

COUNCIL
24 NOVEMBER 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.

Ingenium Parc – Proposed Development Update

2. Cabinet have approved the sale of approximately 11.28 acres (4.56 Ha) of land at Ingenium Parc, Darlington, subject to the grant of planning permission for development. The Council-owned land is a key employment site, located within Darlington's Eastern Urban Fringe.
3. An enquiry has been received from a developer with an occupier identified to acquire a site and as part of their proposals they have indicated that, subject to planning permission, they would build a road to access their site that would in turn open up more of the Council's land.
4. The sale of the land at Ingenium Parc will help to achieve development of further plots and new income through business rates and will assist business development and job creation in Darlington.

Planning and Development Management

5. There have been 355 complaint cases recorded in 2021. 335 closed with justification from officers.
6. There have been 226 complaint cases recorded in 2022. 172 closed with justification.
7. Since the beginning of August 2020, 1,411 applications have been received of which 59 are categorised as major. 1,196 decisions have been made in this period, including Committee Decisions, Chairs Delegated and Delegated Decisions.
8. 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.
9. 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. There is a degree of uncertainty since the change in Government Leadership on how this issue will progress or change in the coming weeks. Guidance is awaited

Environmental Health

10. The Environmental Health Section has responded to 1,305 requests for service in Quarter 2 2022/2023. The main categories of these requests are:

- (a) Food – 109
- (b) Licensing – 105
- (c) Noise – 286
- (d) Planning Enquiries – 62
- (e) Refuse – 86
- (f) Pest – 184
- (g) Personal searches – 287

11. Environmental Health have recently taken enforcement action in relation to a food premises in Darlington. The business was visited as part of a routine inspection programme and was prosecuted due to the conditions found.

Charges

- (a) 1 The premises was not kept clean as required by Retained Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 Annex II Chapter I Para 1, contrary to Regulation 19 of the Food Safety & Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013.
- (b) Equipment in the premises was not kept clean as required by Retained Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 Annex II Chapter V Para1(a) contrary to Regulation 19 of the Food Safety & Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013.

Outcome

The defendant attended Peterlee Magistrates' Court yesterday and pleaded guilty.

Fines/costs

£695 (The defendant informed the court that he has a low income, and this was reflected in the unusually low fine)

12. Teesside Airport has applied to the Food Standards Agency to become a Border Control Post. This is required to allow the importation of food from Third Countries e.g. Africa.
13. Initially it was believed officers had approximately 12 months to facilitate this work, but following a number of high-level meetings and the announcement that Doncaster Airport is to close from the end of October, this process is now being fast tracked and it is hoped that the matter will be finalised in matter of weeks.

14. Due to current staff resource issues, the plan is to 'outsource' the day-to-day operation of the Border Control Post to officers of River Tees Port Health Authority who operate the port at Teesside, and for this purpose a Service Level Agreement is being developed.
15. Officers in Environmental Health will remain the Competent Authorised Officers for the Border Control Post and will maintain ultimate responsibility for its operation.
16. The details and costings are yet to be finalised.
17. Officers from Environmental Health, in conjunction with Public Health, have introduced the Darlington Healthy Catering Award Scheme.
18. The aim is to use community led changes to environments in which children and young people live, play and socialise. To facilitate the shift towards the healthy choice being the 'normal' choice with a joined-up community-based systems approach to encourage more healthy family behaviours.
19. The award is assessed and managed within Environmental Health Team. A link to the award is given below:
[Darlington Borough Council - Darlington Healthy Catering Award Scheme](#)
20. Darlington College Childcare Centre has recently achieved the Healthy Early Years Award. The centre put healthy eating high on the agenda along with oral health and physical literacy as it seeks to give the children the best start in life. Healthy Early Years Award is just one small part of the Darlington Healthy Weight Plan.
21. Councillor Jon Clarke, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education, presented the Childcare Centre with its award and said: "It's brilliant, I'm 100% behind it and I will be banging the drum for other settings to try for the award."
22. The Air Quality Annual Status Report 2022, reporting on the air quality monitoring carried out during 2021 and measures to improve air quality, has been approved by Defra. Air quality levels across all monitoring sites around the Borough remain below the annual air quality objective for nitrogen dioxide. Work will continue in conjunction with other council sections, neighbouring councils and through the Tees Valley Combined Authority, to implement local actions to continue to improve air quality within the borough.

Business Investment

23. Hundreds of businesses and local job seekers took advantage of the first ever Darlington Business Summit held at the Dolphin Centre from Wednesday 5 until Friday 7 October.
24. Organised by Darlington Borough Council, and in conjunction with Darlington Business Club, the three-day event gave local business people, and those who are thinking of starting a business, the chance to network with others and to find out more about the help and support available across the borough and the wider Tees Valley.
25. Work opportunities and training became the focus of the middle day of the event as Darlington Jobs Fair took centre stage. More than 800 people browsed a wide range of stalls from around 60 local employers and training providers. The event gave people the chance to chat face to face with employers to find out more about the local opportunities on offer. A live jobs board also gave people the chance to apply for immediate vacancies across more than 100 jobs.
26. The final event provided the Darlington economic update to an audience of business leaders and business stakeholders. In addition, a special presentation was made by Darlington Economic Campus, detailing the opportunities presented by the location of more than 1600 Civil servants in the town.
27. Following the Business Summit, the Business Investment Team have received a number of enquiries from local businesses seeking advice on guidance on a range of issues including recruitment, energy efficiency and digital marketing.

Climate Change

28. The second quarter reports on the climate change action plan are being gathered by the Climate Change Officer. He will soon be starting work with lead officers on next year's milestones.
29. We are looking at ways to improve both the data gathering and reporting process. We are working with the Systems Development Team to see if we can use the same systems as the corporate action plan.
30. Work has also started with Senior Management Teams to develop an adaptation plan, to ensure that we are ready for whatever climate change challenges us with.
31. In light of the short timescales and the first come first served nature of recent government funding, we are looking to develop a pipeline of projects.

Darlington Town Fund

32. 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 Yards, delivery and design work providing improvement and enhancements to both the public realm and properties continues, with a number of properties along Skinnergate improved, adding to those within the Yards.

Improvements have also been undertaken to the entrance way into Mechanics Yard from High Row.

33. The new T Levels facility at Darlington College is progressing well onsite, with structural steelwork now erected.
34. Victoria Road enhancements are now progressing, with plans for lighting enhancements, improvements to exterior of selected properties, re-establishment of the pocket park at the junction with the ring road and plans to explore opportunities for new artwork. The draft creative strategy is in development and will be shared with the wider community in the coming weeks.
35. 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 toward completion of the academic report by the University.

Councillor Jamie Barch
Cabinet Member with Economy Portfolio