

COUNCIL
25 JANUARY 2024

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. In support of our LTP priority to reduce the impact of transport on the environment, Darlington Travel Advisors are working with Sustrans (Active Travel Hub), to promote the new cycle route on Woodland Road with employers/businesses along the route, including Darlington Memorial Hospital.
3. Meetings have also been held with Durham Wildlife Trust, to collaborate on designing some guided rides to include our local nature reserves. They are keen to explore options to install cycle parking at some key locations to support public access.
4. Support for modal shift is available through the active travel drop-in sessions at Crown Street Library. These Tuesday afternoon sessions have been working well, with the team engaging with several individuals interested in learn-to-ride sessions. There are also free fortnightly Dr Bike sessions at the Market Hall, where residents can get a full health check for their bike.

Highway Maintenance Programme

5. Highway Maintenance Schemes on site:
 - (a) C71 Houghton Bank, Heighington: Drainage Repairs / Carriageway Reconstruction (0.188km)
6. Highway Maintenance schemes due to start:
 - (a) C182 Thompson Street East: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.183km)
7. Highway Maintenance Schemes completed:
 - (a) A67 Merrybent (Phase 3): Carriageway Reconstruction (0.426km)
 - (b) C39 Walworth Road, Heighington: Carriageway Recycling (0.668km)
 - (c) Unc. Priestgate/Prebend Row: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.227km)
 - (d) B6279 Staindrop Road: Carriageway Patching (0.323km)
 - (e) Unc. Coombe Drive: Carriageway Patching (0.534km)
 - (f) C34a Lime Lane: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.585km)
 - (g) Unc. Bates Avenue: Footway Refurbishment (0.108km)

8. The last few months have seen higher levels of rainfall than normal, and this has impacted on flooding incidents and road conditions.
9. There have been issues with rural roads, mainly due to the amount of water coming off the already saturated fields. The ditches and drainage have struggled to cope. Each of these areas will be revisited once it is dry enough to carry out a full survey at each location and ensure that the drainage system in place is working as it should be. We will also be looking to improve any of these areas if possible.
10. Working with Councillor Riley, ditches on private land that have not been maintained by the landowner have been identified. We will be writing to them to remind them of their obligations.
11. The Department for Transport have also indicated larger increases in Highway Maintenance settlements from 2025/26 that will require pipeline of maintenance schemes to be developed by Local Authorities during the next financial year. Further guidance is awaited from Government.

Local Transport Plan (LTP)

12. TVCA and Local Authorities are developing initial concepts on a pipeline of programmes and schemes that could feature in the Department for Transport's City Region sustainable Transport settlement (CRSTS) round 2. Further guidance is awaited from Government.
13. In March this year, Cabinet approved the LTP programme of works for 2023/24, investing £3.5M in our transport network, including maintenance schemes. Below is an update on delivery of the LTP:
 - (a) Officers are reviewing the significant number of responses to safe routes to school consultation at Hurworth Comprehensive School and St. Augustine's Primary School, with design changes in progress for the latter.
 - (b) Consultation will take place in the New Year on the Abbey Juniors and Infants safe routes to school scheme, on Abbey Road and Cleveland Avenue.
 - (c) Officers are reviewing the current town centre cycle parking provision, with a view to making improvements enabling parking to be safer and ensuring that supply is adequate and appropriate for use.
 - (d) Officers are currently in the process of reviewing all bus stops in the borough to address maintenance issues. This audit will seek to identify and then rectify issues at bus stops such as replacing broken/damaged timetable cases, repairing bus stop shelters and renewing lining/signage where required.

Bus Services

14. Connect and TVCA are in the process of revising the way at stop bus information is displayed. The review will include a revised layout of information, possibly displaying departures in a chronological order rather than by service as now and removal and replacement of Connect branding with new TVCA branding. TVCA will consult with Local Authorities on the new design for at stop timetables and but hope to roll out the new design in January 2024.
15. There are a few minor timetable changes to bus services taking effect in the New Year these include:
 - (a) Additional early morning weekend journeys on service 2A to support Amazon's new shift pattern. This is a DBC supported service using DfT grant funding ringfenced to the 2/2A.
 - (b) Withdrawal of three early morning and three early evening X26/X27 journeys from Faverdale and West Park. These are being withdrawn to improve punctuality and reliability on the rest of the route through to Catterick.

Hopetown Darlington

16. Pupils from Reid Street Primary School and Directors from Homes By Esh were invited on site to see where Wagon Woods will be constructed in the new year. Sponsored by Homes by Esh and designed by Creating Adventurous Places (CAP.co), Wagon Woods is the brand new £600,000 railway-themed, immersive outdoor adventure playground, part of the £35 million scheme at Hopetown Darlington.
17. Hopetown's community engagement programme continues with 155 children engaging with the school outreach programme, and over 950 people enjoying the 'Santa on the Move' event at Firthmoor Community Centre.

Darlington Hippodrome

18. This year's pantomime, 'Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs', opened on Friday 8 December to a full house and ran until Sunday 31 December. Starring Gareth Gates, the pantomime received excellent reviews from theatre reviewers and audiences and is forecast to exceed the financial success of the previous year's pantomime.
19. The Theatre's charitable fund, 'A Place for Everyone', has supported the local community and schools this year, awarding £24,017 in total. Support included offering visits to the theatre to see shows, supporting transport costs, delivery of theatre workshops and tours, funded places for looked after children on youth theatre and dance courses, and enabled artist development in Darlington.

