

**DECISIONS SHOULD NOT BE IMPLEMENTED BEFORE
MONDAY, 19 MAY 2025**

CABINET

Tuesday, 6 May 2025

PRESENT – Councillors Harker (Chair), Curry, Garner, McCollom, McEwan, Porter, Roche and Wallis

INVITEES – Councillors Snedker

C142 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

**C143 TO HEAR RELEVANT REPRESENTATION (FROM MEMBERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC) ON
ITEMS ON THIS CABINET AGENDA.**

No representations were made by Members or members of the public in attendance at the meeting.

C144 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS CABINET HELD ON 8TH APRIL 2025

Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Cabinet held on 8 April 2025.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be confirmed as a correct record.

REASON – They represent an accurate record of the meeting.

C145 MATTERS REFERRED TO CABINET

There were no matters referred back for re-consideration to this meeting.

C146 ISSUES ARISING FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no issues arising from Scrutiny considered at this meeting.

C147 KEY DECISIONS:-

(1) HIGH STREET RENTAL AUCTIONS

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection which requested approval to begin community engagement relating to the designation of a High Street Rental Auction (HSRA) area, to delegate powers to designate the HSRA area and to delegate power to implement individual rental auctions to the Director of Economy and Public Protection.

The submitted report explained that the High Street Rental Auctions provided local authorities with a new power to which require landlords to rent out persistently vacant commercial properties to new tenants. The Council is an early adopter of the HSRA Programme, HSRA can be used where attempts to work proactively and engage with landlords in bringing vacant premises back into use when they have not been successful. It was explained that not all properties or circumstances will be eligible and new burdens payments are available to fund some aspects of the process.

RESOLVED - (a) That Cabinet authorises undertaking a community engagement exercise on the draft High Street Rental Auction (HSRA) designated area, detail attached at Appendix 1 and 2.

(b) The draft HSRA designation and community engagement information is publicised via the Council's website, social media, local newspaper and direct mail to landlords of currently vacant properties within the draft area.

(c) The engagement period remains open for a period of 28 days to allow members of local communities and other stakeholders sufficient time to submit comments

d) The draft HSRA designation is amended and finalised in the light of comments received during the community engagement period.

(e) Approval of the final HSRA designation and any future variations to the HSRA designation is delegated to the Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Economy Portfolio Holder and Cabinet Member for Resources.

(f) Approval to implement each specific High Street Rental Auction is delegated to the Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Economy Portfolio Holder and Cabinet Member for Resources.

(g) Approval to undertake future community engagement exercises pursuant to a variation of the HSRA designation is delegated to the Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Economy Portfolio Holder and Cabinet Member for Resources.

(h) Approval to draw down and administer New Burdens Payment.

REASONS – The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:

(a) Whilst Darlington's vacancy rates are low compared to the North East average, there are several long-term vacant properties within the proposed HSRA area which could become occupied as a result of this new power.

(b) Reducing high street vacancies aligns with Darlington Borough Council's Town Centre Strategy and will contribute to the overall vitality and sustainability of the town centre.

(c) HSRA is a last resort which applies to eligible properties which have been unoccupied for

12 months or at least 366 days within a 24-month period and that occupation of the premises would be beneficial to the local economy, society, or environment.

(d) It is a legislative requirement the council must publish any proposed high street designation and should invite comments from the local community and any other stakeholders who may be affected via email and post and for no less than a period of 28 days. The recommended use of a variety of publication methods aims to reach as many of the affected parties as possible.

(e) Delegation of powers to approve each auction and the final HSRA designation area following the community engagement exercise will enable the council to begin implementation at pace. It is envisaged that community engagement comments will be geographical in nature and any subsequent amendment to the draft HSRA designation boundary at Appendix 1 will not be materially significant to finalisation of the HSRA area and implementation.

C148 SEND STRATEGY 2025-2029

The Cabinet Member with Children and Young People Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of People which provided members with an introduction to the SEND Strategy 2025-2029 for Darlington Local Area SEND partnership, which comprised a comprehensive plan to enhance the provision of services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

It was explained that the Strategy reflected the outcomes of the extensive engagement with stakeholders, including parents, carers, educators, health and social care professionals and young people themselves. It was explained that the Strategy supports Darlington's Council Plan by promoting social inclusion, enhancing educational outcomes, building a skilled workforce, strengthening community health and ensuring sustainable development.

The report stated that the Strategy aligns with key legislation, including the Children and Families Act 2014, SEND Code of Practice 2015 and Equality Act 2010, which ensured compliance with statutory duties. The report noted that the SEND Strategy 2025-2029 is an ambitious plan designed to improve the lives of children and young people with SEND in Darlington.

RESOLVED – (a) That Cabinet Adopt the SEND Strategy 2025-2029 on behalf of Darlington Borough Council attached at Appendix 1.

(b) That Cabinet Agree the Year 1 action plan to implement the aims of the strategy attached at Appendix 2.

REASONS - (a) The strategy is produced in the context of the statutory requirements set out in the Children and Families Act 2014 together with the guidance in the SEN Code of Practice that was issued alongside the 2014 Act. These provisions include the duty to keep under review the educational provision, training provision and social care provision made in its area for children and young people who have special educational needs or a disability and made

outside its area for children and young people for whom it is responsible who have special educational needs or who have a disability (section 27 of the 2014 Act).

