

COUNCIL
20 JULY 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. As part of a £2 million (£2M) project to install electric vehicle charging points across the Tees Valley, charge points have now been installed in car parks across Darlington. 50 kW and 22kW charge points have been installed at Abbots Yard with 22 kW charge points installed at Winston Street North, Commercial Street West, Park Place East and West, Kendrew Street and Feethams Multi Storey.
3. A one-year pilot has commenced on using Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) as a 'drop-in' fuel replacing diesel to reduce the carbon emissions in eleven refuse collect vehicles. HVO is a 'second generation' biofuel when made from Used Cooking Oil (UCO) such as rapeseed, sunflower, soybean, and palm oil, as well as animal fats, following a chemical process involving treatment with hydrogen. HVO is now being used by a number of fleet operators and Local Authorities, being lower cost than electric vehicle alternatives (however is approximately 50p a litre more than diesel) and achieving emissions reduction of over 90% when compared to conventional vehicles.

Highway Maintenance Programme

4. Highway Maintenance Schemes on site:
 - (a) Patching Prior to Micro-Asphalt Contract (18 sites)
 - (b) Unc. Lanethorpe Road / Burnside Road (Phase 1): Carriageway Reconstruction (0.340km)
 - (c) Parapet Upgrades: Safety Kerb/Guardrail installation (7 sites)
 - (d) Clifton Road West Back Lane: Back Lane reconstruction (0.136km)
 - (e) Avon Road Estate : Footway Refurbishment (0.712km)
5. Highway Maintenance schemes due to start:
 - (a) C38a Neasham Road (Phase 2): Carriageway Reconstruction (0.320km)
 - (b) Unc. Burnside Road (Phase 2): Carriageway Construction (0.440km)
 - (c) Unc. Barnes Road (Phase 2): Carriageway Reconstruction (0.406km)
 - (d) A167 Feethams Avenue: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.174km)

6. Where possible, disruptive maintenance works, together with essential utility works have been scheduled to take place during the school summer holiday period when traffic on our roads is lighter and disruption can be kept to a minimum.
7. Highway Maintenance Schemes completed:
 - (a) Unc. Shearwater Avenue: Footway Refurbishment (0.054km)

Highway Improvement Schemes

Woodland Road Phase 1 (Local Cycling and Walking Improvement Plan - LCWIP)

8. Work commenced in Duke Street section on 26 February 2023 and is programmed into seven phases of work to minimise disruption to businesses. The work is due to be complete by November.
9. We continue to work with businesses to both inform them of the progress on the scheme and any works that directly affect access to their property. We will maintain access to businesses throughout the duration of the works.
10. Remedial work to part of the Woodland Road cycle scheme will be carried out by the contractors after testing by our engineers found parts of the scheme between Milbank Road and Greenbank Road to not be of the required standard. There will be some minor daytime works starting from 17 July, but the surfacing and lining work will be carried out from Monday 31 July from 19:00 to 05:00 each night to minimise disruption. All the work is being carried out at the contractor's expense.

Local Transport Plan

11. In March, Cabinet approved the Local Transport Plan (LTP) programme of works for 2023/24. This will see over £3M of Council investment in our transport network over the coming year. Over £2.1M of that funding will be invested in highway maintenance to improve the condition of our road network. £893k will be spent on network management, active and sustainable transport and speed management and road safety programmes. This investment will be complimented by significant investment in Darlington from £310M City Region Sustainable Transport Fund awarded to Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) that will see investment in Rail, Bus, Walking and Cycling projects.
12. Consultation of the Safe Route to School 20 mph LTP schemes on Croft Road for Hurworth Comprehensive School and on Beechwood Avenue for St Augustine's Primary School was carried out in April/May 2023. Engagement has been strong with a high number of responses. Officers are reviewing those comments as part of ongoing development of the schemes. Scheme design is progressing for Abbey School, Hurworth School and Reid Street Primary School.

Arriva

13. Arriva announced a number of proposed reductions to services in Darlington, with effect from Sunday 9 July. These proposed bus services cuts across the Tees Valley have been raised with both Arriva and TVCA as the Local Transport Authority for the sub-region.
14. Following discussions between TVCA, the Tees Valley Mayor and Council Leaders, a decision has been taken to use some Bus Service Improvement Plan+ (BSIP+) funding from Government to reinstate some of the services that were announced to be cut, guided by the calculated cost per journey on these routes.
15. While the negotiation of these emergency contracts has protected the service 12 and provide opportunity for a new through-service to Stockton, unfortunately, due to mobilisation issues from the operator, there will be a temporary cessation of Evening and Sunday services on routes for the 3 & 4. It is anticipated that these will restart in September, or sooner if possible.

Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCP)

16. TVCA are leading on work to develop a region-wide Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy that will deliver a consistent approach to providing charging infrastructure, including on-street provision. Mott MacDonald have been appointed and have delivered two out of three workshops to the TVCA EVCP Task and Finish Group. The strategy is still in draft phase awaiting the final workshop. This will enable officers to seek approval of a policy for Darlington that is consistent across the Tees Valley. A number of internal working groups have been set up within the Council in readiness for this and the subsequent infrastructure roll-out required.
17. TVCA have been awarded a Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Capability Fund allocation of £576k which will be used to:
 - (a) Increase the capacity and capability of the Combined Authority to plan and deliver EV infrastructure.
 - (b) Enable TVCA to have a published EV infrastructure strategy.
 - (c) Enable TVCA to take advantage of the LEVI Capital Fund.
18. Subsequently, TVCA has submitted an expression of interest for the LEVI Capital Fund on 26 May, the key aim of which is to deliver scale in local charge point rollout. This application will be assessed to determine which tranche of two local authorities will progress in, tranche 1 (FY 23/24) or tranche 2 (FY 24/25). If TVCA are allocated into tranche 1 the deadline for bid submission will be 17 November 2023.
19. Some companies are approaching authorities and TVCA offering roll out of infrastructure free of charge. These offers will be considered but quality and compliance with the TVCA strategy will be a significant consideration.

Head of Steam

20. Since the closure of the museum site for redevelopment, Head of Steam Museum has engaged with over 3,000 people through the 'Museum on the Move' outreach sessions in local schools, community centres, libraries and at outdoor sites such as North Park, where the annual Vintage Vehicle Rally was hosted in May.

Hippodrome

21. On 14 June, ITV Tyne Tees featured 'Mike and Millie Go To The Seaside' which took place in Darlington Hippodrome's Hippo Lounge. The play, written by Smashing Mirrors Theatre Company, was designed for those living with later-stage dementia and attended by residents and carers from North Park Care Centre. The performance was supported by funding from the Theatre's 'A Place for Everyone' fund and Creative Darlington.

Libraries

22. The restoration of Darlington Library is well underway, with a reopening date of 9 September 2023.
23. Phase 1 of the work is almost complete, with minor finishing touches still to add. Phase 1 refers to the adult lending section, the Children's Library, The Study, new toilet facilities, and a refurbished lift. A small sensory reading nook has also been added.
24. Work continues on Phase 2 which incorporates The Centre for Local Studies, The Art Gallery and three new areas: The Hoskins Room, named after the original architect, The Reminiscence Room, created for older people and those with dementia, and The Hive, which, with significant funding from the Arts Council, will open residents up to a world of innovative technology and digital equipment with the aim of sparking interests and aspirations and putting people on the pathway to greater success.

Creative Darlington

25. The Council's Heritage and Culture Fund (Creative Darlington) supported the following projects:
 - (a) Cockerton Silver Band, to promote a ticketed concert on 20 May at Central Hall to mark their 150th Anniversary Concert;
 - (b) venue and technical costs of a concert held on 21 June at Darlington Hippodrome, featuring various vocal collectives on Make Music Day;
 - (c) two education programmes involving partnership working between Darlington Hippodrome, Durham Music Service and Orchestras Live in 2023/24;
 - (d) Cabinet of Curiosity Studio's 'Grow Your Own Creativity' programme of family orientated activity.

Town Centre Partnership and Events

26. Darlington celebrated the Coronation of Kings Charles III with a fantastic turnout of visitors enjoying the historical event in Darlington. The following weekend, Darlington hosted a live screening of Eurovision for the BBC and TVCA, which consisted of a full day of music, activities, and entertainment, which was very well received.
27. Judges from Northumbria in Bloom were welcomed to the town for their spring visit, with follow up visits to take place at the end of July, in addition to the National Britain in Bloom visit. This brings together multiple of community projects, photography competitions and engagement with schools.
28. June and July marked the launch of the summer programme with a wide variety of events scheduled to welcome visitors to Darlington. A new Sustainability event was launched for 2023 that attracted eco-friendly activities, science workshops, cycling and businesses showcasing their products, services and projects.
29. Upcoming events in the town centre include Darlington by the Sea (24 to 28 July), the Pride Weekender (12 to 14 August), Fairytales & Legends Day (24 August), Dinosaur Day (31 August), Last Train Home (2 September) and the R’N’B Weekender (8 to 10 September).
30. The Town Centre Team continues to work with town centre businesses to provide support. A social media training session was facilitated at the beginning of July, offering advice and guidance to help businesses promote themselves more effectively. Working with local commercial agents and the marketing team, the team are developing a new video to highlight the benefits of working in Darlington with the aim of attracting new businesses to establish themselves in the town centre. This initiative has been commended by the High Streets Task Force, who have expressed a wish to monitor how this new and innovative project develops.
31. Following a review of last year’s costs, and in considering the high ticket price that would have been required to fund the event, the decision has been taken to not include a fireworks display in the events programme this year.

Environmental Services

32. The winter season 2022/23 concluded in May. Over the course of the season, the Council used 4.929 tonnes, gritting roads on 138 occasions.
33. The success of the Garden Waste Subscription Service continues, with an increase in subscriptions: 9,763 subscriptions were received by the end of May, compared to a total of 9,743 last year. Subscriptions continue to be received, as the service goes from strength to strength.

Councillor Libby McCollom
Local Services Portfolio