

COUNCIL
26 JANUARY 2023

OVERVIEW OF LOCAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Local Services Portfolio.

Climate Change

2. Installation and commissioning of the 22kW and 50kW electric vehicle chargers in town centre car parks, that comprise the first phase of the Tees Valley network is now complete. TVCA are leading on a communications strategy around the EVCPs, which seeks to update residents on the availability of the chargers.
3. Further to the provision of off-street EVCPs, it's been agreed that TVCA will develop an EV Infrastructure Strategy, which will ensure we secure quality and consistency in delivery across Tees Valley, which will include provision for on-street infrastructure. This work will consider where infrastructure is needed and what the best model is for future phases of delivery. This Tees Valley strategy is being developed and a draft will be available early this year.

Highway Maintenance Programme

4. The following Highway Maintenance schemes are ongoing:
 - (a) Unc. Greenhill Road, Heighington: Footway Refurbishment (0.302km)
 - (b) Unc. Pierremont Crescent West Back Lane: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.117km)
5. The following Highway Maintenance Schemes are now completed:
 - (a) Unc. Faverdale: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.474km)
 - (b) C55 Prior Street: Footway Refurbishment (0.466km)
 - (c) Unc. Carriageway Micro Asphalt Contract (46 locations, 9.051km)
 - (d) B6279 Tornado Way (Lingfield Point Junction): Carriageway Resurfacing (0.223km)
 - (e) Unc. Swaledale Avenue: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.252km)
6. A new data driven approach to gully cleansing is being implemented to ensure more regular attendance at locations which require more frequent cleansing. Cleansing frequency will be set based on recorded silt levels with those gullies filling quicker receiving more visits throughout the year. Silt levels will be recorded at each visit and reviewed annually to ensure frequencies are set at the appropriate level.
7. Work has taken place with Northumbrian Water Ltd (NWL) to investigate highway flooding and potential highway flooding at a number of locations.

8. Following heavy rain experienced towards the end of 2022, a number of surface water issues were reported by members and the general public which were impacting on use of the highway. Working with partners, officers have investigated these locations, where not resolved, actions will be developed where appropriate.

Highway Improvement Schemes

Woodland Road (Local Cycling and Walking Improvement Plan - LCWIP)

9. The latest phase of the LCWIP which connects Woodland Road to Duke Street via Outram Street is now complete and a lessons learned workshop has been held for phase 1 which was attended by Members and Officers. The session looked at the Consultation, Design, Construction delivery and Communications throughout. Following the session, actions were identified which will be implemented on future walking and cycling schemes. The next phase of delivery will be the Duke Street section. Due to inflationary pressures in the construction industry the scheme is temporarily paused. The final costs and options are being reviewed with funders. It is still expected that the project will commence early this year.
10. Government have agreed the provisional programme of investment across the Tees Valley for the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement programme with TVCA. This will include rail, walking and cycling schemes and bus corridor improvements. For Darlington, a number of walking and cycling routes have been identified along with improvements to key bus corridors in the borough. The programme will now be developed with feasibility work underway that will be brought forward for consultation and briefings as it is developed.

Head of Steam

11. The museum ended the year with the extremely popular Santa at the Station weekends, which saw nearly 1000 children visit Santa throughout December. The museum closed its doors to the public on Friday 23 December with a Festive Farewell event to celebrate the museum taking a holiday ready for reopening as a brand-new attraction in 2024.

Libraries

12. Cockerton Library reopened after a modest refurbishment in November 2022 with a new, dedicated team of staff. Reopening the refreshed space with an engagement-led approach has seen borrowing figures increase and they are now at levels not seen since recording began in 2018/19 (prior to this the branch was operating on full time hours). In October 2022, 7534 books were borrowed from Cockerton Library. Links have been established with neighbouring schools, Bookstart Rhymetime sessions take place several times a week for families with babies and pre-school children, after-school story and craft sessions are held along with Lego Clubs, and specific groups for adults have been added to the programme, including Rock of Ages and Watercolours, which illustrates the different ages and demographics who are now using the space and accessing books.

Hippodrome

13. The Pantomime Adventures of Peter Pan starring Christopher Biggins opened on Friday 9 December, with occupancy across performances exceeding all previous years. The first week included sell out performances with school children and families from across the region attending. The Hippodrome's Place for Everyone fund has also supported ten school visits to the pantomime as well as donations of tickets to Ukrainian families, young carers, care leavers, Future Pathways and fostering services, all of whom would not have been able to attend a performance without the funds support.

Creative Darlington

14. Over 300 artworks, drawings, watercolour paintings, photographs, print and work in other media in the Borough Art Collection, which are not currently available to the public digitally via the Art UK website, were photographed in Darlington between 1 and 6 December 2022 and are expected to be made available to the public digitally in Spring 2023 as the Council is in the process of negotiating a partnership agreement with Art UK to share more of our public collection online.

Town Centre Partnership and Events

15. The Christmas shopping season was launched in November with the annual Christmas lights switch on bringing thousands of visitors to the town centre. To support the high street retailers and encourage movement of people around the town centre, the team programmed and delivered two ice sculpture trails which attracted visitors to Darlington. 2022 also saw the launch of a new Christmas tree festival, which saw 75 community groups decorating trees displayed throughout the high street.
16. The 2023 events programme will offer exciting activities, events and animation, including some new cultural dates and engagement opportunities, which started with a Chinese New Year celebration on 22 January 2023.

Councillor Andy Keir
Local Services Portfolio