Libraries

Libraries supporting older people

20. Recruitment has taken place for more volunteer drivers to help with the free home deliveries service. A monthly delivery of books or audiobooks can be arranged to the homes of anyone living in Darlington aged 60 or over, along with a friendly doorstep chat.
21. Darlington Library reopened with a wonderful Reminiscence Room, bookable and free for older people and/or those with dementia. The Library has a specially curated Reminiscence Collection, which can be enjoyed when using the space.
22. A monthly group at both Cockerton and Darlington Libraries is held for older people called 'Musical Memories'. Staff lead the session using music, photographs, stories and Reminiscence Boxes, to help spark enjoyable memories and encourage discussion.

Libraries at Christmas

23. Both libraries were decorated for Christmas with beautiful displays which captured the imagination of adults and children alike. A special video was produced showcasing Christmas at the Library, and the joy of reading alone or as a family.
24. Christmas Parties were held for young children with a visit from Santa and a special party with The Grinch. Adults were treated to an evening of poetry, spoken word and live music at our sold-out Winter HARK! Event. There were also festive-themed Musical Memories sessions and a festive talk from a fashion historian.

Libraries School Engagement

25. Arts Council England funded the brand-new digital innovation centre, 'The Hive', at Darlington Library. Engagement has taken place with schools, and many are now buying into the newly designed library packages, which aim to improve opportunities for school pupils to engage in STEM, art and literature activities. School pupils are enjoying designing and making items utilising the 3D printers, laser cutters, Cricut machines, and learning via the VR headsets.
26. Schools also took part in the Northern Children's Book Festival, participating in workshops with a range of different authors, with many pupils also visiting to borrow books from the Library.

Libraries Neurodiverse Offer

27. In a bid to support health services, Cockerton Library now offers a neurodiverse session. The free, bookable session has been designed with support from Daisy Chain and is specifically for pre-school children who have already received a diagnosis or whose parent/carer believes they may be neurodiverse.
28. 'Quiet Time' has also been introduced at Darlington Library weekly to support children who may benefit from knowing when the Children's Library will be free from activity.

Creative Darlington

29. Cabinet of Curiosity Studios delivered three family focused 'Grow Your Own Creativity' workshops free of charge in Darlington Library in December 2023, with Arts Council England and Heritage & Culture Fund (Creative Darlington) budget support. An additional activity will also be provided in Darlington venues in Spring 2024.
30. Darlington Tracks HARK! Winter event, part of Darlington Library's 'Your Creative Story' programme was a sell-out success, with performances from artists and bands, including the Ivor-Novello award winning The Bookshop Band, set alongside readings and a first performance of a newly commissioned song by Pat Plumb and Eve Conway (both Darlington based). The event was backed by Creative Darlington, Darlington Library and Arts Council England Project funding.
31. The 'Your Creative Story' programme was one of three programmes in the North East nominated by Arts Council England for their Arts Council Award within the Journal Culture awards 2023, which were held at the Fire Station in Sunderland on Thursday 13 December.
32. Laura Wilson's 'Circling' exhibition opened in Darlington Library on Saturday 16 December, celebrating Darlington's textile heritage and links to linen, alongside exploring the artist's weaving practice.

Town Centre Partnership and Events

33. Town centre independent businesses were all proactive and joined in Colour Friday - the anti-Black Friday promotional day at the end of November. Both online and instore activity encourages shoppers to support independent retailers. Support was given from Holly Tucker & Co giving national coverage and promotion. BBC Look North aired the story throughout the day to highlight the businesses coming together in Darlington and showcasing the town's offer.
34. Christmas themed events were scheduled on weekends to attract visitors. 12 ice sculptures were displayed around the town centre on Saturday 9 December to attract visitors to Darlington and move around the town centre to explore and see new places.
35. The Town Centre team also supported the Purple Flag assessment, which took place in the town centre on Saturday 9 December with visiting Assessors from Liverpool and York. The Purple Flag Award is given to Towns/Cities with a diverse mix of dining, entertainment and culture. Towns given this award must provide a safe, vibrant and varied night out. A whole range of partners and venues took part in the assessment, showcasing the town, including The Covered Market, Forum Music Centre, Darlington Hippodrome, Number Forty, Dolphin centre, Gaming Lounge and several others. Assessors met a wide range of licensees, police officers, restaurant owners, CCTV operators, Town Centre Partnership Team and the Deputy Leader of the Council.
36. Assessors were impressed with the sheer diversity of the evening economy in the town, the self-evident strong partnerships between operators, the Council and the Police and the safe atmosphere across Darlington.

37. The Town Centre Partnership Team trialled a 'pop-up' lunchtime stand at Redde Northgate. The aim was to engage with employees at a local large business to promote the town centre. It was well received and future dates across Darlington in other large organisations are being planned. This promotional activity is to increase awareness of the high street and highlight the events programme to different audiences.

Councillor Libby McCollom
Local Services Portfolio