

**COUNCIL
25 MARCH 2021**

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL OVERVIEW

Council's Continued Response to COVID19

1. It is pleasing to see that infection rates and hospital admissions have come down considerably during the lockdown period and we now have a road map to recovery, however we are still at an early stage and as restrictions are relaxed, we must all do our best to maintain the low levels of infection by following Hands, Face and Space guidance.
2. The vaccination programme continues at a pace which will help us tackle the virus, but there is still much to do, including continuing our asymptomatic testing centres to identify those in our population who are carrying the virus without knowing it. We will be reviewing our overall approach to testing given the new options available to the public.
3. Support to businesses via Government grants will continue and our great teams will no doubt once again be among the leaders of the Country in terms of speed of getting grants into business bank accounts. We have also been working with businesses in the town centre to get the recovery underway, this will be a fine balance between getting the economy going and the safety of the public.
4. Once again, I wish to thank all our teams for their continued great work in responding to the pandemic and now getting ready for the recovery. Also, a special thanks to NHS colleagues for their work on the vaccine roll-out.

Treasury Campus

5. I am sure that you were all thrilled to see the announcements made by the Chancellor in the Budget that Treasury for the North campus is to be based in Darlington. The news that 750 senior civil servants representing the Treasury, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, will locate here is a tremendous fillip for the town and wider area and nods to our ambitions for the Town.
6. The Mayor of TVCA has set up a task force, and the Council will work closely with Officials to help Treasury deliver this campus.

Locomotion No 1

7. A Memorandum of Understanding was agreed for the return of Loco No 1 in 2025 and twice between 2026 and 2030 and for up to 24 months in each 5 year period going forward. I would like to thank Dame Mary Archer and Sir Peter Hendy for their input and assistance in this matter. It was a very difficult issue to resolve and whilst I would have wished we could have kept Loco in Darlington permanently

legally we had no option and unless an agreement had been achieved we could have lost Locomotion to Darlington for ever. We are able to use “Darlington the Historical Home of Locomotion No 1” on any publicity or promotional material in the future.

8. An agreement has been reached with Beamish Museum for the replica of Loco to be a permanent exhibit in the Head of Steam and it will be removed from Shildon in time for reopening of the museum in May. There are plans for it to be restored into working condition for the 2025 celebrations which will be a great attraction along with other exciting events which will be shared very soon.
9. The installation of the 4 train sculptures on the ‘2025’ roundabout will celebrate Darlington’s past, present and future Rail Heritage engineering. They will be formally opened on 19 March 2021 by Councillors Scott, Keir and Renton.

Strategic Transport

10. The Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan was adopted in January 2020 and good progress has been made on the actions and delivering a programme of projects. A formal annual progress report will be produced early in the new financial year. We await further detail on a new £4.2billion Intra-City Transport fund that is to be split across eight city regions, the Tees Valley being one of those, which should significantly boost funding and the ability to develop further transformational transport projects from April 2022.
11. A programme of Electric Vehicle charging points is being procured to accelerate the availability of charging facilities to encourage the switch to electric vehicles. It is anticipated this will start to roll out later in 2021.

Towns Fund

12. The delivery of the accelerated funding projects from within the £1M is progressing well. Expectations are that the new free Town Centre Wifi will be available within coming weeks, and new lighting enhancements to the clock tower, Pease statue and St Cuthbert’s Church will be undertaken and visible in early April. Work to Buckton’s and Clarks Yards has now commenced and physical improvements will begin to be visible within both Yards.
13. The main Towns Fund is now in the stage which will take forward project development and engagement with stakeholders, which will establish a business case for each of the nine interventions. Which can then be summarised and presented to Government later in the year.
14. Discussions are ongoing to develop proposals for the new Adult Learning facility, which is proposed within the Northern Echo building and early engagement is taking place for other projects, including the Northgate area and the Skinnergate and Yards area.

Climate Change

15. The action plan is going through final amendments before it is ready for internal discussion. Feedback has been received from members of the Cross-Party climate change working group.

16. The group has met twice, under the chairmanship of Councillor Snedker and will continue to meet every two months.
17. We have begun the process of recruiting a technical consultant to carry out the district heat network feasibility study. The consultant is expected to be in place by the end of March.

Youth Unemployment

18. In December 2020 the 18-24 year old claimant count stood at 12.1% (890 young people) this was above the North East average of 10.1% and the Great Britain average of 8.9%.
19. The Darlington 18-24 year old claimant count is the lowest in the Tees Valley and ranks seventh out of 12 in the North East.
20. The Council, alongside CAB and Morrison Trust, continue to support young people who are unemployed through the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). The Council YEI Team are currently supporting 112 young people.
21. We acknowledge that the impact of Covid on youth employment has been severe, and the Director of Economic Growth has called together a task group of key agencies. Their first tasks will be to get an up to date understanding of the nature of youth unemployment, and to marry the immediate needs of employers supporting young people to gain quality employment. Longer term we aim to assess and influence delivery of effective support by partner agencies.

Councillor Mrs Heather Scott OBE
Leader of the Council Portfolio