

COUNCIL
24 NOVEMBER 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. The Tees Valley Combined Authority £310m City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement Programme delivery plan for 2022/23 to 2026/27 has now been agreed with government. Investments include:-
 - (a) £86.5m on rail infrastructure projects
 - (b) Almost £48m in active travel schemes to encourage cycling and walking
 - (c) Over £46m investment in bus
 - (d) Almost £83m to be spent on highway maintenance and small-scale improvements across Tees Valley
 - (e) The remainder is to be spent on digital transport projects, supporting decarbonisation, ensuring access to employment and education opportunities and multi-modal investments to support the Mayoral Development Corporations and regeneration of town centres
2. Transport Committee was held in Middlesbrough and part of the meeting was dedicated to site visits, where we took the opportunity to visit some of their transport investment schemes. We visited the traffic control centre which is a Tees Valley partnership arrangement that manages traffic signals and other technology across the Tees Valley. This will see significant investment across the Tees Valley to enable better management of the road network.
3. The first phase of the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Project will see 131 Electric Vehicle Charging Points installed across the region, with installations currently underway. The Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy is also in production, which will update the current Design Guide and will set out the strategy for the region, helping to secure further funding for electric vehicle infrastructure.
4. Sustrans have been appointed to deliver Active Travel Hubs in each Local Authority area, building on previous activity delivered through other hubs, offering practical support to help people walk and cycle more. New partnerships have been formed with established organisations in Redcar, Darlington and Hartlepool to provide temporary locations, and new staff have been recruited.

5. Active Travel England, the new executive agency tasked with delivering the Government's cycling and walking strategy, asked all local transport authorities to complete a self-assessment. In the Tees Valley, this was a collective response on behalf of TVCA and the five local authorities. The levels were scored 0-4. Following moderation, Active Travel England agreed with our self-assessment of Level 2: *Strong local leadership and support, with strong plans and emerging network*. This puts us in a strong position to secure additional funding for active travel in the coming years. Of the 79 local transport authorities, none are at Level 4 and only 5 are at Level 3.
6. TVCA formally entered the Enhanced Partnership in July 2022, alongside the five local authorities and the local bus operators. Design work is progressing on the nine priority bus corridors, and interventions to improve the customer experience are being progressed, including better information, vehicles and better integration with other modes. The Kids Go Free offer over the summer holidays was well received and is in place again over the October half-term holiday.
7. Locally, it is recognised there are still issues with performance of bus services in Darlington. More staff are due to complete training imminently which should assist, and other interventions being developed. We continue to monitor this and press for improvements to be delivered as soon as practically possible.

Darlington Station

8. The Full Business Case for the Darlington Station project was finalised and submitted in early August. The construction of a temporary car park on the cattle market site has commenced and demolition work has started on the Neasham Road side of the station in order to clear the site in advance of construction commencing.

Climate Change

9. The Cross-Party Working Group on Climate Change met on 17 October. The meeting was attended by the Junior Members of Youth Parliament. The Junior MYPs are both 10 years old and both have environmental aims in their manifestos. They have been asking pupils in their schools for ideas and presented the outcomes to the Group.

Darlington Economic Campus

10. The Government Property Agency continues to work with the identified developer for the permanent campus location at Brunswick Street. The Council have now commissioned an Economic Impact Study on the development Darlington Economic Campus (DEC). This should be completed by early 2023.
11. Representatives from DEC attended the Business Summit meeting to outline their experiences since relocating to Darlington, highlighting some of the positives they had encountered since moving to the town.

Towns Fund

12. The DLUHC are to undertake a series of deep dive audits across the country, which will be completed in towns in receipt of a Town Deal. Based on the level of perceived risk and a random sample, it has been confirmed that Darlington Council would not be the subject of this audit in 2022.
13. Delivery onsite continues on the Skinnergate and the Yards project, with enhancement to properties and public realm. Construction continues on the college T Levels project, with structural steelwork installed. In addition the Rail Heritage Quarter, part funded by the Town Fund, project continues.
14. Works associated with the west of station improvements at the top of Victoria Road are progressing, with the enabling demolition work programmed in 2022.
15. Elsewhere design work continues at the Northern Echo building in relation to the proposed Adult Skills facility.
16. In Northgate and the Garden Street/Weir Street, design and property acquisitions/negotiations being progressed. Including acquisition negotiations for Northgate House and properties on Northgate itself.
17. The development of the Creative Strategy progresses for Victoria Road, which will identify options and a clear strategy for further enhancements to the street leading up to Bank Top Station. Including improvements to exterior of selected properties and the re-establishment of the pocket park at the junction with the ring road. Engagement with the wider community is key to the successful development of the creative strategy.

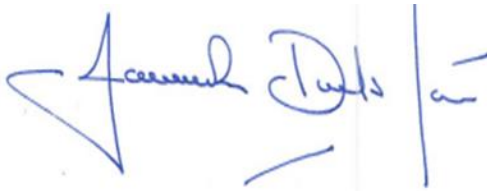
Crown Street Library

18. I attended the Annual Meeting of the Crown Street Library Trustee Board, on the 19 October. Because of the building work currently underway the meeting was held via Teams. It was good to meet with the Independent Trustees and we heard about the renovations underway and the developing plans for the re-opening of the refurbished building next year. The meeting can be viewed on YouTube [Crown Street Library Trustees Board - YouTube](#)

Winter Pressures event

19. The Winter Pressures Event was held in Central Hall at the Dolphin Centre on the evening of Thursday 6 October 2022. It was a free drop in event where residents of Darlington could find out what support is on offer as a potentially tough winter approaches.
20. There was representation from both DBC officers and external organisations, including Age UK, Citizens Advice, Darlington Association on Disability, First Stop, Green Doctor, Kings Church Foodbank. Morrisons Trust, Social Prescribing, The Bread & Butter Thing, YMCA and the 700 Club.

21. There was a clear willingness of the voluntary sector to work with the Council in supporting residents. A video was filmed on the night featuring each organisation represented, outlining what services they provide. This will be used on the Council website and through social media to help people access the support they might need. Learning from the event will be used to help shape any future activity in this area.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Dulston', with a vertical line to the right of the name.

Councillor Jonathan Dulston
Leader of the Council Portfolio