

COUNCIL – MEETING CANCELLED 13 MAY 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.

Supporting the Childhood Health Weight Plan for Darlington

2. Cabinet has approved the commencement of a review of the available planning powers that could be used to support the Council's objectives of achieving the targets in the Childhood Healthy Weight Plan for Darlington.
3. There are existing powers within the planning system which can be adopted to support health and wellbeing and several local authorities have adopted Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) to assist in managing the number of hot food takeaways.
4. In approving this review Cabinet have requested that officers explore the merits of adopting the available planning powers through the development of an evidence-based analysis of good practice elsewhere in the country which will assist in addressing childhood obesity and that in conducting the review, officers consult with the Health and Wellbeing Board.
5. Cabinet have agreed that a report be brought back to a future Cabinet meeting.

Planning, Development Management and Environmental Health

6. 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.
7. 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.
8. The Planning enforcement/compliance service currently has 77 planning enforcement cases under investigation. 91 Cases have been satisfactorily resolved by the Monitoring and Compliance Officer since the beginning of August.
9. Since the beginning of August 2020, 729 applications have been received of which 26 are categorised as major and 703 others. 565 decisions have been made in this period including Committee Decisions, Chairs Delegated and Delegated decisions.
10. Significant progress is now being made with regard to the fire damaged building at Skinnergate and the proposed residential/commercial development. Negotiations

have been concluded with Historic England and the appointed architectural agents have been able to move the project forward to planning application stage.

11. 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. Compliance is nearing completion. 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] and 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. Work has now commenced.
12. Pre application negotiations are now almost complete with regard to the North Road Railway Station scheme following a briefing with Members.
13. During the Pandemic (up until the end of March) the Environmental Health Department responded to 1496 requests for service relating to Covid-19, the closure of premises and safe working practices and carried out 469 checks which resulted in 80 warnings.
14. In addition to the enforcement reported previously, it has been necessary to:
 - (a) Serve a Prohibition Notice on a gym that was opening to members of the public in contravention of the business closure provisions. This was followed by £3000 in fines by way of Fixed Penalty Notices issued by the Environmental Health and a number of users of the gym have been given Fixed Penalty Notices for £100 each.
 - (b) As the use of the gym continued despite this action officers from Environmental Health supported by the Legal Team and the Police were granted a Closure Order at Darlington Magistrates Court at the end of March.

Darlington Towns Fund

15. 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.
16. The four project areas identified as part of the £1m Forward Funding programme have been unanimously supported by the Town Board and have progressed well. These areas are:
 - (a) The Yards Phase1 (Clark's and Buckton's Yards) – transform and improve public space. This is now being delivered.
 - (b) Town Centre lighting enhancements. St Cuthbert's Church, Clock tower, Pease statue and around planters are now completed.
 - (c) Town Centre Wi-Fi, which is now completed in the central area; and
 - (d) The acquisition of properties along Northgate which contribute to the wider Railway Heritage Quarter project.
17. Officers have facilitated three positive and productive stakeholder meetings where local businesses took the opportunity to pass comments on the proposals. 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.

18. The acquisition of 142/144 Northgate has now been completed and signifies the first step towards the Council's intention of seeking 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.
19. The Heads of Terms for the main Towns Fund programme have been agreed and signed by all parties, including the Secretary of State.
20. An initial engagement meeting has been held with stakeholders along Skinnergate and the Yards, which provided information on proposals to consider both improvements to the public realm and properties within the area as part of the Towns Fund programme.
21. The Adult Learning facility proposed within the Towns Fund has now been fast tracked, with £575,000 secured from government in 2020/21. The proposal is to develop a project which seeks to locate the facility within the Northern Echo building.

Darlington Victorian Indoor Market

22. Work continues to progress on the refurbishment of the Indoor Market. Phase 1 which is the development of hospitality and street food hall, is almost complete and will open in the near future. Phase 2 which includes the refurbishment of retail element of the market hall will commence imminently. Phase 3, the development of the Temperate Garden is progressing to planning application stage.

Business Investment Team Update

23. The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a new Treasury campus will be established in Darlington. The plans for the Treasury hub were outlined in last year's budget, and after an extensive scoping exercise, Darlington was announced as the preferred location, with 750 civil servants set to relocate from London.
24. Following this news, the Department for International Trade, the Government department responsible for the UK's global business, including post-Brexit trading agreements, announced it will also be relocating as many as 500 workers to Darlington.
25. The creation of the Government's new Northern Economic Campus has been widely welcomed and has generated considerable interest from a range of professional, legal and financial type companies that are now looking to find a base in close proximity to this new facility. Consequently, enquiries for town-centre commercial office space have increased significantly.

Local Restrictions Support Grants

26. The Business Investment Team continue to work with colleagues in the Business Rates team to deliver the range of Covid-19 financial support measures introduced by Government since October 2020. The headline Local Restrictions Support

Grants were initially designed to support businesses suffering reduced demand or forced to close under the 'tier' system but were subsequently updated to cover national "lockdown" restrictions too.

27. Darlington Borough Council have administered the various support schemes on behalf of the Government. The table below shows the volume of applications for each of the schemes, together with the total amount of grant money awarded to local business.

	Applications	Approved	Declined	Awaiting Decision	Amount Paid
LRSO Open	364	218	140	6	£192,075.70
LRSO (Closed Addendum) National Lockdown	1,098	870	227	1	£1,336,122
LRSO Tier 3	462	266	196	0	£427,264.43
Christmas Support Payment for Pubs	77	51	26	0	£51,000.00
LRSO Tier 4/National Lockdown	1,257	898	359	0	£4,380,243.37
Closed Business Lockdown Payment	893	893			£4,028,285.71
Additional Restrictions Grant Phase 1 - Lockdown	982	596	365	21	£1,738,868.66
Additional Restrictions Grant – Phase II Recovery	175	175			£737,575.00
TOTAL:	5,308				£12,891,434.87

28. So far, the number and value of 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) 3,740 Local Restriction Support Grants - £10,414,911
- (e) 1,157 Additional Restrictions Grants - £2,476,444

29. The total value of lockdown grants awarded in Darlington since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 is £37,931,355.

30. As part of the March 2021 Budget, the Government set out a new wave of support measure for the small businesses, including Restart Grants to support local economies as they emerge from the pandemic and lockdown restrictions and commence a path of recovery. The existing range of local restrictions support grants will be superseded by the restart grants (except for Additional Restrictions Grant). The national Restart Grant scheme, which is now open for applications, aims to help businesses to reopen safely. Non-essential retail, hospitality, leisure, personal care, gyms, and accommodation businesses can apply for the grant. The awards so far are as follows

Restart Grants	Grants Awarded	Total Value
Strand One: Non-Essential Retail	145	£426,040
Strand Two: Hospitality, Leisure, Accommodation, gym & sport, and personal care	355	£3,170,000
Totals	500	£3,596,040

Local Plan

31. The Local Plan Examination is progressing with the hearing dates expected to begin on Tuesday 25 May. The Hearing programme is available on the Local Plan Examination website at <https://microsites.darlington.gov.uk/local-plan/local-plan-examination/>

Climate Change

32. A technical consultant to carry out the BEIS funded feasibility study into a district heat network has now been procured. The study report is due to be completed by the end of October.
33. Emissions data for 2020/21 is not yet available, but a methodology to estimate work-related home working emissions will be included in the reporting.
34. The draft action plan will be presented to Asset Management Group in May prior to coming before Cabinet.

Councillor Alan Marshall
Economy Portfolio