

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

Safer Routes to School (SRTS)

5. 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 September.
6. A scheme for St. Bede Primary School on Thompson Street East was consulted on, with a closing date of Sunday 23 June. Responses have been analysed and the scheme is being taken forward to the statutory Traffic Regulation Order stage with comments being incorporated into the scheme where appropriate.
7. A scheme for Hurworth Comprehensive was consulted on and construction is currently on site programmed until 10 September 2024.
8. A scheme for Longfield School has been developed and is expected to go out to consultation in September.
9. Feasibility work has started for a scheme at Mowden Junior School.

Bus Services

10. Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) are in the process of revising the way at stop bus information is displayed. This includes new branding and making information easier for passengers to access. The re-design also aims to improve the quality of information available.
11. TVCA have launched a new scheme offering cheaper fares for people aged under 22. This comprises 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. There was also a 'kids travel free' offer during the summer holidays: for every fare paying adult a child under 11 could travel with them for free.
12. 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. TVCA continue to develop the improvement programme with support from local authorities.
13. It has been agreed that the supported bus services in Darlington and the Tees Flex service will all be funded by TVCA until March 2025. Funding beyond March 2025 is dependent upon further Department for Transport funding through the BSIP process. The supported services are 3 and 4 (evenings and Sundays), 6/6A, 16, 17 and 18.

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.
15. Sessions began in schools in November 2023 and up until the end of the 2024 academic year (end July 2024) the programme has now been delivered in 22 schools in total, including 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.
16. Up to the end July 2024, 3,791 pupils have received the training, of which 1,967 are Darlington students.

Hopetown Darlington

17. Hopetown Darlington, the north's newest visitor attraction, has welcomed over 35,000 visitors in the first month since opening on 16 July 2024.
18. Visitors have enjoyed a fun-packed summer programme of activities and events, including Brick Journeys exhibition, family-friendly workshops, tours of the site and outdoor entertainment. 'Experiment!', a unique, immersive experience telling the story of how we changed the world from Darlington, will be launched for visitors in late September.
19. During the Autumn season, schools' engagement will be a major priority at Hopetown, alongside a broad range of community groups and an exciting month-long Christmas programme.
20. The official opening of Hopetown will happen on Friday 27 September (199th birthday of the Stockton and Darlington Railway) with invited guests, partners, and Darlington school children, celebrating the town's wonderful new visitor attraction.

Darlington Hippodrome

21. The Mousetrap ran for seven performances between 23 and 27 July, selling over 4,200 seats across the week (up from 3,240 seats sold across the week in April 2019). Audio description and a touch tour for visually impaired people took place prior to the Saturday matinee.
22. September highlights have included Sounds of the 60s Live hosted by legendary DJ Tony Blackburn, and West End musical Sister Act from 9 to 14 September. Ghost The Musical also opened on 24 September and will run to 28 September.
23. On 1 August the venue was hired by the BBC for an event hosted by the Director General. The hire was a great success, with positive feedback received about both the event and the venue.
24. A Taste of Africa Family Fun Day was held on Saturday 24 August: a day of culture, entertainment, cuisine and community spirit for all ages in celebration of African heritage.
25. During the school summer holidays, young people have joined in with circus skills workshops (to complement performances by Cirque in the theatre), Youth Theatre and Youth Dance taster sessions.

Libraries

26. The Reminiscence Collection for older people at Darlington Libraries will be extended thanks to a funding contribution from Darlington Rotary Club. New boxes are being created on the themes of Royalty, Childhood, Music, Women's War, Pets, 1970s and 1980s. The Reminiscence Collection helps to stir memories and conversations about the past. The collection is used at monthly Musical Memories sessions at both libraries and is freely available for public use in the Reminiscence Room.
27. This summer, Darlington Libraries offered in the region of 140 activities, workshops and events for children and young people over the school holidays; almost double the usual number. The increase is attributed to workshops within The Hive, and the Cockerton Team running out of hours events at the branch. Highlights within The Hive include, 3D design and print, digital illustration, sewing, coding and animation. The branch library ran Teddy Bears Sleepovers, story and crafts, photography, movie screenings and educational activities learning about different continents. Alongside this programme, the usual programme of summer activities was also provided, including Baby and Toddler sessions, magicians, animal encounters, authors and illustrator experiences.
28. Darlington Libraries took over the market square for a fun day incorporating children's entertainment, a range of author and illustrator experiences and mascot meet and greets. Building on the success of last year, the day presents an opportunity to engage with a large group of families, to promote library services and the Summer Reading Challenge.
29. From September 2024, a range of new workshops are now being offered in The Hive. In addition to workshops for school pupils, the following are also available for children
 - (a) Animation
 - (b) Paper Crafting (Home Educated Children)
 - (c) Digital Illustration (Home Educated Children)
 - (d) 3D Design & Print
30. The following activities are available to adults:
 - (a) 3D Design and Print
 - (b) Fabric/Sewing Social Group
 - (c) Dress Making Course
 - (d) Paper Crafting
 - (e) Digital Illustration
 - (f) Music Production Course

