

COUNCIL
1 FEBRUARY 2022

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 91 planning enforcement cases under investigation and 79 cases have been satisfactorily resolved by the Monitoring and Compliance Officer since the beginning of September.
3. Since the beginning of August 2020, 1240 applications have been received of which 42 are categorised as major. 900 decisions have been made in this period, including Committee Decisions, Chairs Delegated and Delegated Decisions.
4. Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent has been Granted for works at Bank Top Station for improvement works and a Multi Storey car park. Negotiations are ongoing regarding compulsory purchase of some properties.
5. Final negotiations have now concluded regarding the applications at the Railway Quarter with Historic England and other interest groups.
6. A number of significant planning applications for housing are now anticipated from parties seeking to deliver significant housing numbers in the Borough. In addition, there are a significant number of applications already in the system which are awaiting the approval of the Local Plan, hopefully early this year.

Environmental Health

7. The Air Quality Annual Status Report 2021 has been accepted by Defra with positive appraisal comments commending the Council on the positive measures taken to improve air quality and noting that the report aligned well with national policy.

Local Plan

8. As Members will be aware, the Council consulted on proposed modifications to the Local Plan to ensure the Plan was found sound by the Government appointed Inspector. We received more than 800 representations from more than 200 people/organisations. It has taken some time to process all comments as many were paper comments which had to be processed and redacted.
9. The comments had to be summarised and a response prepared prior to being forwarded to the Inspector. Despite the number of paper copies received officers managed to deal

with the comments and submit to the Inspector prior to Christmas despite the consultation only ending at the end of November.

10. It is hoped that we have the Inspector's draft report sometime in January where we will have two weeks to fact check it and return it to the Inspectorate when they will issue the final report which will be published and will conclude the Examination.
11. A report will then be prepared for Cabinet and hopefully Council to seek approval for the adoption of the Local Plan (subject to the Inspectors report finding the Plan sound).

Climate Change

12. Following Cabinet approval in October, work is ongoing to set the milestones against which we will be reporting. Reports will be presented to full Council in July and January.
13. We have been approached by the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to take part in a fully funded heat network zoning pilot project. These are designated geographic areas within which a heat network will be the default heating solution. The pilot project should have minimal impact on our workloads but should result in a report telling us if Darlington is suitable for a heat network zone.

Darlington Towns Fund

14. Works to improve the environment of both Buckton's Yard and Clark's Yard has been progressing throughout 2021. This Phase 1 work is now complete, with new timber conservation doors, well stocked planters, colourful new benches, lighting, improved shopfronts with professional signwriting and general improvements undertaken.
15. This Phase 1 work has enabled preparation for further works in these Yards, including new shopfronts, accessway improvements from High Row and a green wall in Buckton's Yard. These items are now part of the main Towns Fund Skinnergate and the Yards project, which covers the wider intervention area.
16. A business case has been completed for each of the nine Towns Fund intervention projects and agreement made by the Town Board to progress with submission of business case summaries to government. Three of the summary documents were submitted in July 2021 and the remaining six were submitted at the end of November 2021. The latter are currently being reviewed by government.
17. The development of proposals for property enhancements along Skinnergate and further work within the Yards, has commenced. This is alongside the community engagement which is ongoing relating to the public realm/highway in Skinnergate and into Coniscliffe Road.
18. The Adult Skills project within the Northern Echo building continues, an architect has been appointed, and the T Levels project at Darlington College is progressing into detailed design.

Business Investment

19. General Business Enquiries - throughout October and November 2021, the number of enquiries for business development projects across all sectors increased as confidence levels improved, business support events occurred in face-to-face environments and new growth opportunities could be realised.
20. Covid-19 & Business Support - Darlington Borough Council received £631,502 Additional Restrictions Grant top-up allocation in August 2021. The Council have used this funding to support:
 - (a) Those business sectors identified in the latest Government guidance (June 2021) that we were unable to support due to lack of funds at the time.
 - (b) Businesses who have clear growth and investment plans and job creation goals.
21. This fund must be defrayed by 31 March 2022. The latest performance figures for the ARG top-up scheme are (budget: £631,502):
 - (a) Spend to date: £297,467.
 - (b) Committed: £269,000.
 - (c) Unallocated: £65,035.
22. Cleveland Bridge - officers have been working closely with the Administrators and other stakeholders to facilitate the sale of the assets and the retainment of key Cleveland Bridge artifacts for the benefit of the town.

Councillor Alan Marshall
Economy Portfolio