

COUNCIL
23 MARCH 2023

OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY PORTFOLIO

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

Environmental Health

2. The Environmental Health Section has responded to 981 requests for service in Q3 2022/2023. The main categories of these requests are:
 - (a) Food – 93
 - (b) Licensing – 103
 - (c) Noise – 130
 - (d) Planning Enquiries – 92
 - (e) Refuse – 51
 - (f) Pest – 163
 - (g) Personal searches – 231
3. Environmental Health has successfully prosecuted two residents for non-compliance with a Community Protection Notice for failing to remove unhygienic waste in a timely and proper manner from the rear yard of their property at Brook Terrace, Darlington. The residents were each fined £220, ordered to pay costs of £408 and a victim surcharge.
4. **Care for Clean Air**

Environmental Health has launched a 'Care for Clean Air' campaign to encourage motorists not to leave their engine idling whilst their vehicle is stationary. Leaving an engine idling whilst parked up concentrates emissions from the engine and can lead to poor localised air quality. Information has been provided to schools as children especially can be more vulnerable and the campaign hopes to encourage parents to switch off their engines whilst waiting for children to finish school.
5. **'Ready to Burn'**

Officers from Environmental Health have been visiting service stations, retail premises and supermarkets to check on compliance with the Domestic Solid Fuels Regulations. These Regulations restrict the sale of certain solid fuels with the aim of improving air quality for example wood sold in smaller quantities must be certified and sold 'Ready to Burn' with below 20% moisture. The 'Ready to Burn' logo must be displayed on the packaging of the product or displayed alongside the specific wood or manufactured solid fuel at the point of sale. Generally, compliance was found to be good at the 37 premises inspected in January 2023.

6. **Border Control Post-Teesside International Airport**

Officers from Environmental Health have been working with the management team at the airport alongside officers from the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and officers from River Tees Port Health to make an application for the airport to be designated as a Border Control Post. The application was successful and designation has been granted from January 2023 and will allow the airport to facilitate the import of certain categories of food and flowers from the rest of the world countries, both EU and Non EU.

Climate Change

7. We are continuing to work with the Event Management Team on the Sustainability Event on 2/3 June. Businesses are engaging and we are looking forward to another excellent event in town.
8. We are working to improve the reporting system so that Members and senior management will be able to see progress on actions. We had hoped to be able to use Power BI but this is not going to be an option in the short term. The new system will be in place for the beginning of the next financial year.
9. We have been working with teams to bring together the adaptation actions we already have in place and what we need to add, to ensure that the council is resilient to the impacts of climate change. We will be presenting the adaptation action plan to Cabinet on 25 April.

Development Management

10. There have been 244 complaint cases recorded since 2022. 207 closed with justification.
11. Since the beginning of August 2020, 3619 applications have been received of which 96 are categorised as major. 3152 decisions have been made in this period, including Committee Decisions, Chairs Delegated and Delegated Decisions.

Nutrient Neutrality

12. 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 this year, by which time Natural England will hopefully 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. Solutions have however been found on a limited number of sites to ensure that a limited supply of implementable permissions is ongoing and available. Natural England have recently announced there will be a system in place in the coming months to enable developers to purchase credits to offset the impact of nutrients to allow development to recommence.

Town Fund

13. Delivery onsite continues on the Skinnergate and the Yards project, with enhancement to properties and public realm.
14. Construction works have completed on college T-Levels project, with handover delivered and a formal official opening planned in March 2023. In addition the Rail Heritage Quarter project continues, which is part funded by the Town Fund.
15. Works associated with the west of station improvements at the top of Victoria Road are progressing, with the enabling demolition work now commenced.
16. Elsewhere design work continues at the Northern Echo building in relation to the proposed Adult Skills facility.
17. In Northgate and the Garden Street/Weir Street, design and property acquisitions/negotiations are being progressed including the acquisition of number 156 Northgate, which has now entered the design stage, and ongoing acquisition negotiations for Northgate House.
18. The development of the Creative Strategy for Victoria Road is being finalised and will be shared with the local community and other stakeholders. This sets the scene and assists in identifying opportunities and a clear strategy for further enhancements to the street leading up to Bank Top Station. Including improvements to exterior of selected properties. Works to re-establishment the pocket park at the junction with the ring road are ongoing.

Business Investment

19. The Darlington Jobs Fair returned in February with 75 employers showcasing the opportunities they currently have available. Alongside the employers, there were several advice agencies offering support and guidance to those seeking work.
20. On the day itself, almost 1500 jobseekers attended. It was a very busy four hours and every visitor received a copy of the "Darlington Jobs" newspaper. All the remaining newspapers have gone to local Job Centres for distribution, so every copy has been put to good use.
21. We are currently undertaking post-event evaluation to identify any successful outcomes. However, here is a selection of some of the initial feedback from employers:
 - (a) 'One of the best, if not the best Job Fair we attend in the North of England'
 - (b) 'Everything went smoothly for us, and we got some really interesting candidates that hopefully we can progress into employment with us. Also made some good contacts for future partnerships with various education and training organisations that will help our recruitment efforts'.
 - (c) 'What a great day it was yesterday at the dolphin centre, we have received applications by the time we got back to the office so a successful day'

22. One of the stars of the show, on the day itself, was the 'Job Seekers Translation and Support Hub' which was so busy, extra staff had to be drafted in to support it. Demand was so high both from employers and job seekers, we are doing it all again on Thursday 29th June 2023 to tie in with the end of the academic year. 32 employers have already signed up.

Councillor Jamie Barch
Economy Portfolio