Creative Darlington

31. The Art Gallery counter at Darlington Library recorded 3,157 attendances to the Hot Contents exhibition by Matt Denham, which ran between Wednesday 19 June and Thursday 18 July. The exhibition included video works, audio recordings, photographs and an installation. Hot Contents was informed by 24 participatory sessions and 44 monthly meetings which helped the artist to build and maintain community connections. Darlington Culture Volunteers helped steward the exhibition. The project was backed by Arts Council England Project Funding, and the Heritage and Culture budget.
32. A group exhibition showcasing work by members of Darlington Borough Council's Community Arts Project was on display between 23 July and 6 August 2024 with 1,948 visits to the Art Gallery counted during that period.
33. An exhibition by Sophie Seita was on show from 9 to 14 August and was promoted within Darlington Library's summer holiday programme and the Darlington Pride programme. It included a work informed by LGBTQ+ young people that was informed by a workshop the artist co-ordinated by Curious Arts.
34. Heritage & Culture fund programme budget supported a Mini Pride event at Darlington Library and Darlington Hippodrome on Monday 12 August, programmed by Curious Arts.
35. Tracks Darlington, with £2,000 Heritage & Culture Fund programme budget support in 2024/25, secured a £30,000 Arts Council England Project funding award and will deliver a range of activities. These include a Last Train Home Express launch event at Hopetown Darlington on Thursday 5 September, and the Last Train Home Festival, held across Darlington Hippodrome, The Hullabaloo and The Forum Music Centre, on Saturday 7 September.

Town Centre Partnership and Events

36. The Summer programme began this year on Wednesday 17 July with GOLD Tea Dance with people dancing and enjoying afternoon tea while attendees could engage with many organisations for support and advice.
37. The Vintage Car Rally, held on Saturday 20 July, attracted thousands of visitors with fantastic feedback and increased footfall.
38. Darlington by the Sea also returned for 5 days on Monday 24 July, attracting visitors from across the region. This event is always exceptionally popular, with families enjoying the experience of playing in the pop-up beach in the town centre.
39. 1,970 runners took part in the annual 10k Road Run, with extra road closures and traffic management strategies implemented this year to increase safety. The race was very well received, and feedback has been positive. In addition to the 10k, a Junior 3k and Family Fun Run brought lots of visitors to Darlington.

40. Darlington Pride proved to be a great success, despite the uncertainty created by the national unrest in the week prior to the event. Thousands of visitors came to Darlington to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community with many organisations attending and great live music on stage for visitors to enjoy. The annual Saturday event in the market square was followed by the more relaxed event in South Park on the Sunday and the Mongay Pride Party.
41. Making Sense Together, a specialist event aimed at neurodivergent people and families, returned for 2024 on Thursday 15 August. The event offered visitors sensory and engaging opportunities to explore and enjoy an event alongside specialist service providers on site for people to be signposted and supported.
42. Additional town centre animation days were programmed including Legends and Fairytales and Dinosaur Day, which attracted many visitors into Darlington with activities around the town centre to encourage people to explore and move around different locations.
43. The Market Asset Management (MAM) team organised a second food festival in the town centre over the August Bank Holiday, with the addition of some extra Continental Market dates after a successful event earlier in the year. The additional markets add to the programme and atmosphere in Darlington.
44. Following the success of the British Cycling National Road Championships in June, British Cycling returned to Darlington to launch a race stage from the town centre on Wednesday 4 September. The 153 km race formed Stage 2 of the Men's Tour of Britain and was televised live on ITV4, providing an excellent opportunity for coverage of Darlington. Large-scale sporting events are very popular and showcase the town to new visitors, including overnight stays.

Environmental Services

45. Winter maintenance season is undertaken each year, commencing on the first Monday in October. The season will commence this year on Monday 7 October.

Climate Change

46. The Hive at Darlington Libraries is now offering a "Make-do and Mend" weekly workshop where different skills and technical techniques are shared to support attendees to repair, reuse and re-imagine clothing and fabric items.

Councillor Libby McCollom
Local Services Portfolio