodland Road, Darlington – Disposal for Residential Self Build Plots

11. In order to facilitate the Council's legal duty to have a site available and listed on the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Register, Cabinet has agreed that the land to the rear of Tandridge Court is declared surplus to requirements and its inclusion on the Council's Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Register.
12. The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services is authorised to dispose of the land for self-build housing development, subject to the Council receiving market value for the plot(s) and the prospective self-builder obtaining detailed planning consent.

Town Centre Developments

Towns Fund

13. The Town Investment Plan (TIP) was agreed by the Towns Board and submitted to Government on 31 July 2020. The TIP provides details of Darlington's proposed interventions under the Towns Fund.
14. On the 27 October 2020 we received notification from Government that an allocation of £22.3m has been offered as our Towns Deal for Darlington. On acceptance of the Heads of Terms and prioritisation of proposals within the TIP, progression will commence on Phase 2 of the Towns Fund process. This will include project development and detailed business cases for each of the proposed project interventions which will result in submission of a Towns Deal Summary Document to Government within 12 months of accepting the Heads of Terms. Agreement of this will release funding from Government.
15. The funding will be used to complement, and extend, regeneration schemes in the town centre; in North Road, in the area between the town centre and the Head of Steam Museum; and Victoria Road, including the areas around the station and the cattle market.
16. Accelerated funding of £1,000,000 has been received from Government to fund capital projects that are in line with the Towns Fund. This funding must be spent this financial year with the aim of making an immediate impact to support the growth and recovery of Darlington during the pandemic. Projects include improvement with the historic yards; town centre enhanced lighting; town centre

WIFI; and property acquisition in Northgate, and these projects are now being developed.

Future High Street Fund (FHSF)

17. The application for FHSF was submitted to Government in June 2020, which focused on a largely residential proposal within the East Street and Crown Street area of the town centre. A clarifications request was issued by Government to towns across the country with a submission date of 12th October. Clarification of our application has been successfully submitted to which we await a response.

Repair to the Victorian Indoor Market Roof

18. The release of £300,000 from the agreed capital budget to enable works on the repairs to the roof at the Victorian Indoor Market to commence has been approved.
19. On completion of roof works, Phase 1 of the redevelopment of the market hall will commence in early 2021.

Skinnergate Development

20. Work with Historic England has progressed well regarding protection of the heritage assets included within the scheme. A planning application will be brought forward in the next weeks to gain the necessary permissions for the residential development to commence in mid-2021.

Planning, Development Management and Environmental Health

21. Work on the new Development Management Charter is progressing and a report will be brought to Members of the Planning Committee for consideration when complete.
22. Discussions with Homes England regarding the Burtree Garden Village are ongoing.
23. The Development Management process is operating as normal, despite most members of staff working from home. Planning Committee is operating successfully via TEAMS. Since the beginning of August, we have received 340 applications which can be broken down into 11 major and 329 others. We have made 272 decisions in this period which include Committee Decisions, Chairs Delegated and Delegated decisions.
24. The Planning enforcement/compliance service is operating as normal, including site visits, seeking to resolve planning disputes and breaches. Further use of Section 215 Powers [untidy land] have been used to improve the appearance of land and properties within the Borough. There are currently 54 planning enforcement cases under investigation. Members will appreciate that only the most significant cases are reported confidentially to Planning Committee on a monthly basis where the issues discussed are not within the public domain to ensure that the Council's position is not compromised in any way. In general terms however 69 cases have been satisfactorily resolved by the Monitoring and Compliance Officer since the beginning of August.

