

COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2026

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 requests for service in Quarter 3 2025/2026. The main categories of these requests are:
 - (a) Food 107
 - (b) Licensing 103
 - (c) Noise 177
 - (d) Planning Enquiries 91
 - (e) Refuse 56
 - (f) Pests 171
 - (g) Personal searches 114
3. Environmental Health has partnered with Public Health and Childcare Development to launch an enhanced Healthy Early Years (HEY) Award, supporting early years settings to promote healthier lifestyles for children across Darlington. The expanded award now brings together three key areas of child wellbeing: nutrition, physical activity, and oral health. To assist settings in meeting the new standards, a comprehensive guidance document has been published, offering practical advice, local examples of effective practice, and links to relevant services and resources. The updated HEY Award will be assessed by the Food Safety Team as part of routine food hygiene inspections, ensuring a consistent and supportive approach to improving health outcomes for young children.
4. A new air quality monitor for PM2.5 (particulate matter) has been installed on the recreational ground off Fenby Avenue, the monitor is an urban background monitor and part of the Automatic Urban and Rural Network which is run by Defra. Once operational the monitoring results will be available on the UK Air website.

Climate Change

5. We have been taking part in local discussions around developing regional energy strategic plans. These are a government requirement on the National Energy System Operator to inform network investment by the distribution network operators (DNOs). We have also been supporting the Local Area Energy Plans being drawn up by the consultants employed by TVCA. Our participation in both of these ensures that Darlington is not left behind in any future energy system planning.
6. We are also in discussion with the local resilience forum to determine how we measure the costs to the council and to Darlington as a whole, of severe weather events. This will

include an indication of where the worst impacts are being felt. If we can do this robustly, it will enable us to target interventions and, hopefully, help to reduce future insurance claims (and subsequent rises in premium).

7. The Climate Change Officer is now qualified to deliver Carbon Literacy training. She is offering teams bespoke training sessions. If Members would like her to deliver a session for Members, we can arrange that.
8. The Ecologist has almost completed work on the statutory biodiversity duty report, which must be submitted before the end of March. She is also working on the nature restoration action plan. She is continuing to work on our approach to dealing with biodiversity net gain alongside responding to planning applications.

Building Control

9. Building Regulations applications and works are progressing as normal, no issues to be reported. The large Brunswick Street office development has commenced with initial drainage and piling works underway. Building Control have undertaken initial commencement inspections at the site and continue to work with the contractor Kier regarding the Building Control application.
10. The BSR audit inspection is now complete, with a report issued to DBC. This included several areas highlighted for review and address. Much work and resources have been dedicated to drawing up an action plan since it was issued in late November. All identified actions have been implemented, with relevant information reported back to BSR.
11. Preparation for the introduction of the government's Building Safety Levy continues at pace. The Building Control team are taking every opportunity to learn more about the expectations from MHCLG. This may take up further, considerable resource from the Building Control service. MHCLG have confirmed a burdens fund will be available in relation to the introduction of the levy which may need to be explored further. It has been suggested that this may need to be used to cover employee resource to administer the levy collection process, along with IT systems and software to record and report details of levy collection. We await further details and guidance and take every opportunity available to gain further understanding of the expectations.
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.
 - (b) It has been noted that work has been instigated to demolish Valley House and this is now an active demolition site. The dangerous structure file on this property is now closed.
 - (c) General: We have noted a steady influx of minor dangerous structure reports so far this year. This is in stark contrast to the start of the previous year, where a rapid influx of reports in relation to winter storms were reported. This winter appears to have been much calmer so far. We continue to deal with any reports accordingly, in

relation to Building Control involvement, ensuring safety of the public within the borough.

Development Management

13. Following the granting of planning permission for infrastructure to support drone delivery flights from the Amazon in October 2025, initial drone testing in connection with Amazon's Prime Air programme commenced on site in January 2026. This includes take-off and landing within the site, together with maintenance check flights, where drones follow pre-programmed routes beyond the site before returning to it, although no customer deliveries will be made at this stage.
14. The testing period forms part of the time limited planning permission which relates to the Sandbox testing period only to allow the impact of noise from drone flights to be monitored and for data gathered during this testing period to be used as an evidence base for the Secretary of State to develop noise policy and to inform future statutory guidance for BVLOS drone operations to be rolled out nationally for this technology.
15. Officers from Planning and Environmental Health will continue to work closely with Amazon and their representatives during this testing period as they move towards submitting a further planning application for full Prime Air operations in due course. In accordance with the planning conditions attached to the time limited planning permission, Amazon are reporting any noise complaints on a monthly basis. To date none have been received.
16. Work continues on the new Treasury building on Brunswick Street following the granting of planning permission. Site preparation and infrastructure works started towards the end of 2025 with the main construction works following on.
17. Enforcement reports relating to unauthorised development continue to increase with most reports resolved without the need to resort to formal enforcement action. Members are updated on the more significant or urgent cases where investigations are ongoing confidentially at the Planning Applications Committee each month. There has been an increase across the Borough in unauthorised signage recently, both within the town centre and other concentrations of commercial properties across the town. Given the number of unauthorised signs in place, the Enforcement Team has been targeting signs in the most sensitive locations i.e. listed buildings, conservation areas, and others where complaints have been received.
18. Recently enforcement notices have been served on a number of properties to secure removal of unauthorised signage where this hasn't been possible through negotiation. This has resulted in a generally positive response with signage having already been removed or a commitment given to comply with the notices. The team will continue to secure compliance with these notices and continue to investigate other unauthorised signage as resources allow.

