

## **OVERVIEW OF LEISURE AND LOCAL ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio.

### **National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF) Update**

2. Yarm Road/McMullen Road roundabout – works are ongoing to improve the capacity of this important roundabout. Works in December focused on Salter's Lane to avoid causing traffic delays on Yarm Road on the run up to Christmas. Works on Yarm Road/McMullen Road and the roundabout will commence this month and the scheme is programmed for completion at the end of April 2019.
3. Detailed design works have commenced on the proposed Lingfield Way/Yarm Road traffic signalled controlled junction. This scheme involves the widening of Lingfield Way to two lanes and the installation of a traffic signal control junction including pedestrian phases and the construction of a footway/cycleway on the east side of Lingfield Way. Some diversion work for statutory undertakers has already taken place and the main works are programmed to commence around Easter time.
4. Highways England propose to commence a scheme to improve Morton Palms roundabout in early February 2019. This scheme involves the widening of the Yarm Road approach to form three lanes onto the A66 and the widening of the A67 approach onto the A66 to create an extended two lane approach to the roundabout. This scheme is programmed to be completed by Easter 2019. Two lanes of traffic will be maintained between Morton Palms and Morton Park roundabout whilst construction is ongoing. The junction will be resurfaced overnight as it will require the closure of the A66.
5. The new Symmetry Park road, linking Morton Way with Tornado Way, is currently under construction. This link road runs parallel with the A66 and McMullen Road and will provide an alternative route to help traffic in the area.

### **Parkgate Bridge**

6. The structure is now in place and the landscaping works started in the New Year. It is anticipated that the bridge will be open towards the end of February 2019.

### **National Highway and Transportation Award**

7. All highway authorities are encouraged by Department for Transport to participate in a national public satisfaction survey annually. This year Darlington was asked to present at the annual conference and picked up an award for improved public satisfaction in road safety and managing congestion. Darlington ranked number one of 113 authorities in terms of our road safety education public satisfaction.

## Rotary Way Cycle Route

8. A new cycle route has been completed along Rotary Way in the Faverdale area of Darlington. The route links the toucan crossing on West Auckland Road adjacent to the junction with John Fowler Way, northwards to the roundabout junction with Rotary Way. The route then continues along Rotary Way to the Centurion Way roundabout. Rotary Way has a 50mph speed limit and large numbers of HGVs serving the industrial estate, and this cycle route provides a safe route separate to the traffic for those riding their bikes to work in this area. The scheme was funded jointly by Darlington Borough Council and the Tees Valley Combined Authority Access to Employment programme.

## Transport

9. Groundwork has been undertaking consultation with residents, businesses and visitors to Victoria Road (between the rail station and the ring road) and the surrounding roads. The aim is to identify how the area can be changed to improve sustainable and public travel to the station, as well as support the local economy and environment through improvements to safety, accessibility and connectivity. The work has involved face to face conversations, online surveys and stickyworld, an online planning resource. Groundwork has then developed ideas and concepts to address some of the issues raised and developed models to depict what these could look like. Two events to discuss these ideas have taken place in the Dolphin Centre involving local residents, businesses, Councillors and other stakeholders. These will be considered and options developed for implementation in 2019/20.
10. Bus Marketing – two events took place in December and January to promote travel by bus. In December, Arriva promoted the Christmas bus timetable and £1 twilight fare. A festive bus was parked at Joseph Pease Place and staff handed out festive goodies to visitors to the town centre. On 21 January, 'Blue Monday', the Council worked with Arriva, The Cornmill Centre, Queen Street Shopping Centre and House of Fraser to promote bus services and the town centre in general. A day long programme of events was held, designed to spread some cheer on what is supposed to be the most depressing day of the year. There were free coffees and pizzas for bus passengers, giveaways, promotions and entertainment. The event was promoted on buses and social media.
11. The Shining Example cycle safety campaign ran from the end of October until 7 December and aimed to highlight the requirement to use bike lights during the hours of darkness. The campaign centred around a video which demonstrated the difference that using bike lights and reflective clothing makes to the visibility of a cyclist in the dark. The campaign attracted media attention from across the Tees Valley, with the video being shown at two Middlesbrough Football Club matches at the Riverside Stadium, and a radio interview with BBC Tees, in collaboration with the accident reduction team at Durham and Darlington Constabulary. The outcomes of the campaign were over 1,200 views of the video on YouTube; 3,300 page-views of Shining Example content on the Let's Go Tees Valley website and 280 entries in the prize draw to win bike lights and reflective cycling gear.