25. Members of the Planning Committee agreed at the October Planning Committee Meeting to grant planning permission for a Lidl supermarket and associated development at Faverdale which incorporates a Home Bargains store and a drive through coffee retailer.
26. During the Pandemic (up until the end of Q2) the Environmental Health Department responded to 829 requests for service relating to Covid 19, the closure of premises and safe working practices.
27. Officers have generally seen a high level of compliance from businesses; however, it has been necessary to:
 - (a) Serve a Prohibition Notice followed by a Fixed Penalty Notice on a barber who was working remotely through lockdown.
 - (b) Serve a Prohibition Notice on a Gym that was opening to members of the public in contravention of the business closure provisions.
 - (c) Serve a Fixed Penalty Notice on a takeaway that opened beyond 22.00 despite previous warnings from officers.
28. Officers from Environmental Health participated in an online forum as part of Business Week giving advice and guidance to businesses on Covid related issues.
29. The Environmental Health Department responded to 2,318 requests for service for the months June, July, August and September. The main categories of these requests are:
 - (a) Food 140
 - (b) Licensing 78
 - (c) Noise 357
 - (d) Planning Consultations 96
 - (e) Refuse 116
 - (f) Pest 337
 - (g) Covid Enquiries 351
30. Environmental Health has successfully prosecuted two cases in which the tenants of properties allowed household refuse to build up in private yards and gardens and in one of the cases this contributed to a rat problem. The tenants in both cases failed to comply with a Community Protection Notice and the defendants were fined £500 and £440 plus costs and a victim charge.

Business Investment Team Update

31. As well as supporting the on-going business development enquiries, the Business Investment team have focussed on the following.

Business Week 2020

32. Darlington's Business Week 2020 programme was an entirely virtual experience, brought together by the Business Investment Team. The week consisted of 17 on-

line activities such as the launch event with a keynote address from Tees Valley Mayor, Ben Houchen, information sessions and a series of business development workshops. Business Week was supported by networking events hosted by Darlington Business Club and Tees Valley Business Club bringing together a range of local companies, partners and business support organisations to provide free informative and engaging sessions to help local businesses build resilience, help recovery, and learn how to diversify and find new opportunities via new and existing customers. There were also dedicated support sessions for those wishing to start their own business.

Jobs Fair

33. As part of Business Week 2020, the team hosted its first ever virtual Jobs Fair, providing information and links on employment opportunities currently available in the Darlington area. The event was held entirely on-line as a Facebook live event, and provided details of more than 100 live vacancies, together with a range of training and volunteering opportunities. In addition, details of a number of measures to assist jobseekers with the support they need to progress were shared.

Tees Valley Business Summit

34. Tees Valley Business Summit aims to connect the local business community through an innovative and interactive experience to help local business grow and develop. Run in association with Tees Valley Business, Tees Valley Combined Authority, Tees Valley Mayor and the North East Enterprise Agency, the Business Summit has become the number one event in the region that brings the business community together. Built on world-leading technology, this year's event was entirely on-line and virtual, allowing attendees, partners, exhibitors and speakers to participate in a safe and secure environment. Darlington Borough Council had a virtual stand at the two-day event, with officers on hand to help and guide with information, resources and expertise.

Business Doctor Workshops

35. To help and support Darlington businesses during these difficult times, a series of peer-to-peer workshops are now in place, focussed on putting plans together so every business can be adaptable and flexible and emerge from the pandemic stronger and more resilient. Each 3-hour workshop is limited to 10 participants to promote engagement and peer group interaction and learning. Feedback from the first two sessions has been very positive.

Business Promotion

36. The team have been raising awareness of a number of business issues/opportunities, primarily around the Covid pandemic and the implementation of the UK's exit from the EU. Specifically, these have included:
 - (a) Kickstart Scheme
 - (b) QR Code Generator and Business Requirements

- (c) EU Exit – End of transition Workshops (BEIS)
- (d) Digital City Accelerator Programme

Darlington Station Local Supplier Event

37. Working with Council colleagues, TVCA and Network Rail, a local supplier event took place to raise awareness of the opportunities for local SMEs to be engaged in future rail station redevelopments. Mayor Ben Houchen spoke to about 200 businesses at this virtual event to explain how they could get involved with the transformational work at Darlington, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Billingham and Teesside Airport stations. Available work for local businesses will include building and stone masonry, groundworks, joinery, roofing, glazing, electrical, scaffolding and steel fabrication packages, painting, security, and much more.

Councillor Alan Marshall
Economy Portfolio