

**COUNCIL**  
**15 MAY 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 1,109 requests for service in Quarter 4 2024/2025. The main categories of these requests are:
- |                        |     |
|------------------------|-----|
| (a) Food               | 158 |
| (b) Licensing          | 85  |
| (c) Noise              | 221 |
| (d) Planning Enquiries | 77  |
| (e) Refuse             | 62  |
| (f) Pests              | 175 |
| (g) Personal searches  | 183 |
3. Advice has been given in One Darlington magazine to dog owners on steps that can be taken to minimise dog barking. Barking dog complaints (359 in 2024) account for 40% of all noise complaints received each year. Officers from Environmental Health are working with Communications, to plan for Noise Action Week (19 – 24 May 2025) to highlight this issue. A review is also being undertaken of the procedure for investigating barking dog noise complaints.
4. The former owner of popular Darlington takeaway 'Spice 4 U' has been prosecuted for hygiene offences and ordered to pay more than £1600 in fines and court costs. A routine inspection by Darlington Borough Council's environmental health team in September last year, uncovered a string of hygiene offences at the Cockerton based business including filthy structure, equipment and poor food handling practices. This resulted in the business receiving a 0-star hygiene rating. A number of immediate actions to improve the cleanliness of the premises and associated equipment were identified by the council which business owner, Mr Choudhury, failed to comply with. Following an interview under caution, the council progressed a prosecution under the Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013.
5. Since the start of February Environmental Health have been conducting visits to check products being sold are safe for consumption. Many sweets and fizzy drinks imported from the US contain chemicals which are banned in the UK or additives which may have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children. The team have been liaising with local businesses about the risks posed by imported confectionary and asking them to withdraw stock that is not compliant with UK regulations. The warning comes following a series of inspections carried out by Environmental Health, where nearly £1,600 of confectionary containing dangerous ingredients was seized from eight local shops. Media reports and TV

interviews have helped to promote the campaign. It has also been shared on TikTok where it has had 380k views, 8k likes, 292 comments and 8.5k shares.

## **Climate Change**

6. Following the departure of the Climate Change Officer, we have undergone a recruitment process. From a very strong set of candidates, I am delighted to say that we have appointed an internal candidate and HR processes all being well, they will be in post from 12 May.

## **Development Management**

7. 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. The Agreement is however yet to be signed.
8. 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.

## **Building Control**

9. We have now completed the first reporting quarter for Building Safety Regulator KPI returns. Returns for the quarter are to be submitted prior to 30 April 2025. The Building Control team continue to work towards preparing all relevant reports to be submitted to the BSR.
10. The government's Building Safety Levy has now been confirmed to be postponed until autumn 2026. It is still thought that Building Control will be the collectors and administrators of the Levy within DBC. The Building Control team continue to take every opportunity to learn more about the expectations from MHCLG and prepare for the levy introduction. This may take up further resource from the Building Control service and a resource review will be required in the run up to autumn 2026.
11. Following the departure of our previous Building Control Manager, the post has now been filled internally, and that candidate is now undertaking the post of Building Control Manager within the Building Control team. Two members of the surveying team have dropped to part-time working patterns. Further recruitment is underway at present, and we hope to appoint further Building Control Surveyors soon.
12. 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. Some recent reports were received about works being undertaken which may have been a general health and safety concern. Appropriate steps were taken to inform the HSE about potential unsafe working practices.
  - (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.
13. General – Following incidences of inclement/stormy weather we saw a large upturn in reports of dangerous structures to the Building Control team. This had a significant impact on available resource for other, general Building Control business. All incidents have been dealt with accordingly in relation to Building Control involvement, ensuring safety of the public within the Borough. Reports appear to have slowed following a spell of calmer weather.

### **Business Investment**

14. The number of business investment enquiries has increased since the start of the year. The main areas of interest continue to be from the hospitality sector, but there has also been a noticeable number of new enquiries from the local industrial/manufacturing sector looking for follow-on space.
15. The Business Investment Team have continued to promote the range of business support services available through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund before the programme ended on 31 March 2025.
16. The Business Investment Team have attended the following Business Events:
- (a) Cockerton Business Club – 3 March 2025
  - (b) Tees Valley Labs Demo Day 2025 – 5 March 2025
  - (c) Small Business Strategy & Business Growth Service National Review Workshop – 19 March 2025
  - (d) Made in the Tees Valley - Sold to the World Event – 25 March 2025
  - (e) Steam Ahead - the Darlington Big Big Project Finale Presentation – 25 March 2025
  - (f) NECC Showcase at Teesside Expo – 27 March 2025
  - (g) Business Central 10th Anniversary Event – 7 April 2025

### **Towns Fund**

17. The Towns Fund Programme continues to deliver on its objectives with the public realm enhancements in Coniscliffe Road completed on target in March 2025, some minor revisions to planters ongoing. Shopfront works continue in the final phases on both Victoria Road and Skinnergate & the Yards.
18. Enabling works are underway on the former Northern Echo building, with Adult Skills facilities likely to be operational by early 2026 and completion of the full building by the end of 2026.
19. Work has commenced on 156 Northgate to transform an historic building into quality office space, this should be completed by December 2025.
20. Contracts are with procurement for works to Edward Pease House, with a target start on site date May/June 2025. It is anticipated that the refurbishment work will be finished in autumn 2025. Development of the disused site on Garden Street into an urban green space has commenced with an artist being appointed in March 2025 to begin research.

## **Estates**

21. The Blackwell parkland continues to be enjoyed by regular users and newcomers alike with positive feedback; the maintenance company for the parkland, Brambledown are carrying out regular inspections and can be contacted directly should any issues arise. The new footpath from the parkland to the bus stop on Grange Road near the hotel entrance has now been completed with safety barrier installed. A similar barrier is to be installed outside the other footpath access on Grange Road. The 'Heritage Park' residential development by Homes by Esh is now well underway with early purchases continuing and show homes due to be open early May.
22. The Burtree Garden Village development which includes the Council's land at High Faverdale Farm has now started and the infrastructure works which will open up the site from Rotary Way in the south and Burtree Lane in the north are progressing well. The Phase 1 reserved matters planning applications are now being progressed and the farmhouse and buildings have been demolished.
23. The procurement of the town centre regeneration development partner has been paused temporarily awaiting the arrival in early May of the Council's newly-appointed Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection will take an active role in the process.

## **Planning Policy**

24. Work is ongoing on a new Homes Strategy for the Borough. It is hoped a draft will be presented to Cabinet in July seeking approval to consult on a wider level.
25. The built environment is important to the Borough and its Conservation Areas play an important role in its appearance. Conservation Area Appraisals should be reviewed every five years. Many of the Borough's Conservation Area Appraisals are out of date and a systematic review is now taking place concentrating on the Conservation Areas on Historic England's 'at risk register' as a priority.

26. A review of the Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal has taken place and consultation has occurred. It is hoped this will be adopted by the Council at this meeting.
27. A new Conservation Area Appraisal and designation of a Conservation Area for Middleton St George has been prepared and consulted upon. It is hoped this will be adopted by the Council at this meeting.

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