

COUNCIL
29 SEPTEMBER 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.

Improvements to Coniscliffe Road

2. Cabinet have approved the allocation of £700k from the Tees Valley Indigenous Growth Fund for upgrading and improvement works in Coniscliffe Road and noted that a further £240k will be match funded through Darlington's Town Board Fund.
3. Cabinet supports the upgrading and improvement works to Coniscliffe Road to accommodate pavement café culture, strengthen green infrastructure, promote active travel, support local businesses and create a safe, attractive and working streetscape for the future.

Ingenium Parc – Proposal to Market and Dispose of Land for Development

4. Cabinet received a report seeking approval to market the land at Ingenium Parc and to seek preferred developers. The Council owned land, which amounts to 16.40 HA, is located within Darlington's Eastern Urban Fringe and is allocated for employment uses.
5. The land has an access road which was funded by the Tees Valley Combined Authority and the Council is now looking for developers with a view to attracting manufacturing and industrial units and to provide infrastructure and services so that the wider site is development ready in the future.
6. Cabinet have agreed to the disposal of plots on a direct sale and to market the land to seek Expressions of Interest if required. Cabinet also agreed to delegate authority to the Chief Executive to negotiate provisional disposal terms and the final terms will be reported to a future meeting of Cabinet.

Central Park

7. On 26 August 2022 practical completion was achieved for Innovation Central - the new business incubation facility on Central Park. The £8.3m development will provide one floor of laboratory or "clean workspaces" with three upper floors being of varying sizes of mainly compact offices. The design offers flexibility in room sizes, but the initial layout provides for 5 labs and 39 offices.
8. The lease for the facility will be completed with NEBIC in September. The intention is that Innovation Central will provide complementary space to the Business Central building, which NEBIC currently manage on Central Park. We understand there is already

considerable interest in the new building and it is hoped that news of the first tenants is only a few weeks away.

9. The remainder of Central Park will now receive landscaping, branding. This will provide a much-improved developer-ready site of great interest to local and relocating/expanding businesses, especially on the back of the Economic Campus developments nearby.

Climate Change

10. The consultants working on the BEIS pilot study into designating heat network zones have submitted their report to BEIS. We are waiting to hear what the next stages of the process are.
11. We have created an 'introduction to climate change pack', for Parish Councils to use with their communities. We are grateful to Neasham Parish Council for acting as a critical friend in this process. Once they have given us feedback on what we hope is the final version, it will be available on the Council's website.
12. A Zero Waste Map showing where residents can reduce, reuse, recycle and repair has been added to the Sustainable Darlington section of the website.
13. We are looking at improving our engagement with all sectors, with improvements to the website, collaboration with other departments (such as business development and community safety) and utilising opportunities such as digital billboards as they arise.

Towns Funds

14. Confirmed acceptance from Government of submitted performance and governance returns in June 2022 has released further Towns Funding to Darlington in line with our agreed financial profile. All nine Town Fund projects now have capital funding availability to enable progression.
15. Towns Fund projects continue to be developed and delivered. In the Town Centre, design work is progressing at the Northern Echo building in relation to the proposed Adult Skills facility. Whilst in Skinnergate and The Yard's, delivery and design work providing improvement and enhancements to both the public realm and properties continues, in particular the improvements to the look of the entrances of Clark's and Buckton's Yards from High Row.
16. The new T Levels facility at Darlington College has now commenced onsite, with early groundwork completed and structural work planned to commence.
17. In Northgate, engagement and design continues, with property acquisitions being progressed, alongside design work for the Garden Street/Weir Street area.
18. Further enhancements for Victoria Road are planned and will be progressed over the coming months.

19. Darlington`s participation in the Southampton University `Feeling Towns Programme` aimed at developing an understanding of what `pride` means to different people, continues to progress well. The research team have reported progress to the Town Board.