(b) The strategy is produced in the context of the statutory requirements set out in the Children and Families Act 2014 together with the guidance in the SEN Code of Practice that was issued alongside the 2014 Act. These provisions include the duty to keep under review the educational provision, training provision and social care provision made in its area for children and young people who have special educational needs or a disability and made outside its area for children and young people for whom it is responsible who have special educational needs or who have a disability (section 27 of the 2014 Act).

C149 DESIGNATION OF NEW MIDDLETON ST GEORGE CONSERVATION AREA AND ADOPTION OF FINALISED APPRAISAL

The Cabinet Member with the Economy Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of Economy and Public Protection to seek Councillor's approval to designate a new conservation area at Middleton St George and to adopt the corresponding appraisal.

It was explained that the report provided justification for the designation of a new conservation area at Middleton St George and adopting the corresponding appraisal. The draft version of the appraisal had been subject to a six-week public consultation period and amendments had been made in light of the comments received.

The report also stated that following the adoption of the finalised appraisal, the text currently marked in yellow would be amended to reflect the adopted status of the appraisal and no other changes would be made. The adopted appraisal will be named the Stockton and Darlington Railway: Middleton St George (Fighting Cocks) Conservation Area Appraisal Adopted Document May 2025.

RESOLVED - (a) That Cabinet recommends that Council adopts the new conservation area boundary at Middleton St George (see chapter 6.0 of the finalised appraisal).

(b) That Cabinet recommends that Council adopts the new conservation area's name: Stockton & Darlington Railway: Middleton St George (Fighting Cocks) Conservation Area.

(c) That Cabinet recommends that Council adopts the finalised appraisal for the new Middleton St George Conservation Area.

(d) That Cabinet recommends that Council authorises the amendment of finalised appraisal with regards to the text marked in yellow, to reflect the adopted status of the document. The adopted appraisal will be named: Stockton & Darlington Railway: Middleton St George (Fighting Cocks) Conservation Area Appraisal. Adopted document. May 2025.

REASONS - (a) Fighting Cocks was an original stopping point (station) along the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR) of 1825. The presence of the railway led to the establishment of the Middleton Iron Works in 1864, which sparked the development of the village of Middleton St George.

(b) The bicentennial of the S&DR is this year. There will be many events along the former route to celebrate the birth of the modern railway. Darlington Borough Council (DBC) has been making significant S&DR-related investments, and Middleton St George Parish Council is also preparing for its celebration within the village. Over the past few years, heritage assets at Fighting Cocks have been promoted through the Middleton St George Neighbourhood Plan, S&DR Heritage Action Zone and Fighting Cocks Heritage Hub.

(c) The appraisal demonstrates in detail that sufficient special interest survives at Middleton St George which is associated with the S&DR and the industrial development of the village justifying the designation of a conservation area. It picks up the 'unfinished' work by Durham County Council who proposed a (different) conservation area boundary for Middleton St George in 2022.

(d) The draft conservation area boundary proposed by DBC has generally been welcomed by residents who took part in the public consultation. It is also supported by the Friends of the S&DR and Middleton St George Parish Council. Amendments have been made following feedback received, including concerns raised by Historic England.

(e) Once the conservation area boundary has been adopted, the appraisal will provide an evidence base for managing change in the area and form a material consideration in the Planning process. Conservation area designation can also assist if funding is sought for larger regeneration or conservation schemes within the boundary.

(f) The appraisal also includes suggestions to improve the condition of the area. These are in line with the aims of the Middleton St George Neighbourhood Plan and the Fighting Cocks Heritage Hub.

C150 RELEASE OF HIGH NEEDS CAPITAL - BEAUMONT HILL ACADEMY

The Cabinet Member with the Children and Young People Portfolio introduced the report (previously circulated) of the Executive Director of People to seek Members agreement to release an additional £375,000 of High Needs Capital Funding for the refurbishment of Haughton's Children's Centre and Block 3 Beaumont Hill Academy.

The report explained that to date Cabinet had released £466,000 of High Needs Capital Funding and this amount was based on a initial estimate costs from an outline feasibility study done by Eddisons Building and Project Consultancy in 2023. A further detailed survey has now been completed by the RLB Group which has identified some significant costs that were not included in the original estimate, largely in relation to the Beaumont Hill remodelling. The report also stated that because of the time lapse since the original survey in 2024 and Cabinet approved the funding in March 2024 there had since been some inflationary costs of materials.

Reference was made to the initial estimate costs from a study completed previously, but noted that the true costs had not been reflected.

RESOLVED – That Cabinet recommends that members agree to formally release £375,000 of High Needs Capital Funding for the provision of additional special education needs places at Beaumont Hill academy in line with the new SEND strategy.

REASONS - (a) Release of the High Needs Capital funding will allow Beaumont Hill academy to refurbish Haughton Children's Centre to provide a sixth form centre for up to 30 pupils.

(b) Remodelling the space vacated by the sixth form pupils will create an addition 30-40 high needs places for secondary age pupils with special educational needs and reduce reliance on expensive out of borough placements.

C151 MEMBERSHIP CHANGES - TO CONSIDER ANY MEMBERSHIP CHANGES TO OTHER BODIES TO WHICH CABINET APPOINTS.

There were no membership changes reported at the meeting.

C152 TO CONSIDER THE EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS :-

**DECISIONS DATED –
FRIDAY, 9 MAY 2025**