

COUNCIL
18 JULY 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.

Highway Maintenance Programme

2. The following Highway Maintenance Schemes are now on site:
 - (a) Patching Contract: Carriageway Patching (18 sites)
 - (b) Heighington Footways (Phase 3): Footway Reconstruction (0.319km)
3. The following Highway Maintenance schemes are due to start:
 - (a) Avon Road Estate Footways (phase 2): Footway Resurfacing (0.404km)
 - (b) C38a Neasham Road (Phase 3): Carriageway Reconstruction (0.214km)
 - (c) A1150 Salters Lane North: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.891km)
 - (d) A68 West Auckland Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.510km)
 - (e) Micro Asphalt / Surface Dressing Contract (4.185km, 27 sites)
 - (f) A67 Piercebridge: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.882km)
 - (g) Unc. Roundhill Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (1.68km)
 - (h) B6280 Yarm Road Hundens Lane X Roads: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.231km)
 - (i) Unc. West Auckland Road West Back Lane: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.190km)
4. The following Highway Maintenance Schemes are now complete:
 - (a) Unc Swaledale Avenue: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.275km)
 - (b) A67 Coniscliffe Road: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.440km)
 - (c) Unc Barmpton Lane: Carriageway Reconstruction (0.810km)
 - (d) Patching Contract: Carriageway Patching (18 sites)
 - (e) A167 Croft Road (Tees View) Carriageway Remedials (0.050km)
 - (f) Unc Riverside Way: Carriageway Resurfacing (0.310km)

Safer Routes to School (SRTS)

5. A consultation has been completed on a scheme that will introduce a 20mph zone on Abbey Road and Cleveland Terrace covering the frontages of Abbey Infant and Junior Schools. There is general support for the proposals, and we are in the process of producing an Engagement Report summarising consultee responses. Subject to traffic regulation orders we are aiming to deliver the scheme towards the end of the financial year.
6. A scheme for St. Augustine's Primary School was previously consulted on. Taking account of responses received, a revised scheme will be consulted on in July.
7. A scheme for St. Bede Primary School on Thompson Street East was consulted on, with a closing date of Sunday 23 June.
8. A scheme for Hurworth Comprehensive was consulted on and is programmed to be delivered during the summer holidays from Wednesday 24 July.
9. A scheme for Longfield School will be consulted on in July.
10. Feasibility work is about to begin for a scheme at Mowden Junior School.

Bus Services

11. The Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) are in the process of revising the way at stop bus information is displayed. Initially this will involve minor changes to reflect TVCA's new branding, with further work planned for a complete re-design that will be accompanied by a process of user group testing and consultation. The aim of the re-design is to improve the quality of information for passengers.
12. TVCA planned to launch a new scheme on 16 June that will bring in cheaper fares for people aged under 22. This will comprise of a £1 single fare and a £3 day ticket which will primarily be valid in Tees Valley, but will also allow cross boundary travel into the Transport North East Area. TVCA are expected to share a marketing and communications plan for the new fares offer imminently.
13. TVCA as Local Transport Authority has produced a 2024 Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). This is required to secure the release of its BSIP funding allocation for 2024/25. The 2024 refresh is an update to the original 2021 BSIP, which includes updating the baseline to 2023/24 including highlighting achievements made since 2021; setting out the improvement programme for 24/25 and getting ready for 2025 and beyond, ready for delivery as opportunities for funding arise.

Rail Education Programme

14. The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership recruited a Rail Education Officer in September 2023 to deliver a programme of rail safety and confidence sessions in schools within a 1.5-mile corridor of the Bishop Line, between Bishop Auckland and Darlington. The two-year programme is funded by the rail industry and since sessions began in schools in November 2023 the programme has now been delivered in 19 schools in total, ten in Darlington – Corporation Road Primary, Firthmoor Primary, Gurney Pease Academy, Heathfield Academy, Northwood Primary, Red Hall Primary, Springfield Academy, St Bede's RC Primary, St George's CE Academy and St John's CE Academy.

Hopetown Darlington

15. Work on Darlington's newest visitor attraction, Hopetown Darlington, is now complete. A press day was held on Monday 15 July and the site opened to the public on Tuesday 16 July.
16. Tickets for site admission, Wagon Woods, Brick Journeys and summer activities are available to book on the site's website: www.hopetowndarlington.co.uk/whats-on.
17. An official launch day will take place in late September to coincide with the 199th anniversary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

Darlington Hippodrome

Show Programme

18. During the period of reporting, a broad mix of shows have proved popular with a wide range of audiences. Highlights have included a comedy take on Oscar Wilde with 'The Importance of Being Earnest?', as well as family favourite 'Bluey', sold out tribute shows 'Taylormania' and 'Rumours of Fleetwood Mac', Strictly's 'Anton & Giovanni' and David Walliams' stage adaptation of his book 'Awful Auntie'. The Hipp @ The Hullabaloo programme has presented Edinburgh Fringe previews, including comedians Tom Stade and Gareth Mutch.

