

COUNCIL
21 MARCH 2024

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL OVERVIEW

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform and update Members on the Leader's Portfolio since the last meeting of Council. The following are some of the areas of work under the Leader's Portfolio.

Strategic Transport

Darlington Station

2. Good progress continues to be made on the Darlington Station project. On Neasham Road, where the new station building and multi storey car park is being built, blockwork and cladding installation has commenced.
3. Also, on the eastern side Network Rail have established their site compound and been carrying out enabling work on the rail infrastructure. In mid-February hoardings started to be installed within the existing station to enable works to commence to demolish the 1960's retail units and begin to create space for the stairwells and lifts to access the new footbridge, which will connect the existing station to the new platforms and station building.
4. On the Western Gateway preparatory work is continuing to put in place the necessary agreements, carry out surveys and design work ahead of the demolition of the two remaining properties (1-4 Park Lane and 1 Waverley Terrace) which were acquired for the project.

Transport Investment Programme

5. In January, TVCA Cabinet unanimously approved a £1bn investment programme which comprises 26 new projects aligned to the Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan. This decision will enable development work to commence on the programme.
6. Key projects specific to Darlington, include:-
 - (a) £250m allocation to the Darlington Northern Link Road
 - (b) £60m allocation for investment in digital transport technology across Tees Valley
 - (c) £20m allocation for the introduction of autonomous public transport vehicles
 - (d) £5m allocation for developing a proposal that gives more local control over the Tees Valley rail network
 - (e) £40m allocation for infrastructure upgrades to enable the introduction of new train services between Darlington <-> Hartlepool
 - (f) £20m allocation for the redevelopment of Teesside Airport Station
 - (g) £35m allocation to support the growth of rail freight across Tees Valley
 - (h) £45m allocation to support access to employment, education and training by investing in bus / active travel infrastructure

- (i) £10m allocation to help overcome barriers to employment experienced by people across Tees Valley

Bus Service Improvement Plan

7. Following the Arriva service withdrawals and the introduction of a number of subsidised services from summer 2023 initially to March 2024, these have now been re-procured and will operate through to March 2025. In Darlington this includes:-
 - (a) Service 6/6A – continuation of the new service (6/6A), which connects Darlington and Stockton via the Airport and includes Hurworth (replacing the previous service 12)
 - (b) services 17 and 18 – reinstatement of hourly service between Mowden and Darlington (replacing part of the previous service 3), and reinstatement of hourly service between Darlington and Harrowgate Farm (replacing part of the previous service 3A)
 - (c) Services 3 and 4 - Reinstatement of late Monday – Saturday evening, and a Sunday daytime service
8. From the BSIP / BSIP+ funding which has been awarded to TVCA, one of the identified priorities was to make improvements to bus shelters and improve the at-stop timetable information. It is planned that from April 2024 a new timetable template will be launched and installed.

Climate Change

9. The Climate Change Working Group meeting for February was deferred because the Climate Change Team attended the APSE Energy conference on 28 and 29 February, along with the Cabinet Member for Resources and the Chair of the Working Group.
10. Contact has been made with the new Tees Valley Project Manager in the North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub. The Hub is there to help the Council find resources for net zero projects. A meeting has been arranged for the Tees Valley Project Manager to meet with officers and discuss potential projects.

External Meetings and Engagement

11. I have attended a range of external meetings and engagements:
 - (a) NE Chamber of Commerce Event: I gave an update on the Council budget, and the wider context of LA budgets in general; an update on DBC major projects, and impact on the local economy. This was concluded with a Q&A.
 - (b) I attended Transport for the North annual conference on 5 February. A number of notable speakers – Combined Authority Mayors (Steve Rotherham, Andy Burnham, Tracy Brabin), Huw Merriman MP (Minister of State for Rail and HS2). The consequences of the cancellation of HS2 was a hot topic; there was general consensus – cross party – that the North will be the poorer for its cancellation. The need to transform the bus industry was discussed – with insights from a range of interested parties.

- (c) I attended the Transport for the North Board meetings 8 February and 20 March.
- (d) Rail North Committee on 21 February. The main discussion related to ongoing performance issues with some Train Operating Companies.
- (e) I met with Tom Nutt, Chair of the Town Twinning Association, to discuss their plans for the 2025 celebrations.
- (f) Darlington Town Deal Board on 27 February. The board received and discussed updates on progress of projects.
- (g) I visited STEMFest Tees Valley on 7 March. This was the first occasion that this event had been held in Tees Valley. It was a fantastic 2-day event; the first was for primary school children, followed by secondary school age. It was a wonderful opportunity for school aged young people children to see some of the many exciting STEM careers available locally.
- (h) TVCA Cabinet met on 15 March.

Councillor Steve Harker
Leader of the Council Portfolio