

COUNCIL
25 MARCH 2021

OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY PORTFOLIO

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

Central Park – CPI, Hybrid Business Innovation Centre and Landscaping Works

2. Cabinet received an update on the progress being made on Central Park and noted the work done so far to develop the plans for the Hybrid Business Innovation Centre (HBIC), which will accommodate 2,370 sq. m of business space.
3. Cabinet has authorised the release of £10,737,855, subject to formal approval of ERDF funding and have authorised the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services to proceed with the project including applying for planning permission.
4. Cabinet have designated the construction of the HBIC as a strategic procurement and the landscaping works and procurement of operator as non-strategic. Cabinet also delegated powers to the Procurement Board to progress the procurements in accordance with Contract Procedure Rules.
5. A very small part of the corner of Springfield Park adjacent to the existing Thompson Street mini roundabout has been identified for highway improvement and S.106 Agreements have been completed. A Deed on the whole of the site would have serious implications for that proposed highway improvement.
6. It was good to see in the Budget Announcement that CPI have received a £5m investment from the Government to develop a library of vaccines to fight Covid-19 variants. The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy visited CPI on 11 March 2021 to reinforce the strategic importance of this work being carried out in Darlington.

Local Plan

7. The Local Plan is currently being examined by Will Fieldhouse an independent Inspector appointed by the Government. The Inspector has issued a revised timetable and Hearings will be in the following weeks:
 - (a) 17 May
 - (b) 24 May
 - (c) 14 June
 - (d) 21 June (Reserve Days)
8. The Inspector intends to finalise the hearing programme by 15 March. At the moment we are planning for the hearings to be hybrid. The Inspector will be in the Town Hall with necessary officers and everyone else online.

Planning, Development Management and Environmental Health

9. Work on the new Development Management Charter is now complete and a report will be brought to Members of the Planning Committee for consideration. The Charter sets out the reasonable expectations of applicants, agents and objectors when they become involved in the planning process. The Charter also references the relevant guidance and policy documents we use to arrive at planning decisions listed on our web pages.
10. The Planning enforcement/compliance service is operating as normal. There are currently 64 planning enforcement cases under investigation. 89 Cases have been satisfactorily resolved by the Monitoring and Compliance Officer since the beginning of August.
11. Since the beginning of August 2020, we have received 729 applications which can be broken down into 26 major and 703 others. We have made 565 decisions in this period which include Committee Decisions, Chairs Delegated and Delegated decisions.
12. Enforcement notices have been served on two gypsy sites which have been appealed against to be heard by hearing. In addition, an enforcement notice has been served on unauthorised activity including the stationing of a caravan near Sadberge. Direct action in default is being taken on a property in Montrose Street. The works are being taken under section 215 [untidy land and buildings]. It will result in a significant improvement in the street scene and the amenity of residents. An appropriate charge on the property will be made on the property to recover the Council's costs.
13. Further negotiations are ongoing relating to the Supermarket proposal at Faverdale which will be presented to the Planning Committee in due course.
14. The section 106 agreement associated with the Lidl supermarket application already granted planning permission at Faverdale has now been signed, to make the permission 'live' and ready to commence.
15. Significant progress is now being made with regard to the fire damaged building at Skinnergate. Negotiations are ongoing with Historic England and architectural agents have been appointed to move the project forward as quickly as possible to planning application stage.
16. The Environmental Health Department responded to 1641 requests for service in Q3. The main categories of these requests are:
 - (a) Food 106
 - (b) Licensing 42
 - (c) Noise 148
 - (d) Planning Enquiries 95
 - (e) Refuse 65
 - (f) Pest 177
 - (g) Personal Search 450
 - (h) Covid 461

17. In October 2020, an officer from Environmental Health took part in a 'virtual' Business Week Webinar to give businesses advice and guidance on the Covid restrictions and business closure legislation.
18. An item was brought to Members of the Planning Committee in February regarding the work that has been undertaken to produce a design code for the Faverdale Garden Village. The design code will let out design criteria that will be used when planning applications are received. The intention of the guidance is to ensure that a consistent approach is taken to ensure higher design standards are achieved reflecting the garden village status of the site. A Member briefing took place on Wednesday 3 March.

