

COUNCIL – MEETING CANCELLED 13 MAY 2021

OVERVIEW OF LOCAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO

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

Local Transport Plan

2. Cabinet received an annual update on highways and transport from a regional and local perspective. It included updates on delivery, performance, and public satisfaction in 2020/21.
3. The report also included an update on the Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan and the Darlington Transport Plan. Cabinet approved the Darlington Transport Plan framework as the basis for consultation in 2021 to enable residents, businesses and organisations to help shape the transport strategy for Darlington.
4. The report also agreed funding for this year's highway improvement, maintenance, and active travel programmes and agreed recommendations that came from the Communities and Local Services Committee to inform the programme development.

Woodland Road Walking and Cycling Scheme

5. Tees Valley Combined Authority confirmed funding of £1.7m for the construction of the first phase of the Woodland Road Walking and Cycling Scheme which will improve access to the town centre via Outram Street and Duke Street. The temporary 20mph speed limit and one-way street for traffic on Duke Street, introduced last year as part of the social distancing measures, have proven popular and are planned to be incorporated into the scheme. Following consultation amendments have been made where possible and details of the final plans have been circulated to residents and businesses to commence a formal consultation process on the proposed Traffic Regulation Orders. Work on the scheme is scheduled to start in June 2021 and is programmed to last until April 2022.

Rethinking Victoria Road

6. The works on the western section of Victoria Road between St Cuthbert's Way and Clifton Road are substantially complete. Work started on the eastern section at the end of March and is due for completion in June. The final works will include the landscaping elements, resurfacing of the carriageway and the commissioning of the traffic signals.

Highway Maintenance Schemes

7. Highway Maintenance schemes complete:
 - (a) C182 Longfield Road: Footway Reconstruction (0.113km)

8. Highway Maintenance schemes on site:
 - (a) Stanhope Road South/Coniscliffe Road, West Street: Carriageway reconstruction (0.260km)
9. Highway Maintenance schemes due to start:
 - (a) Carriageway Patching Contract (22 locations)
 - (b) Unc Victoria Embankment: Kerbing/Drainage Works (0.5km)
 - (c) Pendleton Road South/Arkendale Street Back Lane: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.128km)

Head of Steam

10. The museum prepared for its reopening with a refresh of what is available to do in its grounds including a willow sculpture trail, children's activity area and new picnic area.

Creative Darlington

11. Four railway heritage themed signs were unveiled on a roundabout on Haughton Road on 19 March 2021 as part of an overall redesign programme. The new work celebrates locomotives that have a particular connection with Darlington, Locomotion No 1, Derwent, Prince of Wales and Tornado.

Libraries

12. Darlington Libraries reopened for book borrowing on 12 April 2021 in line with government advice. Free home deliveries continue to be offered to those aged 60 and over.

Darlington Hippodrome

13. On 29 March 2021, Darlington Hippodrome received the news that it had been successful in its round 2 bid to Arts Council England's Cultural Recovery Fund. The theatre will receive £499,304 which will fund overheads, staff salaries, reopening plans and the purchase of equipment for the Classic Cinema in the March to June period.
14. From 12 April 2021, engagement/education activities including Youth Dance and Youth Theatre classes have been taking place in the Hippodrome once again.

Town Centre Partnership and Events

15. The Welcome to Darlington rebranding programme has been scheduled to attract visitors back into Darlington in line with re-opening guidelines. This will encourage visitors to a safe and welcoming town which re-opened on 12 April 2021.
16. Officers in Licensing, Highways and the Town Centre team, along with DAD (Darlington Association on Disability) and the Police, have been working with businesses to facilitate more pavement cafes, enabling the local businesses to offer outdoor socially distanced seating for food and drink in the town centre and across the Borough.

17. The Events calendar has been programmed to fit with Government guidelines beginning with roaming music to add atmosphere and engaging with local musicians to come and perform throughout the summer. Large scale events will take place later in the summer, subject to the lifting of the remaining restrictions.

Environmental Services

Darlington Crematorium Refurbishment – Cost Update

18. Cabinet received a cost update on the Darlington Crematorium refurbishment and new Chapel project and noted that the costs for the project have increased significantly on the original estimate due to the delays in work at the start of the pandemic and the impact of Brexit and COVID-19 on costs and supply of materials.
19. Cabinet have agreed that the project is continued as the additional costs can be met within the existing financial envelope and have agreed to the release of additional capital funding of £1.512m.

West Cemetery Update

20. As part of development for the new Chapel within West Cemetery an ecology survey was carried out which formed part of the planning application and at that time there was no evidence of great crested newts.
21. Subsequently the council received a report from a resident that they had seen great crested newts in the area. Following discussions with the councils ecologist the evidence was felt to be credible and therefore it was necessary to carry out further investigations. DNA samples were taken from ponds within the allotments which has resulted in evidence of great crested newts, which unfortunately has meant that building work for the Chapel has had to stop until a licence is granted from Natural England.
22. An application has been submitted and acknowledged for a district licence and we now need to wait to see if they will be happy to approve the licence on that basis. If so this will allow our Ecologist to start discussion with them with regards to other sites in the area that are deemed suitable for newt habitat, then hopefully we can offset our works against this and continue with their proposed mitigation. At the time of writing the timescale is unknown and therefore the impact on the project is similarly unknown. Whilst the application is being reviewed work can continue on the crematorium, which is progressing well.

Garden Waste Collections

23. Garden waste collections for summer 2021 commenced on 6 April 2021. To date we now have 7,600 subscriptions to the scheme compared to 7,100 last year therefore popularity of the scheme is increasing.

Grounds Maintenance

24. The winter programme for grounds maintenance was successfully completed on schedule (pruning, cutting back shrubs, etc). Commencement of the summer season started on 22 March 2021 with grass cutting operations.

Climate Change

25. This year as part of our highway maintenance programme of works all resurfacing we will be carried out using a warm asphalt mix rather than the traditional hot mix. The benefits are:
- (a) Reduced CO2 emissions associated with asphalt production by around 15%
 - (b) Improved productivity as it takes less time to cool to trafficking temperatures so more can be laid in a single shift
 - (c) Reduced public disruption through earlier re-opening to traffic.
 - (d) Improved conditions for the workforce.
 - (i) Reduced heat and fumes making for a more comfortable working environment
 - (ii) Steam reduced which improves visibility for the workforce and the general public, this is important with limited safe working spaces improving all round visibility.

**Councillor Andy Keir
Local Services Portfolio**