Business Investment

19. The main areas of enquiries for business growth and business start-up has been the hospitality and personal services sector.

20. In February 2026, Darlington Jobs Fair, a major recruitment event hosted by Darlington Borough Council, designed to connect jobseekers, career changers, and students with local and national employers was held. Whilst traditionally held at the Dolphin Centre, this fair was hosted at the Darlington Indoor Market Hall. With a broad industry representation, the event featured over 60 exhibitors, including Darlington Building Society, Zigup, Lidl, Paralloys, Willmott Dixon, CPI, Kier Construction and the Darlington Economic Campus, as well as Darlington Council. Opportunities available ranged from entry-level positions and apprenticeships to management roles in sectors such as healthcare, engineering, logistics, retail, and the civil service. In addition, a number of support organisations like National Careers Service, Mind, Enterprise Made Simple, TVCA and Jobcentre Plus were on hand to provide advice and guidance, and educational providers like Darlington College and Learning & Skills attended to discuss upskilling and further education courses.
21. The Business Investment Team attended the Tees Valley Supply Chain Showcase on 12 February 2026, which brought together regional businesses, major project leads, investors, and public-sector partners to highlight the scale of economic opportunity emerging across the Tees valley. The event focused on strengthening local supply-chain capability and ensuring that firms across the region—particularly SMEs—are well-positioned to benefit from the region's expanding industrial and clean-energy sectors. Key themes discussed included major investment pipeline, supply chain readiness, skills and workforce development, innovation and diversification.
22. Officers have been working with our Tees Valley local authority peers to develop and deliver a "Business Masterclass Programme", a structured series of high-quality workshops, expert-led sessions, and practical learning opportunities designed to help local businesses improve productivity, adopt new technologies, scale up, and build long-term resilience. Funded by TVCA, the programme forms part of the region's wider business-support ecosystem and is delivered in partnership with local authorities, universities, and specialist providers. The Business Team are promoting Darlington businesses to participate.
23. Officers have supported Department for Business and Trade (DBT) and TVCA with the delivery and application appraisals of the Tees Valley Export Support Programme, a £600,000 regional initiative designed to help businesses across Tees Valley start exporting or expand their existing overseas activity. The programme is designed to help Tees Valley firms overcome common barriers to exporting—such as cost, compliance, and market access—and to ensure that local products and services can compete on the global stage. A number of Darlington businesses have been supported through this scheme.

Planning Policy

24. Consultation on Victoria Embankment and West End Conservation Area Appraisals has now concluded. A report will be prepared for a subsequent Cabinet and Council meeting with recommendations for adoption.

25. The Local Plan Review is now undergoing a 6 week consultation period. A report will be prepared summarising all the comments received and recommending modifications before a further round of consultation later in the year.
26. Work is on-going on the Homes Strategy and Action Plan and a report will be prepared for the April or May Cabinet.

Estates & Property

27. As reported to Cabinet on 3 March, the Council's Town Centre Development Partner Cityheart are progressing the Council's proposals for the STEM centre and finalising the proposed Development Agreement.
28. Infrastructure works at Burtree Garden Village which includes the Council's land have been hampered recently by the bad weather but are expected to pick up pace again as the weather improves. We still await a decision on the reserved matters planning application for cells L, M & O together with a decision on the detailed planning application for Cell CH.
29. Further to the approval by Cabinet in February regarding the Cummins option agreement, solicitors are now instructed and Cummins have recently submitted a planning application for their proposed expansion plans on Council land at Salters Lane South.
30. Proposals for the Council's land at Coniscliffe Road are continuing and a planning application is anticipated within a few months.

Towns Fund

31. The Towns Fund project board, which is comprised of relevant officers, is responsible for the oversight of the delivery of the remaining Towns Fund projects as defined by the Neighbourhood Board.
32. The focus is on the remaining projects which are Edward Pease House, 156 Northgate, Skinnergate and the Yards and the Northern Echo Building.

STEM Centre

33. The release of the Growth Mission Fund allocation is dependent on the completion of a full Government 'Green Book' business case. The Council and Department of Business and Trade grant funding team are working closely together to achieve sign off of the business case in March 2026
34. Cabinet resolved at the meeting on March 3 to include the STEM Centre site as part of the Cityheart development agreement and to commission Cityheart to deliver the scheme. In the interim, the necessary professional service works are underway to progress to the submission of a planning application.
35. Design consideration and refinement. The agreed facility operator, Darlington College and the Council are engaging with businesses and the education network to fully understand their current and future requirements of the centre to inform the final design. This will continue throughout the preconstruction planning stage and will have the necessary focus

on engaging those disadvantaged communities as defined by the Pride In Place Programme.

Pride in Place

36. The first year of Pride In Place starts in April 2026. This current year has been about making preparations.
37. At its last meeting on February 4, 2026, the Neighbourhood Board considered:
 - (a) The Regeneration Plan which was submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in November. Confirmation of the plan is expected imminently.
 - (b) The new guidance as the programme moves from Plan for Neighbourhoods to Pride in Place. In particular the increased focus on actions led by the community.
 - (c) How a small grants fund might be established
 - (d) Updates of the three projects currently underway, STEM Centre, Skerne Park Community Centre feasibility study and a youth engagement proposal”

Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy Portfolio