

COUNCIL
28 SEPTEMBER 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 1,278 requests for service in Q1 2023/2024. The main categories of these requests are:

(a) Food	107
(b) Licensing	80
(c) Noise	260
(d) Planning Enquiries	68
(e) Refuse	106
(f) Pest	242
(g) Personal searches	234

Student EHO's

3. Regionally, and indeed nationally, the Environmental Health profession is generally an ageing one. There are very few newly qualified students coming through the educational programme and as current professional officers retire, the "pool" of available officers is decreasing. This is also an issue with our Authority. Therefore we are keen to encourage young people to develop this career path where we can.
4. Additionally in light of the recent developments at the airport/increase workload, officers in Environmental Health in partnership with Public Health have recruited 2 part-time student EHO's. They will spend part of their time in Environmental Health and part at Port Health and other relevant departments where they will receive extensive training and experience in order to become Environmental Health Officers.

Ban on Single Use Plastics

5. A range of polluting single-use plastics will be banned in England later this year.
6. The ban will include single-use plastic plates, trays, bowls, cutlery, balloon sticks, and certain types of polystyrene cups and food containers. This ban will be introduced from October 2023, allowing businesses time to prepare.
7. From October, people won't be able to buy these products from any business - this includes retailers, takeaways, food vendors and the hospitality industry.

8. Officers from Environmental Health have sent a letter to all registered takeaways informing them of this and have arranged, through the Communications team, to send a similar message to all business via social media.
9. Advice visits and enforcement, moving forward, will be incorporated into the normal inspection regime and complaints and requests for advice will be responded to in the normal manner.

Climate Change

10. Following the motion to Council in July, the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan are being revised to reflect the new target.
11. All Assistant Directors and their senior management teams are meeting with the Sustainability and Climate Change Officer to develop the actions that will be needed to get us to net zero by 2040.
12. A new trajectory will be calculated for this more ambitious and challenging target.
13. We have amended the job description for the Climate Change Officer post in recognition of the increased responsibility on the team and this is currently going through job evaluation.

Towns Fund

14. The Town Fund interventions continue to progress across the town centre and at gateways to the town centre. The tender to procure a partner to redesign, refurbish and ultimately manage the Northern Echo building has been published. The tender period is due to run until early November with appointment of a partner in late November following the evaluation process.
15. Work on Skinnergate and the Yards is continuing with notable improvements to several shop fronts. The redesign of Coniscliffe Road is currently going through the planning process. The refurbishment and redevelopment of 156 North Road into quality office space is also in the statutory planning approval process. Improvements to Victoria Road has commenced.

Victorian Indoor Market

16. Phase 3 of the refurbishment programme has commenced with the development of new stalls in the trading area. Several pre-let enquiries have been received from new traders interested in tenancies for the stalls. The street food hall continues to be successful, and a new café has opened on the High Row side of the market building.

Business Investment

17. The Business Investment Team continue to promote Darlington as a place for business growth and business investment, including attendance at the Tees Valley Business Summit, one of the largest business support events in the Tees Valley.

18. Business investment enquiries continue to increase. The main areas of interest are commercial office space and town centre retail/leisure space.
19. The Business Growth Masterclasses have continued, delivered in collaboration with Business Doctors. Businesses from a range of sectors have taken part, and each business benefited from 1:1 mentoring support and individual business assessments.
20. The Business Investment Team have been working closely with the Northeast England Chamber of Commerce to develop the Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) for Tees Valley. This is now complete and alongside the specific skills required to build new green economy, and ease the recruitment crisis in the health sector, businesses involved in the LSIPs overwhelmingly identified communication skills as a key priority, and digital skills were raised across the board.

Estates and Property

21. The residential development at Neasham Road continues to grow with all the foundations for the proposed Council Houses completed and several of the structures progressing well. Many of the Esh/JV houses are now occupied, and sales are continuing despite the change in market conditions. Proposals to bring forward the remaining undeveloped part of site are well advanced and subject to planning permission it is anticipated that activity will start on site very soon.
22. At Ingenium Parc, legal contracts are currently being drawn up for the development of an 8-acre site on Plot 1 for a recognised distribution operator with potential for over 200 new jobs. The sustainable urban drainage (SUDs) and landscaping works are complete.
23. North Cemetery Lodge sold well at auction recently and a planning application is awaited.
24. Proposals for the residential development and parkland restoration at Blackwell Grange are progressing. A planning application has been submitted and consultation with stakeholders continues.

Planning Policy

25. A report will be presented to this Council meeting seeking adoption of the Skertingham Garden Village Supplementary Planning Document. This policy is necessary to protect the interest of residents. It is not the end of story; many more milestones will need to be crossed if Skertingham is to be progressed including Master Planning and Planning Applications. Further, I have made it clear that engagement must be ongoing with local people.
26. Work is ongoing on a new Housing Strategy for the Borough; it is currently at the internal consultation stage but will be coming forward to Cabinet soon to seek approval for public consultation.

27. An application is currently awaiting determination for an initial phase of development on Burtree Garden Village including access road, landscaping and a first phase of up to 750 new homes. Details are still being worked out in relation to Nutrient Neutrality mitigation, strategic highways matters and developer contributions prior to determination.
28. I am pleased to confirm the appointment of Lauren Gibson as our new Ecologist. The authority has gone a number of years without being able to fill this role and has been reliant on buying in external technical support.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy Portfolio