

COUNCIL
25 NOVEMBER 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.

Land at Faverdale – Former St Modwen Land Development Strategy

2. Cabinet has received a report to obtain approval to seek Expression of Interest for a preferred developer for 29.95 Ha (74 acres) of land to the east of Faverdale East Business Park (FEBP), for employment use.
3. The land, which is owned by the Council, comprises approx. 50 acres of agricultural/ grazing land with the remainder being the remaining floor slab of the former Rolling Stock works surrounded by scrub covered embankments.
4. Scheme proposals will be requested including options for the Council to retain circa 18 acres to satisfy potential enquiries from businesses looking to develop in Darlington. Once a preferred developer has been provisionally identified, a report will be submitted back to Cabinet for consideration of any options and terms.
5. Cabinet has agreed to the marketing of the land and that delegated Authority be given to the Chief Executive to negotiate provisional disposal terms with the final terms being reported to a future meeting of Cabinet.

Land at Faverdale / Burtree Garden Village Feasibility Work

6. Cabinet received a report to seek approval for feasibility funding to engage the services of Esh Homes Limited to facilitate an early planning application for the Council owned land at Faverdale / Burtree Garden Village.
7. The Council's land, amounting to approximately 27 HA (67 acres), was declared surplus to requirements at the meeting of Cabinet on 11 July 2017. The land currently forms part of the wider Burtree Garden Village proposals that are currently being considered as part of the Local Plan process.
8. Cabinet has approved the costs and authorised the release of the funding necessary to engage Esh Homes Limited and for the Council to undertake the feasibility work. The costs will be funded from the Council's Investment Fund. The Assistant Director – Law and Governance has been authorised to execute the necessary documents to facilitate future development. This will provide a site capable of contributing to the delivery of new Housing and other affordable/social homes to satisfy the Borough's housing need and achieve a capital receipt for the Council and increased Council Tax receipts from new homes.

Planning and Development Management

9. The Planning Enforcement/Compliance Service currently has 98 planning enforcement cases under investigation and 92 cases have been satisfactorily resolved by the Monitoring and Compliance Officer since the beginning of September.
10. Since the beginning of August 2020, 870 applications have been received of which 32 are categorised as major. 671 decisions have been made in this period, including Committee Decisions, Chairs Delegated and Delegated Decisions.
11. A legal charge on 38 Montrose Street has been secured for direct action works undertaken by the Council to improve its appearance and are now complete.
12. Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent has been Granted for works at Bank Top Station for improvement works and a Multi Storey car park.

Environmental Health

13. The Environmental Health Section has responded to 1521 requests for service in Quarter 2 2021/2022. The main categories of these requests are:

(a) Food	123
(b) Licensing	73
(c) Noise	255
(d) Planning Enquiries	64
(e) Refuse	69
(f) Pest	262
(g) Personal Search	434
(h) Covid*	67

*(please note this figure does not include Environmental Health's involvement with track and trace equivalent to 1 FTE).

Prepacked for Direct Sale - Natasha's Law

14. From October 2021, food businesses must provide allergen labelling information for Prepacked for Direct Sale (PPDS) changed. Foods will need to have a label with a full ingredients list with allergenic ingredients emphasised within it. The law was introduced following the unfortunate death of Natasha Ednan Laperouse and is commonly known as "Natasha's Law".
15. These changes will provide essential information to help people with a food allergy or intolerance make safe food choices.
16. Prepacked for direct sale products are foods that have been packed on the same premises from which they are being sold.
17. Prepacked products refer to any food put into packaging before being placed on sale. Food is prepacked when it:

- (a) Is either fully or partly enclosed by packaging;
 - (b) Cannot be altered without opening or changing packaging;
 - (c) Is ready for sale.
18. Common foods that can fall into this category include sandwiches, salads and pies made and sold from the premises in which they are made.
19. Officers from the Commercial team in Environmental Health will be giving advice and guidance to business on request and during inspections to ensure compliance.
20. If businesses repeatedly fail to comply then appropriate enforcement action will be taken.

Food Standards Agency Recovery Plan-Food Inspections

21. During the Pandemic Environmental Health officers were under instruction from the Food Standards Agency not to visit commercial premises unless they had evidence that there was a direct risk to public health. The purpose of this was to limit the spread of infection of the Covid virus as far as possible.
22. As a result of this, officers were left with a significant backlog of over 450 food inspections with an additional 150 uninspected premises that registered during the pandemic as people were working from home.
23. In May 2021 the Local Authority (LA) recovery plan was announced proposing a way forward to re-start the regulatory delivery system for the highest risk businesses and providing greater flexibility for lower risk businesses wherever possible.
24. Officers have developed a plan which triages all currently registered food premises and uninspected premises and ensures that priority is given to the highest risk premises.
25. As at the end of September the backlog of inspections was:
- (a) For year ending March 2022:
 - (i) Total Inspections = 594 of which 2 are category A, 9 are category B and 63 are category C.
 - (b) For year ending March 2023:
 - (i) Total Inspections = 229 of which 8 are category B and 50 are category C.
26. It is expected that some of the inspections from year ending 2022 will need to be carried over into 2022-23.

Climate Change

27. The Climate Change Action Plan was approved by Cabinet on 5 October and cleared call-in on 18 October. Milestones and a reporting mechanism will be established and agreed with the responsible lead officers.

28. An additional new post of Climate Change Officer has been created to support the Sustainability and Climate Change Officer; doubling the capacity of the climate change team. The Climate Change Officer started work on 11 October.

Darlington Towns Fund

29. 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.
30. 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. This 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.
31. The work within the Yard's continues beyond phase 1, with improvements and enhancements to both the public realm and properties continuing. Planning and listed building application has already been made for several key business premises in the Yards. Capital funding of £1.372M has now been released for the Skinnergate and Yards project enabling the development of both the public realm/highway options and the property enhancement options within the area to progress.
32. 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.
33. 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.

Local Plan

34. The proposed modifications to ensure the Local Plan is sound are currently out for consultation. Provided that the Inspector does not feel he needs to open the hearings for any further consideration, I hope we will be able to recommend the Local Plan for adoption early in the New Year, subject to his report.
35. The Consultation period ends on Tuesday 30 November at 5pm.

Business Investment

36. In August 2021, Darlington Borough Council were formally notified that it had successfully achieved the Additional Restrictions Grant spend targets set by HM Government, and as such, would be receiving an additional grant allocation to further the post-covid support the Council can offer. Darlington Borough Councils ARG top-up grant is £631,502. Based on Government guidance and local intelligence, 3 broad areas of support have been identified:
 - (a) Existing ARG commitments (overspend, community centres, market traders).

- (b) Businesses impacted by the delay in reaching Stage 4 – as per the revised Government Guidance in June 2021.
 - (c) New support measures targeted at new enterprises and existing businesses with business growth and development plans.
37. Plans are being developed to prioritize how this funding will be delivered.
38. Darlington Business Week returned in October 2021, providing a range of events and workshops with nearly 300 businesses participating over the week.

Councillor Alan Marshall
Economy Portfolio