Darlington Indoor Market

20. Phase 2 of the redevelopment of the Indoor Market commenced in August 2022. The works include the refurbishment of the entrances and trading area, new public toilets and toilets for traders, improved signage, and the conversion of an empty retail unit in the market vaults into a new bar area. It is anticipated that all work will be completed by December 2022.

Business Investment

21. Plans for Darlington Business Summit 2022 are now well underway, with a programme offering a series of free-to-attend activities over three days, dedicated to local businesses and jobseekers needs. The Business Submit runs from the 5 -7 October 2022 and includes the DL Expo (business-to-business exhibition), a Jobs Fair, with more than 60 employers register to attend, and a business support showcase, offering a range of information and advice for local businesses.
22. Business investment enquiries continue to increase, as business confidence returns. The main area of interest continues to be industrial development land availability and town centre retail/leisure space.
23. The Business and Intellectual Property Centre - Tees Valley has officially opened its doors at Cockerton Library. The service will support entrepreneurs as they start and grow their business thanks to free one-to-one support and access to industry leading business resources. The BIPC will help people from all walks of life to start and grow a small business with free business databases, market research, confidential 1-1 support, advice clinics and workshops.

Planning and Development Management

24. There have been 355 complaint cases recorded in 2021. 335 closed with justification from officers.
25. There have been 203 complaint cases recorded in 2022. 165 closed with justification. In addition to the 5 emergency complaints, 58 open cases are currently under investigation,
26. Since the beginning of August 2020, 1,390 applications have been received of which 53 are categorised as major. 1,101 decisions have been made in this period, including Committee Decisions, Chairs Delegated and Delegated Decisions.
27. Notices under Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act [untidy land and buildings] have been served on a property in Skinnergate and Northgate House. Satisfactory conclusions have been arrived at, relating to both buildings, which will involve significant external appearance changes to the betterment of the Town Centre, supporting the work currently being undertaken under the Towns Fund.

28. Since the last overview report, progress has been made with colleagues across the Tees Valley to deal with this issue on a catchment area basis. Our Local MPs have also been briefed and have raised the issue at Westminster. Since the last report, further guidance has been issued by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, supported by a Ministerial Statement, which has clarified the position for all authorities within the catchment area, including Darlington. Essentially for the moment, new development involving overnight stays is paused until early next year, by which time Natural England will have in place a system for developers to purchase mitigation credits relating to nutrients, which will allow planning permissions for overnight stays including housing to be recommenced.

Environmental Health

29. The Environmental Health Section has responded to 1357 requests for service in Quarter 1 2022/2023. The main categories of these requests are:
 - (a) Food – 133
 - (b) Licensing – 122
 - (c) Noise – 247
 - (d) Planning Enquiries – 77
 - (e) Refuse – 99
 - (f) Pest – 169
 - (g) Personal searches – 339
30. Officers from Environmental Health have been working with officers from Public Health with regard to the Darlington Healthy Weight Plan. The Healthy Early Years (HEY) Catering Award is just one small part of the Darlington Healthy Weight Plan. The aim is to use community led changes to environments in which children and young people live, play and socialise. To shift towards the healthy choice being the 'normal' choice – joined up community-based systems approach in nudging towards more healthy family behaviours. The Catering Award is designed to help achieve the aims of the Healthy Weight Plan. The award is open to nursery settings and childminders.
31. Darlington College Childcare Centre has recently applied and been successful in achieving the award. Officers from Environmental Health will promote the award during routine visit to early years settings.
32. Enforcement Action has been taken with regard to a cafe called Country Cuisine, 9b Brinkburn Road, Darlington. During a routine visit, an officer noted that the premises and equipment were extremely dirty and there was no supply of hot water at the time of inspection resulting in a voluntary closure. The premises was to be given a hygiene score of zero which is the lowest hygiene score possible.
33. Following a formal PACE interview, the proprietor agreed to accept a simple caution and, as the food business operator, he must undertake Food Hygiene Training to a minimum of level 3. This is to be completed within 3 months and pay a contribution of a £100 towards the investigation costs.

Councillor Alan Marshall
Economy Portfolio