

COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

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 1,167 requests for service in Quarter 4 2023/2024. The main categories of these requests are:

(a) Food	156
(b) Licensing	95
(c) Noise	198
(d) Planning Enquiries	60
(e) Refuse	92
(f) Pest	200
(g) Personal searches	197

Climate Change

3. We are coming towards the end of the hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) trial with the fleet management team. To date, swapping diesel for HVO in our refuse trucks has saved more than 132 tonnes CO₂. The issue going forward is the cost difference between HVO and diesel, so we are working with the team to look at other alternatives.
4. We have worked with the library team to set up a seed swap library in Central Library. The first staffed session on 22nd March was very successful with lots of residents coming in and swapping their own seeds for different ones.
5. We have also set up meetings with the Northeast and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub, to look at what support they can offer us. The Climate Change Officer will be looking for potential projects with teams and taking those to the Hub for their help in finding funding.

Development Management

6. The application for the New Treasury Building is now with the Council following a formal announcement from the Government. We have already had a meeting with the applicants to discuss further detail regarding the appearance of the building. These discussions have been productive and are ongoing.
7. Further work is ongoing following the Outline Approvals for housing recently Granted at Coniscliffe Park. Discussions are being had with the developers with regard to the further involvement nearby residents prior to a formal detailed submission.

8. Enforcement reports relating to unauthorised development are currently increasing. Most reports continue to be solved at officer level. All more significant cases where there are ongoing investigations are updated confidentially at Planning Committee on a Monthly basis.

Building Control

9. Building Regulations applications and works progressing as normal, no issues to be reported.
10. Changes to the Building Regulations, responsibilities and operating procedures are ongoing. The changes and additional requirements/roles/responsibilities are putting stress on the resources available.
11. Surveyors are registered with the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) and are still in progress with their competence validation. Processes are in place for the required BSR surveying supervision to ensure the service and surveyors remain legal under the Building Safety Act in the interim.
12. Development of methodology for retrieving and reporting Building Control KPI's to the Building Safety Regulator is underway. ICT are assisting in this. Development processes have been hindered by the late submission of detailed guidance from the BSR.
13. Dangerous structures: British Steel – Whessoe Road retaining wall. Monitoring is ongoing by British Steel and their engineers. No other major DS issues/occurrences elsewhere.

Town Fund

14. Delivery onsite continues along Skinnergate and the Yards project, with enhancements completed to a significant number of properties and to the public realm. Public realm proposals are being developed alongside this, including on Coniscliffe Road.
15. The Rail Heritage Quarter, part funded by the Town Fund, project continues.
16. The proposals for the re-development of number 156 Northgate have now received Planning approval and EOI interest from prospective contractors have been received.
17. The funding for the redevelopment of the former Northern Echo building, within the town centre, has been secured. Following a procurement process we have appointed Adavo as our preferred partner to design, build and operate the building. We are finalising contract and lease arrangements with some emergency work already commenced. It is anticipated that structural work will commence in July following gaining the necessary statutory notices. It is anticipated that the work will be completed in March 2026.
18. A feasibility study for the Edward Pease House continues to be progressed.
19. The design of several property enhancements along Victoria Road are well developed and have now commenced.

20. As part of the budget speech in March 2024 it was announced that Darlington had been selected as part of the second tranche of the Long-term Plan for Towns. The funding will amount to £20m over 10-year period 25% revenue 75% capital. The emphasis of the fund is on focussing upon the development of interventions through community groups with an aim of developing community, civic and social fabric for an area. Work has commenced in engaging with community groups and a review of the current Town Board to reflect the overall ambition of an increase in community representation. A future cabinet report detailing the fund and the required governance arrangements will be presented in due course.

Business Investment

21. The number of business investment enquiries continues, with the main area of interest from the hospitality sectors.
22. The Business Investment Team have successfully led the delivery of the following events:
 - (a) Darlington Jobs Fair – 8 February 2024
 - (b) STEMfest Tees Valley – 6/7 March 2024
 - (c) Kings Award Information Event 12- March 2024
23. The roll out of UK Shared Prosperity Funded business support activities continues, with support now in place for:
 - (a) Delivering Net Zero
 - (b) Digital Transformation
 - (c) Securing Financial Investment
 - (d) Smarter Adoption of digital technology
 - (e) Creative & Visitor Economy Development
 - (f) Supply Chain Opportunities

The Business Team are working with the Tees Valley Combined Authority to raise awareness of these schemes and encourage Darlington businesses to engage and participate.

24. Officers from the Business Investment Team are attending the UK Real Estate and Inward Investment Festival in Leeds. This 3-day event brings together the public sector with Government, investors, funders, developers, and housebuilders. The event gathers key players, influencers and decision makers within the investment and real estate markets to highlight investment and development opportunities, whilst connecting and facilitating new relationships to drive economic growth through development and regeneration.
25. Plans are now in development for an autumn Jobs Fair on 2 October 2024.

Estates

26. Work continues to progress well on the restoration of the Blackwell Parkland including the pond, railings and perimeter walls and will continue throughout 2024. Sites works on the proposed residential site at Blackwell are also progressing well.

Planning Policy

Burtree Garden Village

27. Discussions are on-going to agree a Masterplan for the area prior to the application being considered by the Planning Committee

Skerningham Garden Village

28. Developers have carried out a consultation exercise on the Masterplan for the area and will be communicating the responses to any people/organisations that participated in the near future.

Homes Strategy

29. Work is on-going on the Homes Strategy, and we are currently in a period of engagement with stakeholders prior to the presentation of a draft for consideration and wider consultation.

Housing Delivery

30. The completions for the financial year 2023/24 was 359 with 397 starts, this shows a downturn from previous years which was expected due to the impact of Nutrient Neutrality. Completions and starts have increased in the last quarter of the year.

Biodiversity Net Gain

31. The statutory requirement for 10% Biodiversity Net Gain was introduced for minor development (apart from exemptions) on 2 April, this joins the requirement for major developments which was introduced in February.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy Portfolio