Darlington Towns Fund

19. The aims and purpose of the Towns Fund is to drive the sustainable economic regeneration of towns to deliver long term economic and productivity growth.
20. The four project areas identified as part of the Â£1m Forward Funding programme have been unanimously supported by the Town Board and the necessary procurement, tender and engagement exercise have commenced. These areas are:
 - (a) The Yards Phase1 (Clark's and Buckton's Yards) – transform and improve public space;
 - (b) Town Centre lighting enhancements;
 - (c) Town Centre Wi-Fi; and
 - (d) the acquisition of properties along Northgate which contribute to the wider Railway Heritage Quarter project.
21. Officers have facilitated two positive and productive stakeholder meetings where local businesses took the opportunity to pass comments on the proposed designs. Improvement works include enhanced public realm and seating areas, new doors, windows, guttering and downpipes, new lighting and new paintwork and artwork, which will encourage people to visit the ever growing number of independent shops and allow people to dwell for a time in these attractive historic yards. Works associate with the Yards Phase 1 have recently commenced and will be completed in the springtime.
22. Terms for the acquisition of 142/144 Northgate have been agreed and signifies the first step towards the Council's intention of trying to acquire the remaining units which make up the whole of the former Edward Pease residence. Discussions regarding the acquisition of further premises on Northgate are continuing.
23. The Heads of Terms for the main Towns Fund programme have been agreed and signed by all parties, including the Secretary of State.

Business Investment Team Update

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

Local Restrictions Support Grants

25. The Government has provided funding for local authorities to support local businesses adversely affected by the Covid-19 restrictions. Support is in the form of grants to individual businesses. The business support schemes are as follows:

- (a) Local Restrictions Support Grant (Open) - running from 14 October to 4 November 2020.
- (b) Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) - running from 5 November to 2 December 2020.
- (c) Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) - Tier 3 restrictions – running from 2 December to 30 December 2020.
- (d) Additional Restrictions Scheme.
- (e) Christmas Support Payment for wet-led pubs.
- (f) Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) - Tier 4 restrictions – running from 31 December 2020 and Closed Business Lockdown Payments running from 5 January 2021.

26. The Business Investment Team are administering the LSRG (Open) and the Additional Restrictions Grant scheme. Business Rates team are administering the LSRG “closed” schemes.

	Applications	Approved	Declined	Awaiting Decision	Amount Paid
LRS Open	353	218	131	4	£192,809.26
LRS (Closed Addendum) National Lockdown	1,040	830	207	3	£1,262,774.00
LRS Tier 3	411	251	153	7	£405,592.43
Christmas Support Payment for Pubs	73	48	24	1	£48,000.00
LRS Tier 4/National Lockdown	1,093	790	290	13	£1,964,657.20
Closed Business Lockdown Payment					£3,512,000.00
Additional Restrictions Grant	404	137	252	15	£497,940.31
TOTAL:	3,374				£7,883,773.20

27. Darlington Borough Council has undertaken a review of the discretionary Additional Restrictions Grant scheme to support local business during the national lockdown restrictions.

28. It has now been agreed that the eligibility criteria for this discretionary grant be expanded. This will allow more businesses to access financial support, including support for home-based and mobile businesses. The additional business sectors now eligible for support include:

- (a) Garage Services – repair and maintenance of motor vehicles
- (b) Children’s nurseries

- (c) Pet Welfare Support Services – such as boarding, day-care, walking and grooming
 - (d) Live Event Support Services
 - (e) Wedding Support Services, including photographers & videographers
29. In addition, the Council has introduced new one-off grants for self-employed taxi-drivers, registered childcare providers and approved driving instructors.
30. So far, Covid-19 business grants awarded via DBC since the start of the pandemic is as follows:
- (a) 735 Small Business Grants - £17,350,000
 - (b) 364 Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants - £6,520,000
 - (c) 105 Discretionary Grants - £1,170,000
 - (d) 3,374 Local Restriction Support Grants - £7,883,773
31. The total value of grants awarded in Darlington since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 is £32,923,773.

Climate Change

32. The climate change action plan is receiving final amendments before it will be seen again by the Climate Change Working Group and is then sent to Asset Hub. Procurement of a technical expert to carry out the district heat network feasibility study is in train.

Councillor Alan Marshall
Economy Portfolio