

COUNCIL
14 JULY 2022

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL OVERVIEW

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform and update Members on the Leader's Portfolio since the last meeting of Council. The following are some of the areas of work under the Leader's Portfolio.

Strategic Transport

2. I chaired the Tees Valley Transport Committee where updates were provided on delivery of the Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan. The funding secured for transport is significant, and in particularly sustainable transport. There will be over £60m per year invested over the next 5 years and this will enable significant improvements.
3. I look forward to a programme of briefings with TVCA on the future of transport.

Peer Review

4. The Council invited the Local Government Association to undertake a Peer Review. Senior Officers and Politicians from other organisations formed the independent Peer Review Team and a programme was developed to assess our Council to help us develop and learn as an organisation. I would like to formally thank the team for the time they took from their busy roles to help Darlington learn and improve as a Council.
5. During the review week they interviewed over 120 people across 38 meetings. Interviewees included staff, members and a wide range of external stakeholders, and I would like to thank all of them for their valuable contributions.
6. As part of the review we organised a tour of our Borough where the story of success is clearly evident. We have an ambitious capital programme and whilst there is lots of hard work ahead, we are determined to deliver a strong position for Darlington's future. In preparing this report I have listed a few of the success stories highlighted that demonstrate the breadth and scale of our ambition:
 - (a) Investment in the Dolphin Centre – for leisure, health and wellbeing of our residents.
 - (b) Feethams House – temporary home of the Government Economic Campus to create high quality jobs that also generate footfall for our town centre economy.
 - (c) Victoria Road Improvements – Create a good first impression of Darlington for people visiting town by train and improve the conditions to do business.
 - (d) Riverside Park – creation of a green environment for town centre residents and employees, with aspirations for more riverside walks along the Skerne to the Rail Heritage Quarter.

- (e) Hippodrome and Theatre Hullabaloo – first class facilities to drive visitors into the town and run programmes to encourage access into the world of culture.
- (f) The new Economic Campus on Brunswick Street – regenerating the area, creating high quality jobs that also generate footfall for our town centre economy.
- (g) The acquisition of Sports Direct – demolition underway to create space for residential living that will support our town centre economy.
- (h) The acquisition of the Northern Echo building to create good quality office accommodation and a hub to help people develop skills needed for the employment market.
- (i) Investment in a modern library facility at Crown Street, that will be complimentary to skills hub in the Northern Echo building.
- (j) Master planning and acquisitions to regenerate the Northgate tower area of town and the creation of a linear park offering opportunities for both commercial and residential development that link to the town centre to the Rail Heritage Quarter and maximise the Skerne.
- (k) Proposals to improve the environment in Skinnergate that will improve trading conditions and deliver an affordable housing scheme for residential living that will also support our town centre economy.
- (l) Introduction of improvements in Coniscliffe Road to support hospitality businesses and encourage the café culture.
- (m) The Yards – investment in our yards to showcase our heritage and create a pleasant trading environment that traders are embracing and taking pride in looking after.
- (n) The modernisation and investment in the Market Hall to provide an attractive environment to trade and provide new hospitality and entertainment opportunities.
- (o) The acceleration of Central Park, Ingenium Park and Faverdale to bring forward investment creating job opportunities for all.
- (p) Darlington Station – providing a new station for the town, regeneration of the surrounding area and the foundations for improved public transport systems across the Tees Valley.
- (q) Neasham Road affordable housing and joint venture schemes bringing much needed housing and delivering a very challenging site at Neasham Road.
- (r) West Park & Burtree Garden Village receiving garden village status that will provide high-quality places and the housing needed to support the economic growth of the town.

- (s) New Cattle Market – A long-held ambition to relocate the Cattle market to a more suitable location has been delivered.
 - (t) The Rail Heritage Quarter – on site now and will be a world class visitor destination to attract visitors to support our economy and be used to help regenerate the wards surrounding it by offering facilities and programmes to residents.
7. We received very positive verbal feedback and now await the Peer report. We expect to receive this early summer and this will be taken to a Cabinet meeting in the autumn. Upon receipt of the report we have agreed with the LGA to develop an action plan that will also be taken to a Cabinet meeting in the autumn.

Climate Change

8. The Cross Party Climate Change Working Group met on 20 June when they discussed staff engagement and a new zero waste map. Members of the group were also shown some resources on what other councils are doing and will be identifying case studies to explore in greater depth.

Darlington Economic Campus

9. GPA continue the fit out on the Feethams Office. Staff are now taking up occupation moving out of Bishopsgate House, and the Feethams Office is expected to be fully fitted out and staffed over the summer months.
10. The Council has had preliminary discussions with the developer of the Brunswick site and pre planning works continue.

Towns Fund

11. The Towns Fund Investment Plan continues to progress with work and design ongoing in relation to Skinnergate and The Yard's. This includes improvement and enhancements to both the public realm and properties, with a recent addition being a new living green wall in Buckton's Yard.
12. Also progressing is the new TLevels facility at Darlington College, which has appointed a contractor to deliver the works and is expected to be starting in the summer holiday period at the college. Design development continues for the proposed Adult Skills facility, which is to be provided within the acquired Northern Echo building in Priestgate.
13. Progression of all nine Town Fund interventions to date, has enabled the release of significant capital and revenue funding from government. DBC is required to report on progress and performance on a bi-annual basis.
14. Darlington's participation in the Southampton University *'Feeling Towns Programme'* continues to progress well. The visiting researcher has spent several days in and around the town centre and Northgate areas engaging with groups and individuals, aimed at developing an understanding of what 'pride' means to different people (*"people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community"*), linked closely with the Towns Fund and levelling up.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Dulston". The signature is stylized and includes a vertical line to the right of the name.

**Councillor Jonathan Dulston
Leader of the Council Portfolio**