12. As part of a year-round cycling incentivising scheme, cyclists were encouraged to log their rides during December on the Love to Ride website, for daily chances to win cycling gear from 1 to 25 December. Around 200 cyclists take part each year in the Tees Valley and around 20,000 miles are cycled in the challenge.
13. As part of the Let's Go Tees Valley programme we have worked with two secondary schools to develop materials for young people to share their messages for cycling safely. The concepts were generated by the students and then they produced story boards which were then turned into professionally shot videos, featuring the students themselves. The first video, produced by a school in Hartlepool, was piloted amongst students at Hummersknott School in Darlington at a series of assemblies during Road Safety Week. It focuses on the importance of wearing a helmet. In addition, the Shining Example video was shown to highlight the importance of using bike lights. It is planned to roll out the video to all secondary schools and via social media.
14. In mid-November we distributed 200 Bishop Line branded reusable coffee cups at Bank Top Station. The cups were so popular that throughout December we distributed 500 Christmas themed, Bishop Line branded, reusable coffee cups. They were distributed at Christmas events held at venues along the Bishop Line route – Auckland Castle Christmas Market, Locomotion Christmas weekend, Head of Steam 'Meet Santa' event, Hippodrome café and Dolphin Centre Horsemarket café. The cups promote the recently launched 'Hourly Service'; feature a list of attractions along the line; and the Bishop Line website address where visitors can see the new hourly service advert. Twelve Social media posts shown between 14 November and 13 December generated a reach of over 7,000 (no. of people seeing the posts) and ultimately 490 post clicks to find out more, 119 likes/comments/shares, and ten new Facebook page likes. Posters have also been placed at the stations along the line. The patronage continues to grow.

## **Sports Development**

### **Sheltered Housing Update**

15. The programme has engaged with 148 people in 2018 from sheltered housing schemes within the town and community. There was a total of 14 sessions weekly, which ranged from chair based exercises, to yoga and Tai Chi. There was a total of 3,128 attendances in 2018.
16. In addition to the weekly physical activity sessions in 2018, we engaged with the residents to provide different events, such as: choirs, dance shows, Dogs Trust visits, beauty treatments and ukulele lessons. We were assisted by five volunteers, who took part in various roles from bingo callings to befriending.

### **Red Hall Update**

17. The Healthy Darlington Project at Red hall engaged with 106 residents to provide activities, including: Strong by Zumba, Boxercise, Bootcamp and Archery. The total attendances in 2018 was 1,062.

## **Events Management**

### **Ice Sculpture Event –8 December**

18. Thousands of visitors explored Darlington's first ever interactive trail of festive ice sculptures, which were available for viewing at various locations around the town centre. The sculptures included Angel Wings, Rudolph, The Nutcracker, Aladdin's Lamp and our very own Locomotion No.1 Steam Train. Visitors had the opportunity to watch a sculptor at work in the Market Square and a chance to take part in the carving process at Joseph Pease. A map was provided online and at various locations in the town centre, which included a competition to win a family ticket to see Aladdin at the Hippodrome by guessing how many baubles were inside the treasure chest sculpture on Blackwellgate.

### **12 Days of Christmas Social Media Campaign – 8-19 December**

19. In December, 12 days of competitions were advertised on the Love Darlo Facebook page, with prizes donated by town centre businesses, including: Crown Street Library, Queen Street Shopping Centre, Cornmill Shopping Centre, and many of Darlington's independent retailers.

### **Christmas Lights Switch On –Thursday 22 November**

20. The annual Christmas Lights Switch On event drew over 8,000 people into the town centre. In addition to the lights, entertainment on the evening included carol singing by children from Gurney Pease Academy who were accompanied by Voices of Darlington. Our media partner TFM provided three singing talents from around the North East.

