

COUNCIL
27 MARCH 2025

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 1,361 requests for service in Quarter 3 2024/2025. The main categories of these requests are:

(a) Food	158
(b) Licensing	129
(c) Noise	237
(d) Planning Enquiries	91
(e) Refuse	84
(f) Pest	257
(g) Personal searches	201

3. Environmental Health and Public Health have been working on a significant project which involved looking at improvements in hygiene and infection control in the Boroughs 32 elderly Care Homes. The work has resulted in a 75% decrease in outbreaks of sickness associated with the care homes in the past year. The team has also been informed that the improvements have also led to a significant decrease in outbreak admissions to Darlington Memorial Hospital whilst other similar areas have remained the same. The success of the work is to be highlighted at a National Conference organised by the UK Health Security Agency.

Climate Change

4. In December, the Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer submitted our report to Defra for the trial project to extend the Secretary of State's Adaptation Reporting Power to Local Authorities. We have received positive feedback from Defra for the quality of the report. My thanks to all teams involved in pulling it together.

Development Management

5. The application for the New Treasury Building has now been granted planning permission by the Council following a formal announcement from the Government. Further discussions have been had with the applicant's agent to further improve the design of the scheme. These discussions have been productive and are now complete. A further meeting with residents to explain the details of the scheme has taken place in conjunction with the Deputy Leader and local ward members. The Section 106 agreement associated with the permission has yet to be signed. Whilst there is a commitment to the scheme it is likely that some further amendments to the scheme will be negotiated at the applicant's

request. Following further discussions with the applicant it has been agreed that they will now progress with the 106 legal agreement to enable the Council to issue the decision.

6. The matter was presented to Members of the Planning Committee on 7 August 2024. A decision was made to approve subject to the signing of the above 106 agreement. It has been recently confirmed that the Government will sign the agreement imminently.
7. 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 regarding the further involvement of nearby residents prior to a formal detailed submission. This meeting has now taken place. Planning permission has been granted. Discussions with the developer for the Northern part of the site are well under way which have included extensive pre application discussions which have resulted in significant improvements to the scheme. A detailed submission is expected in the next couple of months.
8. Enforcement reports relating to unauthorised development are still 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. There is an increase in the use of Stop Notices to prevent the progression of unauthorised works, which has had a noticeable impact on staff resources. The Enforcement Team is currently piloting a scheme to investigate unauthorised or unsuitable advertisements, which could result in the service of discontinuance notices to remove the signage. These would be used selectively in the more sensitive areas.
9. The National Infrastructure Project Public Inquiry at Byers Green for solar panels has now completed. Unlike most applications a decision on the matter will be dealt with by a Government Inspector, not the Council.
10. 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 approved and is currently underway, which when complete will achieve a much-improved public realm.
11. It is anticipated that decisions will be made on significant Housing Schemes in the coming months at Middleton St George and elements of the Skertingham Local Plan allocation.

Building Control

12. Building Regulations applications and works progressing as normal, no issues to be reported.
13. We are now in the first reporting quarter for Building Safety Regulator KPI returns. Monitoring is ongoing and returns for the quarter are to be submitted prior to the end of April 2025. The Building Control team continue to work towards preparing all relevant reports to be submitted to the BSR. Information relating to the BSR requesting to undertake an audit of the DBC Building Control service has been received and may occur anytime within the next few years, with limited notice. The Building Control team have been preparing towards the potential of the audit over the last 18 months and are in a good position. These changes and additional requirements / roles / responsibilities

continue to impose strain on the resources available. This has been further exacerbated by recent loss of staff to the private sector building control sector.

