

**COUNCIL  
26 NOVEMBER 2020**

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**LEADER OF THE COUNCIL OVERVIEW**

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**Council's Continued Response to COVID19**

1. COVID19 remains the Council's and the Country's major challenge in the short to medium term. By the time of our meeting, we will be approaching the end of the second national lockdown and I will update you on any information I have received since the dispatch of this report. The levels of infection still remain high, although we expect to see these fall as a result of the lockdown, but as Council will appreciate, there is a time lag before we see the impact of the lockdown on rates of infection and hospital admissions.
2. We all appreciate these are difficult times for residents but to ensure we return to "normal" as soon as possible we all need to continue to be vigilant and follow guidance to minimise transmission. To help residents in these difficult times we have paid £36,500 in isolation grant payments. This has also been a very challenging time for businesses and through the grant funding made available by the Government, we have recently paid out £663,910 to 449 businesses to help them manage through lockdown and other trading difficulties. At the time of this report being despatched, further Government guidance is awaited on the Winter Grant Scheme.

**Save our Loco Campaign**

3. At the time of writing we have over 4,500 signatures on the petition to keep Loco No1 in Darlington. The campaign to raise awareness continues via social media, billboards, posters, banners, media including TV, One Darlington magazine as well as lots of engagement activities through various social media channels. We are planning further activity in the coming weeks and hopefully there will be a successful outcome to the campaign in the near future.

**135<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the opening of Crown Street Library**

4. On 23 October 2020 I attended a meeting of the Crown Street Trustees (via Teams), which had been convened on the anniversary of the opening of Crown Street Library. One of the Trustees, Yvonne Richardson, gave a very informative presentation about the construction of the Crown Street library, the events leading up to the opening of the Crown Street Library and the celebrations in the town that took place on the day it opened. Yvonne also talked about some of the features of the building and importance of the building in the Darlington streetscape and as an example of a Victorian library building. Yvonne noted the benefits of the library to the people of Darlington, the social, educational, leisure pursuits and more recently also for local history and arts activity. Recognition was given to the Pease family for their many contributions to the betterment of life for the townspeople, not just with the library, but with many other things and for the library building as a lasting legacy. Updates about the plans for building renovation and information about how

the Library Service has been coping during lockdown and its future plans were also received. Further details about this meeting are available on the Library Service webpage <https://www2.darlington.gov.uk/web/arena/darlington>

## Strategic Transport

5. As portfolio Member for Transport in the Tees Valley Combined Authority I continue to work at regional and national level lobbying for the strategic transport needs of the Tees Valley and Darlington.
6. I attended the All Parliamentary event on Transport (via zoom) to make the case for further investment in the Tees Valley for rail and road infrastructure.
7. Attended meetings with Transport for the North and East Coast Mainline Group and 2 meetings of the Audit Committee for Transport for the North.
8. There is a significant and ambitious investment programme being developed and delivered across all forms of transport. Some of the key highlights of the programme are:

- (a) The New Tees Crossing, which will increase capacity and reliability on the A19 is progressing to Outline Business Case stages for Government to consider the funding for the scheme.
- (b) An update to residents, businesses and stakeholders is underway on the progress in developing the Darlington Northern Link Road scheme. The aim being to complete an Outline Business case for Government early next year. Support for the scheme from residents, business and stakeholders is being sought to address the inadequacies of the current route for strategic traffic and HGVs to the motorway.

A new road is needed not just to alleviate pressures on our local roads but to provide a fit for purpose connection from the Tees Valley to the motorway network to improve the Economic Growth opportunities for the sub-region.

- (c) There is significant investment planned for the rail network, with:-
  - (i) Darlington Station progressing into detailed design stages and full business case to Government.
  - (ii) Middlesbrough Station detailed designs progressing.
  - (iii) Hartlepool Station feasibility work for enhancements being undertaken.
  - (iv) Northallerton to Eaglescliffe design work for improvements to enhance freight connections to and from Teesport.

All of the above putting the building blocks in place to deliver a high-quality integrated rail network across the Tees Valley that facilitates passenger and freight growth.

- (d) The development of a Local Cycling and Walking Plan with around £5.6m of investment planned to encourage cycling and walking to replace short or local

journey and increase more sustainable journeys. In Darlington the first priority will be the Woodlands Road area into the town centre.

- (e) Work is also progressing to develop a Bus Partnership to work with operators to improve bus services and passenger experience across the Tees Valley.

### **Towns Fund**

- 9. Attended Board meeting of Town Fund to complete acceptance of the £22.3m allocation awarded to the Council. The hard work of everyone involved in putting together the application has been recognised in achieving this superb result.

### **Healthy New Towns**

- 10. Represented the Council at a Westminster Health Forum policy conference to share information on our successful pilot project.

**Councillor Mrs Heather Scott OBE**  
**Leader of the Council Portfolio**