Hippodrome Hires and Community Performances

19. A successful period for dance school hires, which has included hosting Infinity Dance School, Melanie Edmondson School of Dance and the Joanne Banks Dancers. The Hippodrome's Youth Theatre and Youth Dance classes have also presented their own end of year performances and showcases in both the Hippodrome and Hullabaloo Theatre.

Libraries

Schools

20. Darlington Library worked closely with schools to establish the value of the library's schools' packages, which were produced for the reopening in 2023. Results have been very positive, with 100 percent of responders advising they were satisfied with the number and variety of workshops provided. Respondents advised that the sessions: -
 - (a) Supported pupils learning and attainment
 - (b) Engaged pupils not ordinarily engaged
 - (c) Enhanced the curriculum
 - (d) Were exciting and not something they could generally offer within their school
21. 100 percent of respondents said that they were likely to purchase the package again for the next school year.
22. A further event will be arranged for school leaders to visit the library, see The Hive and the equipment offered, and hear about the school packages, with an early-bird offer to book for next year.

Dementia Support

23. A monthly drop-in session is offered for those with dementia and their families, utilising the Reminiscence Room alongside the specially curated Reminiscence Collection, with staff on hand to support. The Art Gallery is also a meeting place with games and jigsaws, as well as an opportunity to participate in a watercolours group suitable for all abilities.
24. Improvements have been made to signage and wayfinding within the library, and the team have benefitted from Dementia Friendly Training.

Crossing The Tees Book Festival

25. Crossing the Tees is back for its 11th year, with a range of events and workshops at Darlington Library and neighbouring Tees Valley libraries to take part in. The festival celebrates books and the written word, including opportunities to see and hear from authors and the chance for participants to develop their own writing skills.

Summer Reading Challenge

26. In anticipation of the Summer Reading Challenge which commenced on Thursday 18 July, the team visited schools to promote the benefits of participating in the challenge. The challenge aims to support schools by keeping children reading over the school holidays to help prevent the "dip" in attainment they notice in September.
27. During the challenge, children aged 0 - 16 who borrow a book will be entered into a draw to win some fantastic prizes, including a PlayStation, a flying simulator experience, panto tickets, cuddly toys, and Lego sets. Prizes are funded by the Library budget and by engaging businesses who provide sponsorship. An extensive activity programme also runs alongside the challenge to keep families entertained, educated, and involved during the summer school holidays.

Hark!

28. Thanks to funding secured by the Creative Darlington Manager, Darlington Library will hold another exciting 'HARK!' Event. HARK! is an adult event which blends music, poetry and spoken word, offering a licensed bar and a different experience to other events held within libraries. HARK! often engages audiences from different towns and cities helping to put Darlington on the cultural map.

Creative Darlington

29. Darlington Borough Council Heritage and Culture Fund programme budget support of £2,000 was confirmed with Tracks Darlington, following their receipt of an Arts Council England Project Funding grant offer of £30,000 in May 2024. This will support delivery of Last Train Home 2024, a music and comedy festival, on Saturday 7 September 2024 at Darlington Hippodrome, The Hullabaloo, and The Forum Music Studios and associated events, including an earlier Last Train home Express event at Hopetown Darlington.
30. As part of Local Heritage Month 2024, artist Elaine Vizer gave a talk at Darlington Library on Saturday 18 May on the evolution of photographic techniques from Cyanotypes to Digital Photography. The artist's photography exhibition was also on display in the Art Gallery at Darlington Library until Thursday 13 June 2024.
31. Penguin published author, Lisette Auton, presented a reading event on Thursday 30 May which shared work from seven participants of the monthly creative writing sessions for adults she is leading at Darlington Library as part of the 'Your Library Story' creative programme, which is supported by Arts Council England Project Funding. 20 people attended the event.
32. Creative Darlington supported free 'Positive Poetry – Writing Towards Wellbeing' workshops at Darlington Library, which were held from Friday 14 June 2024 until early July 2024 and led by writers from Tees Women Poets.

Town Centre Partnership and Events

33. The summer events programme for 2024 has built on last year's programme with the addition of more cultural events and animation to encourage visitors to explore the town centre.
34. Emergency Services Day, which was held on Saturday 1 June, continues to be a very popular event on the market square, with thousands of families visiting the event to see ambulances, fire engines and police cars. The event continues to be a fantastic engagement opportunity for local public services.
35. On Friday 21 June, we welcomed British Cycling to the town centre as part of the British National Road Championships. The Circuit Championship races attracted visitors from across the region and beyond and the event was supported by Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), as part of an effort to grow to grow cycling and tourism links in the region.
36. On Wednesday 17 July, Northumbria in Bloom judges visited Darlington to conduct their summer visit, which brought teams together from across the council to showcase the town centre. On the same day, the GOLD Tea Dance also returned to the town centre.

Climate Change

37. The Eco Fair was very well received and included a marquee with exhibitors and activities linked to sustainable living. The event on Saturday 8 June attracted over 5,000 visitors to the town centre and raised awareness of environmental issues and projects. Feedback from exhibitors will enable the town centre team to further develop the event for 2025.

Councillor Libby McCollom
Local Services Portfolio