14. The government's Building Safety Levy has been confirmed to come into effect in autumn 2025. It has been confirmed that Building Control will be the collectors and administrators of the Levy within DBC. The Building Control team are taking every opportunity to learn more about the expectations from MHCLG. Communication pathways have been opened with IT system providers who are responding to MHCLG's guidance on Levy collection processes. This may take up further resource from the Building Control service. MHCLG have now provided details of burdens funding which will be available in relation to the introduction of the Levy. Further work will be required to ascertain exact requirements for resourcing and implementation of systems and processes to support Levy collection.
15. Regarding Dangerous structures:
 - (a) Working together with Environmental Health, we continue to monitor the situation with Northgate House and take any action necessary under The Building Act. No recent reports of concerns have been raised in recent months.
 - (b) Rise Carr Club: Working together with Environmental Health we continue to monitor developments and incidents in relation to this property and respond accordingly. It has been noted that several reports of potential dangers have been made over recent weeks in relation to this property. Contact with the owners has been made to resolve any matters requiring attention under The Building Act.
 - (c) General – It has been noted that there was a record number of dangerous structures reports recently, following a single incidence of inclement/stormy weather. More than half the yearly number of reports were received in relation to this weather event. This had a significant impact on available resource for other, general Building Control business in the interim. All incidents have been dealt with accordingly in relation to Building Control involvement, ensuring safety of the public within the Borough.

Business Investment

16. Business investment enquiries continue, with the main area of interests from the hospitality sector.
17. Darlington (together with Bassetlaw & Mansfield Councils) has been announced as an 'Early Adopter' of the High Street Rental Auction programme. Officers are working on developing the processes and gathering the evidence and data to enable this initiative to be implemented.
18. On 13 February 2025, the Council hosted another successful Jobs Fair with over 1300 attendees on the day. At the Jobs Fair, over 100 employers and support services were on hand to support individuals in their search for employment. New to the Jobs Fair was a Digital Hub, a space to bring digital inclusivity to those Darlington residents who currently have limited or no access to on-line resources. The Digital Hub enabled lots of learners to sign up for courses and online CPD with Learning and Skills.

19. The Business Investment Team continue to promote the range of business support services available through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund before the programme ends at the end of March 2025. The Business Team are working collaboratively with the Tees Valley Combined Authority and the service providers to raise awareness of these schemes and encourage Darlington businesses to engage and participate.
20. The Business Investment Team have attended the following Business Events:
 - (a) Teesside University Business Network - work skills development – 12 February 2025
 - (b) Darlington Professionals Network – 17 February 2025
 - (c) Darlington Employers Environmental Partnership – NetZero Marketplace Event – 21 February 2025
 - (d) Tees Valley Pitching & Mentoring Event – 26 February 2025
 - (e) Discover & Connect Event – 27 February 2025
 - (f) Tees Valley Labs Demo Day 2025 – 5 March 2025

Estates

21. The Blackwell parkland continues to be well used with many positive comments; however the heavy rainfall and increased use is causing some issues with the surface of the paths but these have been reported to the maintenance company for the parkland. The 'Heritage Park' residential development by Homes by Esh is progressing at pace with early purchases continuing to evidence strong demand.
22. The proposed Burtree Garden Village development which includes the Council's land at High Faverdale Farm is moving forward with an anticipated start of the infrastructure works in March 2025, subject to Cabinet approval. Removal of hedges and trees in accordance with the planning permission have been completed to avoid the bird nesting season. The Phase 1 reserved matters planning applications are now being progressed.
23. The procurement of the town centre regeneration/development partner has concluded, and results will be reported in May.

Planning Policy

24. It was agreed at Cabinet on 4 February to begin the review of the Local Plan in line with Government ambitions. Progress will be monitored and reported.

Towns Fund

25. The programme continues to deliver on its objectives with several projects nearing completion including the enhancements of Coniscliffe Road, Skinnergate and the Yards and Victoria Road.

26. Work is due to commence on 156 Northgate to transform this heritage building into quality office space. Work should be completed by December 2025. In addition, planning approval and Listed Building Consent has been granted for the improvement works on Edward Pease House. Working with the Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway it is anticipated that the refurbishment work will be finished in autumn 2025.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy Portfolio