

COUNCIL
30 SEPTEMBER 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.

Planning and Development Management

2. The Planning Enforcement/Compliance Service currently has 93 planning enforcement cases under investigation and 101 cases have been satisfactorily resolved by the Monitoring and Compliance Officer since the beginning of August.
3. Since the beginning of August 2020, 841 applications have been received of which 31 are categorised as major. 646 decisions have been made in this period, including Committee Decisions, Chairs Delegated and Delegated Decisions.
4. Progress is being made with regard to the residential/commercial development in Skinnergate. The matter was presented and approved at the Planning Application Committee on 4 August. The scheme is an exciting transformational project, which will set a clear precedent for future development in the Town Centre.
5. Enforcement notices have been served on two traveler/gypsy sites which have been appealed against to be heard by hearing. The hearing for one site has taken place on 27 July in front of a Government Inspector. The outcome is awaited. In addition, an enforcement notice has been served on unauthorized activity including the stationing of a caravan near Sadberge. Compliance has been secured.
6. Direct action in default has been successfully undertaken on a property in Montrose Street. An appropriate charge on the property will be made to recover the Council's costs.
7. Negotiations are continuing regarding the improvements to Bank Top Station and the associated car park.

Environmental Health

8. The Environmental Health Section has responded to 1857 requests for service in Quarter 1 2021/2022. The main categories of these requests are:

(a) Food	144
(b) Licensing	75
(c) Noise	253
(d) Planning Enquiries	101
(e) Refuse	119
(f) Pest	230

(g) Personal Search	494
(h) Covid	273

9. The 2021 Air Quality Annual Status report has been submitted to Defra and forms part of the Review and Assessment process under the Environment Act 1995. The report details the results of the nitrogen dioxide diffusion tube monitoring carried out at 17 locations across the borough and demonstrates compliance with national air quality objectives. In addition, the report includes information on steps taken to address air quality such as a strategy/projects to expand the electric vehicle charging infrastructure, raising awareness on the impacts of poor air quality and reductions in license fees for taxi vehicles that are electric, hybrid or use other sustainable fuels. The new taxi licensing policy implemented from 1 January 2021 also introduced requirements relating to compliance with euro standards and vehicle age limits linking in with vehicle emissions. Defra included new sections in this year's report on air quality and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A review of results from diffusion tube monitoring carried out in Darlington highlights that annual mean nitrogen dioxide levels are generally lower in 2020 than for previous years (since 2016), which is likely to have been influenced by reductions in traffic numbers as a result of COVID-19.

Climate Change

10. The Climate Change Action Plan is expected to go to Cabinet for approval in October. Milestones will be developed to enable clear reporting against those actions and future reports will demonstrate progress towards our carbon neutral target.
11. The Sustainable Darlington page on the website is being used to promote messages and we are looking at including a section written by and for young people. We also have regular articles in One Darlington magazine and on social media.

Building Control

12. Building Control continues to operate on a working from home basis, with all elements of the service being provided. With inspections following a combination of DBC's and our own safe system of work developed following discussions with the Health and Safety Unit.
13. The flow of applications has been constant and the demand for site inspections remains high.

Local Plan

14. The Examination of the Plan is still on-going with a further hearing day held on 7 September. Details of the Examination can be found on the Examinations web page and the hearing days can be viewed on You Tube.

Business Investment

15. All the covid business support grant schemes are now closed. 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) 3,206 Local Restriction Support Grants	£10,451,660
(e) 793 Restart Grants	£5,666,064
(f) 1,088 Additional Restriction Grants	£3,073,484

16. The total value of Covid-19 financial support grants awarded to Darlington businesses between the start of the pandemic in March 2020 and July 2021 is £44,231,208.

17. Darlington Borough Council's original Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) budget had all been allocated by end of June 2021, with final payments being made in July 2021. Having successfully defrayed the ARG allocation, the Council has now received additional ARG top-up funding of £631,502 to deliver further discretionary support in the period up to March 2022. Further Covid-support measures for business will now be put in place in line with the Government's guidance for this top-up fund.

18. Plans for Darlington Business Week are now in place. Business Week 2021 will bring a range of events and workshops aimed at local businesses who are at different stages in their business journey. There's a full and varied programme of activities that will appeal to a wide range of businesses, with practical advice, support and business network opportunities available each day.

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. Improvement works within the Yards has progressed well and includes enhanced public realm and seating areas, new doors, windows, 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. Planning and listed building application has been made for improvements to three key business premises in the Yards.

21. Progress is underway with Stage 2 of the Towns Fund which involves the completion of business cases and submission of summaries to government. To date, three out of the nine business cases have been completed, locally appraised and summaries submitted to government for review. If successful, funding for 21/22 for these three projects will be released.

22. The remaining business cases are in preparation and will be reviewed for intended submission of summaries to government in 2021.

Darlington Indoor Market

23. Phase 1 of the redevelopment of the market was opened to the public on 27 August 2021. The new food hall includes a bar, new public toilets and 6 street food vendors. Early feedback has been very positive on the quality of the food and the general environment.
24. Phase 2 of the refurbishment will commence over the next few weeks which includes the improvement of the market trading stalls and improved access and general decoration.
25. Phase 3 which is the installation for a Temperate Garden will commence in 2022.

Councillor Alan Marshall
Economy Portfolio