## **Darlington Hippodrome**

21. On 17 November the Hippodrome celebrated the first anniversary of the reopening of the Theatre following its restoration. BBC Tees helped us mark the day with a live broadcast from the Theatre with interviews with Councillor Wallis, the Theatre Director and cast members from Rock of Ages, which was in the Theatre that week, and also Liam Mellor, one of the stars of Aladdin, our Christmas pantomime.

22. Since reopening, 162,851 tickets have been sold for 358 performances. 5,736 hours have been volunteered and 6,542 items have been catalogued for the Theatre's archive. The Heritage, Education and Learning Officer with the support of the archive's volunteers, has succeeded in creating a record of every show ever presented at the Theatre since 1907, forming a very useful resource for people to engage with the archive.

23. The Autumn season at the Hippodrome concluded on a very successful week, with the show 'Cilla the Musical' having been seen by 4,000 people and was followed by a week of one night shows, which also proved very popular with a combined attendance of just under 4,000 people.

24. A new exhibition opened in the Catherine Cookson Gallery entitled 'Dickens in Darlington', which celebrates the special connection of Charles Dickens with Darlington. To complement the exhibition, two very successful events were held in the Hullabaloo: a concert by local band 'The Black Sheep Frederick Dickens' and a

performance of 'A Christmas Carol' by Guy Masterson, which was sold out.

25. This year's pantomime, Aladdin, opened on 8 December with packed houses for the opening weekend, including the press night on 9 December. The reviews were excellent and the public reaction was also very warm. On 13 December there was a 'relaxed' performance of the pantomime specifically designed to welcome people with an Autistic Spectrum Condition, learning or physical disabilities, and sensory and communication disorders into the Theatre to enjoy the Panto experience. There were 593 in the respective audiences including a number of school groups. Training on Autism was given to Front of House staff in preparation for the relaxed performance and signed/audio described performances were provided later in the run.
26. A Pantomime themed tour of the Hippodrome was organised as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund's #thankstoyou campaign, which encouraged grant recipients to give something back to the lottery players. Visitors had the opportunity to have a glimpse of the backstage area and chat to the Panto's stars.
27. The new season brochure was published at the end of November, including the launch of next year's pantomime: Jack and the Beanstalk.
28. The Hullabaloo also celebrated its first birthday. In the first year, Theatre Hullabaloo presented 187 performances independently, with 16 visiting companies, from six different countries. 26 schools and nurseries have visited and there have been 10,983 visitors to the Creative Play.

## **Visual Art**

29. The Community Arts Project exhibition ran from 18 October 2018 to 6 December 2018, securing 2,958 visits. The Darlington Society of Arts Winter exhibition opened on 8 December 2018 and ran through to 31 January 2019.
30. Julie MacBean's 'Edgelands' exhibition was on display at Darlington Town Hall exhibition space from 29 October 2018 to 14 December 2018, with original drawings, paintings and prints of landscapes.
31. Creative Darlington is supporting promotion of the Dover Art Prize, with Darlington Borough Council engaged in the selection process alongside other parties. The Dover Prize Fund for Artists, managed by County Durham Community Foundation, awards £10,000 to a selected proposal, with new work generated thereafter, with the support of this award to be premiered in Darlington. The deadline for applications was 6 January 2019.

## **Outreach and Arts Development**

32. Pell Ensemble and Helix Arts worked with children and young people in Darlington via Darlington Hippodrome and with the Education Village, in October and November 2018, with support from Creative Darlington. They delivered five days of participatory workshop activity in total and delivered two performances of 'Upload Unplug', at Crown Street Library.

33. The Creative Darlington budget supported four performances at The Hullabaloo of 'The Young King', by Oscar Wilde, performed by Australian theatre company, Slingsby, on 14 and 15 November 2018, for children aged 8+ and their families. Creative Darlington supports Theatre Hullabaloo in its international practice and efforts to engage children and young people in Darlington.
34. Creative Darlington supported a project in which young musicians composed a piece they then performed with saxophone soloist, Jess Gillam, as the opening act for the Royal Northern Sinfonia at Darlington Hippodrome. Through a series of workshops with a composer/music leader, several Royal Northern Sinfonia (RNS) players and an assistant/trainer music leader, a short piece of music was devised that combined all participants as an ensemble.

