

**COUNCIL**  
**25 NOVEMBER 2021**

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**LEADER OF THE COUNCIL OVERVIEW**

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**Council's Continued Response to COVID19**

1. The Authority continues to respond to the dynamic and rapidly changing situation with regard to COVID19. Infection rates in Darlington have increased significantly more recently with many infections being seen in school aged children. The Authority has been working closely with colleagues in schools and colleges across the borough to ensure that they are supported in responding to the increase in cases and continues to proactively contact trace anyone who have tested positive for COVID 19 to help reduce the rates of infection in our communities.
2. The next stages in the NHS COVID19 vaccination programme are now underway with the roll out of the booster programme for eligible individuals as well as the vaccinations for those age 12-15 years. These are being provided by a range of different NHS providers across Darlington including the Darlington Primary Care Network, the Vaccination Centre at the Arena, community pharmacies and School Immunisation programme providers.
3. The Authority continues to proactively promote the messages from Government about the ongoing measures that continue to be recommended to help reduce the transmission of COVID19 in our communities particularly coming into the winter months.

**Strategic Transport**

4. I chaired the Tees Valley Transport Committee which heard of the ambitious plans to improve journeys across all modes of transport. In this period two key pieces of work have been undertaken:
  - (a) an ambitious prospectus has been developed and put forward to Government. The prospectus put forward the case for investment in transport over a 5 year period in the Tees Valley. Announcements suggest the Tees Valley will receive £310m over the next 5 years the detail of which will be forthcoming after the Government budget announcements.
  - (b) A Bus Service Improvement Plan has been submitted to Government that responds to the government policy direction to improve bus services for all. The Plan outlines the actions and funding required from Government to make the significant improvements to bus services outlined in national strategy.
5. A competition has been launched by the Government for bids to be the new base of Great British Railways. We will be assessing the criteria when it is published, but I have already indicated that I plan to put Darlington forward as an ideal candidate to be home to this new organisation leading the rail industry.

6. I attended the meeting in Manchester to appoint the Chairman of Transport for the North on 17 November, and the subsequent Board meeting via Teams on 24 November.
7. I attended a meeting of the East Coast Main Line Committee on the 3 November to reinforce the need for the upgrade of the line from York, in order that our ambitions for future services are not constrained.

### **Darlington Station Improvement Project**

8. The planning approvals have been secured for the project and work continues to develop the scheme for implementation with Network Rail, TVCA and the Department for Transport all part of the project. A timetable is set for compulsory purchase of any remaining properties and land should the Council not be able to secure them by agreement.

### **Towns Fund**

9. The Towns Fund Investment Plan continues to progress. The initial Yards phase 1 works to improve the environment of both Buckton's Yard and Clark's Yard is nearing completion, with new doors, planters, colourful new benches, lighting and general improvements undertaken. The installation of free public Wi-Fi has been completed within the town centre and up Victoria Road, with improved CCTV being installed within Buckton's and Clark's Yard.
10. The work within the Yard's continues beyond phase 1, with improvements and enhancements to both the public realm and properties continuing within the main Skinnergate and the Yards Towns Fund Project. 21/22 capital funding has now been released for this project from DLUHC, a sum of £1.372M, enabling the development of both the public realm/highway options and the property enhancement options within the area progressing.
11. 21/22 capital funding has also been received for the Adult Skills facility (£490k) and the T-Levels project at Darlington College (£1.47M). Further funding will be released in future years. This funding enables the progression of the projects, with design of both schemes now commencing.
12. The remaining six business cases for the nine main Towns Fund interventions are being completed. A summary document for each is targeted for submission to DLUHC in advance of the deadline of the 30 November.

### **Darlington Economic Campus (DEC)**

13. The Deputy Leader and I recently met with Beth Russell, Director General, Tax and Welfare on the Darlington Economic Campus. Officers are working very closely with the DEC and progress is very good with the temporary location announced and with Civil Servants moving into the advertised roles. At least 5 Departments have committed to the Campus with the possibility of more to follow. Information on the Campus can be found at [www.darlingtoneconomiccampusjobs.co.uk](http://www.darlingtoneconomiccampusjobs.co.uk)

## **Climate Change**

14. Members of the Cross-Party Climate Change Working Group met on 11 October for an update on progress and to meet the newly appointed Climate Change Officer.
15. Funding is still available for projects and Cabinet Members should encourage their officers to speak with the Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer.
16. We have commenced a new blog series on the Sustainable Darlington page on the Council's website and will be inviting internal and external guest bloggers to share what they are working on, their thoughts on climate change and what everyone can do locally. I have written the first of the series and look forward to future posts.

**Councillor Mrs Heather Scott OBE  
Leader of the Council Portfolio**