

COUNCIL
2 OCTOBER 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 1,313 requests for service in Quarter 1 2025/2026.

The main categories of these requests are:

- (a) Food 126
- (b) Licensing 94
- (c) Noise 282
- (d) Planning Enquiries 91
- (e) Refuse 94
- (f) Pests 208
- (g) Personal searches 210

3. The food safety team have taken part in a regional food sampling programme that looked at undeclared food allergies present in meals sold from catering and retail premises. The survey revealed a significant improvement in failure rates compared to a similar survey carried out in 2023. Of the 180 samples taken throughout the region, 31 had been contaminated with a known allergen - with dairy contamination in non-dairy foods and peanuts in peanut free meals being the most frequent offenders. This is compared to 41 failures of 122 samples being contaminated in 2023.
4. The Air Quality Annual Status Report which was submitted to Defra in June has been approved and positive feedback received.

Climate Change

5. We have again been asked to take part in a government trial, in this case for Defra's local authority climate and health risk and adaptation tool (LARA). The Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer coordinated responses from a number of teams, and we are grateful for their support. The exercise highlighted some areas where we could improve our adaptation response to heat risk, and this will be included in the next iteration of the climate change action plan.
6. Following the declaration of a nature recovery emergency at May's Council, a climate change and nature strategy was put before Cabinet in September. The climate change action plan is already being revised and a new nature recovery action plan will be produced in due course.

Building Control

7. Building Regulations applications and works progressing as normal, no issues to be reported.
8. KPI returns for the second 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.
9. The Building Safety Regulator inspection audit of the DBC Building Control service has begun and is in progress. This has imposed some strain on the resources available, but we continue to meet all our responsibilities whilst upholding the service delivery.
10. The government's Building Safety Levy implementation is due to go live in autumn 2026. Building Control will be the collectors and administrators within DBC. 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.
11. Dangerous structures reporting has settled 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 to follow up any reports of dangers in relation to Northgate House.

Development Management

12. As Members are aware 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. The Section 106 legal agreement is complete and planning permission was granted in May of this year. The applicant has submitted applications to discharge pre-commencement conditions and the developer, Keir, has indicated that enabling works for the development will start imminently.
13. 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. By way of an update Officers attended the High Court in Newcastle and were successful in securing an interim injunction on 15th July 2025 to prevent the further preparation of the site for the occupation of travellers. Officers were further successful in securing a full injunction at the High Court on 15th August 2025 which remains in place until November 2026 (to allow the landowners to contest the injunction should they wish to do so). The full injunction prevents activities taking place relating to the preparation of the site for occupation, or the siting and occupation of caravans, mobile homes, vehicles or other chattels intended for temporary or permanent occupation.

14. Further work is being undertaken on the planning application for Drone delivery flights from the Amazon site in Darlington. Detailed discussions are taking place with the applicant, The Civil Aviation Authority and The Department of Transport. It is hoped that a positive position can be arrived at.

Business Investment

15. Business start-up and business growth enquiries continue.
16. Trade merchant Wolseley has taken 108,000 sq ft at the Greenbox Darlington logistics hub. The speculatively built logistics park was completed in March and comprises three grade A industrial units ranging from 85,000 sq ft to 215,000 sq ft. Wolseley, a merchant in plumbing, heating, cooling, and infrastructure trade, has taken space at Unit 2.
17. Martin Brower is recruiting staff for their new distribution centre in Darlington. The Business Investment Team are working with the recruitment agency and supporting the process.
18. The Business Investment Team are planning a significant event aimed at encouraging and inspiring young people to consider a career in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM). Destination STEM Hopetown - is being held at Hopetown, Darlington's award-winning railway-themed visitor attraction, where around 2000 local children aged between 10 and 13 years old, will visit the two-day event on 14 and 15 October, where more than forty employers will showcase the diverse range of STEM careers available across the region, using hands on interactive activities and engaging presentations and exhibitions. A diverse range of employers are being encouraged to attend, offering a unique opportunity to raise awareness of their business. It is also the perfect way for businesses to engage with future talent and to get involved in providing social value to their local communities.
19. The Business Team have been supporting the delivery of the Youth Trailblazer Programme through a range of business engagement activities. Funded by Tees Valley Combined Authority, this initiative is designed to help young people aged 18–21 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) gain valuable work experience. This new pilot initiative is offering paid work placements, flexible unpaid tasters, and one-to-one support to help young people gain skills, explore job options, and get into work, education or training.

Estates

20. The Council's newly appointed town centre development partner Cityheart are excited at the potential opportunities this partnership could deliver for Darlington and early positive discussions have now taken place. A further report to Cabinet outlining next steps will be presented in the Autumn.
21. Blackwell parkland continues to be source of colour and enjoyment for 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. Unfortunately, there have been incidents of damage and vandalism to some of the internal fences which surround the wildflower meadows. and users of the parkland are encouraged to be vigilant and report any such damage to Brambledown. The 'Heritage Park' residential development by Homes by Esh is now well established with several of the new homes already occupied, adding to the appeal of this very attractive location.

22. The continued dry weather conditions has allowed infrastructure works at Burtree Garden Village which includes the Council's land at High Faverdale Farm to progress well and a decision on the Phase 1 reserved matters planning applications are expected shortly.
23. The former Cleveland Bridge site is soon to welcome a new occupier, Pyrol Ltd who will be operating a Pyrolosis Plant and will bring upwards of 150 direct jobs and 400 jobs in supporting businesses. It will be good to see this site brought back into operation.

Towns Fund

24. 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.
25. 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.
26. Work has commenced on 156 Northgate to transform a historic building into quality office space; this is scheduled to complete by December 2025.
27. The tender for works to Edward Pease House is being considered and the specified works are proposed to start in Autumn 2025 with a completion target of January 2026.
28. 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.
29. Initial demolition work has commenced on the properties next to Bank Top Station. The detailed design for the public realm scheme is being completed and TVCA anticipate the works will be complete by early 2026.

Planning Policy

30. Work is progressing on the revised Local Plan and a draft is expected to be presented to Cabinet in November seeking approval for a first consultation.
31. A draft Design Supplementary Planning Document will also be presented to Cabinet seeking approval for the statutory consultation.

32. A call for sites for Local Green Spaces is now open for submissions from the community. This recognises green spaces which have a significant importance to local communities. These should only be designated where these green spaces are:
- (a) In reasonably close proximity to the community, it serves;
 - (b) Demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field) tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
 - (c) Local in character and not an extensive tract of land.
33. Sites which have been put forward which meet the criteria will be included in the review of the Local Plan.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy Portfolio