### **Heritage Track Programme**

35. Five days of primary school and community engagement workshops have been held as part of the 'Heritage on Track' programme, part of the Tees Valley Great Place programme, which focussed on creative exploration of local railway heritage and the heritage of communities located in close proximity to the track bed of the Stockton and Darlington Railway; including activity at the Head of Steam Railway Museum and within Darlington Indoor Market, where 'Locomotive Rhythm' performed on 24 November.
36. A new song was also generated through the programme and broadcast on BBC Tees on 24 November. Further work was also undertaken, including activity at Springfield Primary School on 11 and 12 December.

### **Libraries**

37. The Centre for Local Studies hosted a talk by Dr Ben Roberts of Teesside University who explored the forgotten tales and traditions of how the people of Darlington celebrated Christmas in the past.
38. The library has started a Lego Club for home schooled children. Children attend the club weekly and complete challenges on their Lego Card.
39. Crown Street and Cockerton Libraries held a series of Christmas parties for young children, which included music, games a visit from Santa. All children received a small gift.
40. Crown Street Library hosted a festive celebration on 15 December, where adults and children had the opportunity to make Christmas baubles, enjoy mince pies and watch a choir perform Christmas carols.
41. Over 1,200 children in Darlington have received the Bookstart Treasure Pack from the library. This comprised a picture book and activities alongside guidance for parents to encourage regular reading at home. All nurseries and pre-schools were visited and gifted the packs, alongside a story and rhyme time. The resources, worth in excess of £17,000, were given to the authority for three-four year olds.

42. The Library Service commenced discussions with the residents of the Borough on 7 January 2019, to inform the future look and direction of the town's library services.

### **Head of Steam**

43. Staff at Head of Steam engaged with Richmond and District Historical Society, Thornaby RNIB and the National Council for Women - Darlington Branch, through talks and outreach activities.
44. The 'Santa at the Station' events (15, 16, 22 and 23 December) continued to be popular, with sell out dates across the two weekends.
45. A new exhibition, 'Nostalgia of Steam' by local artist and railway enthusiast, Stephen Bainbridge, opened on 19 January. The exhibition looks back at the days of steam through the eyes of the artist and is on display until 3 March.
46. 713 children visited from schools during November and 101 in December, including three schools previously not worked with before.
47. 25 active volunteers contributed 90 hours during November.

### **Environmental Services**

#### **Volunteering**

48. During 2018 a significant amount of time from the residents of Darlington has been dedicated to the local environment. We have 99 active Street Champions who have regularly collected litter in their locality, keeping the area clean and tidy for all. Through Darlington Cares and The Great Parks Auction, a total of 2,135 employee volunteering hours were dedicated to improving four of the town's parks:
  - (a) Cummins pledged 465 hours to Eastbourne Park;
  - (b) EE donated 750 hours to The Denes;
  - (c) Darlington Building Society offered 500 hours to North Lodge Park; and
  - (d) Capita volunteered 420 hours to Green Park.
49. In total, 921 volunteers ended up donating a massive 3,376 hours to the various parks. The benefits of this initiative have seen significant improvements within these four parks, allowing far more local residents to enjoy the outdoor environment.
50. The various friends groups across the Borough, as well as many other organisations, groups and individuals have donated their time to help maintain and improve the environment of Darlington. This is something I am immensely proud of and offer my thanks to them all, and look forward to similar efforts in 2019.

### **Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) Awards**

51. At the recent APSE Awards, I am delighted to advise that Darlington was declared the Winner in the 'Most Improved Refuse/Recycling Collection Service' category. Nine Authorities were shortlisted for the awards on 6 December, with Darlington coming out on top. Refuse and Recycling Collection is constantly reviewed to ensure routes are efficient with the required safe systems of work in place.

### **Keep Britain Tidy Awards**

52. In the forthcoming Keep Britain Tidy Awards (February 2019), the Council has been nominated in the 'Best Community Initiative' category for work completed alongside Darlington Cares, as part of 'The Great Parks Auction'.

**Councillor Nick Wallis**  
**Cabinet Member with Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio**