

**COUNCIL**  
**17 JULY 2025**

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**OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Economy Portfolio.

**Environmental Health**

2. Following the media reports of a serious injury to an underage user of a sunbed shop in Middlesbrough and the subsequent jailing of the business owner, Environmental Health have carried out a programme of visits to similar shops in Darlington. Self-assessment letters were sent to 13 sunbed businesses in Darlington requiring information on how they control underage use of sunbeds in their premises. Eight follow-up visits were carried out to determine compliance with health and safety and age restricted legislation. Five out of the eight visits found that improvements were needed in terms of health and safety and one shop had illegal tanning nasal sprays seized. As a response to the non-compliance, enforcement letters were sent to the businesses requiring them to comply and checks will be made in due course to check on the progress of these shops.
3. The Air Quality Annual Status Report has been submitted to Defra which concludes that air quality across the Borough is generally good and complying with the air quality objectives. The report provides information on progress made with actions to improve air quality and links in with the aims of the Darlington Borough Council Air Quality Strategy launched in 2024.

**Climate Change**

4. I am delighted to report that the new Climate Change Officer has been recruited and joined the team in May.
5. The annual report is tabled at this meeting. As you can see, the emissions for 2024/5 have risen against our trajectory. We are exploring the reasons for this, but initial investigations suggest that the opening of Hopetown and the increased activity in former empty buildings plays a part. Also, during the current works at The Dolphin Centre, the combined heat and power unit has been offline. This means that electricity has been consumed through the meter that would not normally be used. The new CHP unit is due to be online in July 2025. The Climate Change Officer will be working with the Corporate Landlord to identify improvements in these and other areas.

**Building Control**

6. Building Regulations applications and works progressing as normal, no issues to be reported.
7. KPI returns for the first reporting quarter have been submitted to The Building Safety Regulator. Monitoring is ongoing and further returns will be submitted throughout 2025.

The Building Control team continue to work hard towards preparing all relevant reports to be submitted to the BSR.

8. Confirmation has been received that the Building Safety Regulator will be undertaking an imminent audit of the DBC Building Control service. Preparations within the team have been underway over recent months and we are in a good position. This may impose strain on the resources available. Support and advice have been offered from neighbouring authorities and LABC can also provide an insight into what to expect and provide guidance and assistance.
9. The government's Building Safety Levy implementation has been postponed until autumn 2026 of which Building Control will be the collectors and administrators. The Building Control team are taking every opportunity to learn more about the expectations from MHCLG. Further work will be required to ascertain exact requirements for resourcing and implementation of systems and processes to support Levy collection as we approach the implementation date.
10. Dangerous structures reporting has somewhat alleviated after a surge at the beginning of the year. We continue to follow up reports of dangerous structures and ensure any dangers are removed. We have continued to monitor some of the more contentious problem buildings around the borough, as follows:
  - (a) Working with building managers and the owner, improvements have been made to Rise Carr Club after concerns were raised about loose materials to the roof.

### **Development Management**

11. 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. 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. The agreement has now been signed by all parties, which now gives assurances that the much-awaited development will now proceed.
12. There has been an occupation incident by travellers adjacent to an existing traveller site in the Borough. The matter has been reported to the Planning Applications Committee and the appropriate mechanism to deal with the matter has been instigated through the Court.

### **Business Investment**

13. Business start-up and business growth enquiries continue, with the main areas of interest from the hospitality and health and beauty sectors.

14. The Business Team have been working closely with TVCA to develop the refreshed business support package to help local businesses develop and grow. This support will be funded via TVCA's UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocation.
15. Between 20 and 22 May 2025, officers attend the UK Real Estate, Investment & Infrastructure Forum as part of a Tees Valley delegation. The event brings together investors, developers, local authorities, and industry leaders to discuss sustainable, inclusive, and innovative investment, economic development and regeneration. The event presents an opportunity to network and connect with a wide variety of industry leaders, potential clients, and collaborators. As part of the TVCA package, space was provided to promote Darlington and the investment opportunities available.
16. In early June, the Business Investment Team hosted a "Skills Booster" event. This new event aimed to raise awareness of the wide range of skills and training opportunities available locally to support career growth, personal development, and lifelong learning. It brought together around 40 exhibitors including local education and training providers, support organisations, and a selection of employers. Bringing together a wide range of support organisations helps raise aspirations and supports people to realise their potential.
17. Other events the Business Investment Team have attended include:
  - (a) Amazon Fulfilment Centre Visit with Make UK – 3 April 2025
  - (b) Tees Valley Launchpad Showcase – 3 April 2025
  - (c) Bionow Pharma Manufacturing Conference – 7 May 2025
  - (d) Business & Professional Services employer engagement event – 13 May 2025
  - (e) Tees Valley Business Club meeting @ Darlington – 19 June 2025
  - (f) Impact: The Evolution of AI for Business Innovation - 20 June 2025
  - (g) Darlington Professionals Network – 27 June 2025

## **Estates**

18. 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 and the show home is now open and generating a lot of interest.
19. The Burtree Garden Village development which includes the Council's land at High Faverdale Farm has now started and the infrastructure works are well underway. The Phase 1 reserved matters planning applications are now being progressed, and the farmhouse and buildings are being demolished following a recent arson attack.
20. The selection process for the town centre regeneration development partner is progressing and was considered at Cabinet on 8 July.

## **Towns Fund**

21. The Towns Fund Programme continues to deliver on its objectives with the public realm enhancements in Coniscliffe Road fully completed in June 2025. Shopfront works continue at pace on both Skinnergate and the Yards, and Victoria Road, with both schemes due to complete by the end of 2025.
22. Works to the former Northern Echo building are making good progress, with the ground floor Adult Skills facility likely to be operational in early 2026 and completion of the upper floors by the end of 2026.
23. Work has commenced on 156 Northgate to transform a historic building into quality office space; this is scheduled to complete by December 2025.
24. Contracts for works to Edward Pease House are out for tender and expected back mid-July with a proposed start of August 2025 and a completion target of December 2025.
25. Development of an urban green space on the disused site on Garden Street within the Linear Park project has commenced with an artist being appointed in March 2025 to begin research.
26. Initial demolition work has commenced on the properties next to Bank Top Station. The detailed design for the public realm scheme is due to be complete by end July 2025. TVCA anticipate the works will be complete by early 2026.

## **Planning Policy**

27. A new draft Homes Strategy is currently out for consultation and a further report will be presented to Cabinet once the consultation period has ended and responses considered.
28. Proposals to introduce an Article 4 Direction relation to Houses in Multiple Occupation have now been publicised following a decision at the last Cabinet meeting.
29. Work is on-going on a review of the West End and Victoria Embankment Conservation Area Appraisals.

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