

**COUNCIL**  
**18 JULY 2024**

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**OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Economy Portfolio.

**Environmental Health**

2. You will be aware of the disturbing events that have occurred in funeral homes in Hull/East Riding and the Government request for Environmental Health officer help. Environmental Health Officers have attended the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) training sessions and have visited the six Funeral Businesses in Darlington to carry out reassurance visits. The Team will report back to the MOJ on any findings from the visits however Environmental Health have not found any major issues during the funeral business visits in Darlington.
3. Environmental Health promoted Noise Action Week 2024 in May asking people to be considerate to neighbours and keep noise down. This included signage on the digital billboard and social media messages. Noise complaints are on the increase with Environmental Health investigating 911 complaints received in 2023/24.
4. Environmental Health assisted with the fire at the Ashcourt Waste Transfer Station on Mewburn Road/Whessoe Road, Darlington with Environmental Health Officer's attending site to provide liaison between the Fire Brigade and the Council.

**Climate Change**

5. Work has started on the annual report for 2023/24, which will be presented to Cabinet and Council in September. Emissions continue to fall and are now almost 53% lower than our 2010 baseline.
6. We are arranging a Members briefing on 19 September, where we can delve into the issues more deeply.
7. The Eco Fair held on 8<sup>th</sup> June was very successful, with 5-6,000 enjoying the stalls and activities.

**Development Management**

8. 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. A request has been made to the Government's agent to organise a meeting with local residents to explain directly to them the benefits and likely impacts upon them. The outcome of this engagement will form part of the decision-making process.

9. Further work is ongoing following the Outline Approvals for housing recently Granted at Coniscliffe Park. A 106 legal agreement has now been signed. Discussions have been held with the developers with regard to the further involvement of nearby residents prior to a formal detailed submission. The details and modifications as a result of this engagement have been incorporated into plans which will form part of the detailed planning submission.
10. 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, Members are updated confidentially at Planning Committee on a Monthly basis.
11. The National Infrastructure PIERproject at Byers Green for solar panels is now progressing. Unlike most applications a decision on the matter will be dealt with by a Government Inspector, not the Council. The matter will be heard at a Public Inquiry. The Council will be making submissions to the Inquiry in due course.

### **Building Control**

12. Building Regulations applications and works progressing as normal, no issues to be reported. Awaiting submission of Northern Echo Building Control application.

### **Building Safety Regulator**

13. Two Surveyors are now fully validated for the BSR with remaining surveyors progressing toward validation allowing the service to continue to function legally under the Building Safety Act 2022. Internal procedures are being developed further to align Building Control KPI's with BSR KPI's.
14. ICT are programming Uniform database reports for KPI reporting to the BSR. ICT programming has been slower than expected and this may affect the reporting to the BSR in July.

### **Towns Fund**

15. Delivery onsite continues along Skinnergate and the Yards project, with enhancements completed to a significant number of properties and to the public realm. The planning application for Coniscliffe Road public realm proposals has been submitted.
16. The Rail Heritage Quarter, part funded by the Town Fund, project continues.
17. The proposals for the re-development of number 156 Northgate have now received Planning approval. The tender process to appoint a suitable contractor has been commenced.
18. The funding for the redevelopment of the former Northern Echo building, within the town centre, has been secured. Following a procurement process the Council has entered into contract with our preferred partner, Adavo. It is anticipated that structural work will commence in August, subject to gaining the necessary statutory notices. It is anticipated

that the work will be completed in March 2026.

19. The design of proposals for the Edward Pease House continues to be progressed. Planning and Listed Building consents will be applied for later in 2024.
20. The design of several property enhancements along Victoria Road are well developed and have now commenced.
21. 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. The membership of the Town Board has increased 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 Team**

22. The number of business investment enquiries continues, with the main area of interest from the hospitality sector.
23. TVCA have now launched the UK Shared Prosperity Funded business support programme, with projects in place to support business start, growth and innovation. The Business Investment Team is working with TVCA to raise awareness of the new support measures and encourage Darlington businesses to engage and participate.
24. Officers from the Business Investment Team attended the UK Real Estate and Inward Investment Festival in Leeds. This three-day event brought together more than 13,000 representatives from the public sector, civil service, investors, funders, developers, and housebuilders. The team, working alongside colleagues from TVCA were there to promote opportunities for investment in Darlington and raise the profile of the Borough by highlighting all of the current investments now underway. Hopefully this will lead to potentially more investment enquiries.
25. The Business Investment Team have been promoting the Kings Awards, one of the most prestigious business accolades in the UK, encouraging local businesses to submit applications. One such business is NCB Hazcheck (based at Faverdale) who have been awarded the King's Awards for Enterprise for Innovation, awarded in recognition of their class leading Hazcheck Detect Cargo Screening software.
26. Plans are now in development for an autumn Jobs Fair on 2 October 2024.

### **Estates**

#### **Blackwell Parkland**

27. The restoration of the Blackwell Parkland including the pond, railings and perimeter walls are nearing completion and together with the mown paths and wildflower meadows the

whole area has been transformed. Public reaction to the works has been well received and it is anticipated the park will be open to the public this summer.

### **Faverdale Burtree Garden Village**

28. Planning permission for Phase 1 of the proposed Garden Village development has recently been granted subject to the Section 106 agreement and work to bring forward Reserved Matters applications in respect of Cells L, M & O on the Council's land at High Faverdale Farm are being progressed. The main spine road to serve Phase 1 is to be built between Rotary Way and Burtree Lane and tenders for the road and infrastructure work are due to be issued by Homes England, early July 2024.

### **Special Free School at West Park**

29. In reference to the Cabinet Report dated 7 November 2023, terms for the leasing of land to the Department for Education (DfE) for the construction of a new SEND school have now been set out in principle, subject to Council approval. The DfE will shortly begin a feasibility study which will inform the costs for which the Council is responsible, subject to agreement of a cap on costs. A further cabinet report is targeted for late 2024/early 2025 following the outcome of this work.

### **Planning Policy**

#### **Burtree Garden Village**

30. The Masterplan for the area has been agreed and the first planning application has been considered and approved by the Planning Committee.

#### **Skerningham Garden Village**

31. Developers have carried out a consultation exercise on the Masterplan for the area. The next part of the process is for the Council to consider whether or not it can agree the Masterplan.

### **Homes Strategy**

32. Work is on-going on the Homes Strategy, and we are currently in a period of engagement with stakeholders. A draft for consideration and wider consultation will be placed before Members after approval of the Council Plan.

### **Biodiversity Net Gain/Nutrient Neutrality**

33. The Council continues to update information on its website on both Biodiversity Net Gain and Nutrient Neutrality.

### **Conservation Areas**

34. Following the recommendations from the work that was carried out on the Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Action Zone a suggested amendment to the Northgate

Conservation Area has been proposed and Cabinet approval has been sought for a thorough consultation to be carried out with all interested parties.

**Councillor Chris McEwan**  
**Economy Portfolio**