

COUNCIL
18 JULY 2019

OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY AND REGENERATION PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under by Officers within the Economy and Regeneration Portfolio.

Local Plan

2. Following a recommendation made by Place Scrutiny, Cabinet made the decision to defer the Local Plan report to allow for additional evidenced based traffic modelling to be carried out with regard to the proposed access through Springfield Park.
3. It is important that Cabinet receive all the evidence, listen to feedback, taking into account all views and options before committing to a local plan for Darlington.
4. I would like to remind Members that the Local Plan is a plan for growth and prosperity and aims to ensure that Darlington becomes an even more attractive and sustainable location in which people increasingly choose to live, work and visit. The Plan will play a major part in delivering our economic strategy while providing the new homes needed to support the increase in the number of working people as we take the opportunities of a modern, vibrant economy.

Town Centre Strategy

5. The Town Centre Strategy was presented to Cabinet in July, and a full consultation and engagement exercise with the community of Darlington, partners and stakeholders will commence in the very near future. This strategy clearly sets out an overarching vision and by working with our local partners we will:
 - (a) Develop and enhance Darlington's unique selling points.
 - (b) Establish a richer understanding of the current and future demographic demands upon the town centre.
 - (c) Create an accessible town centre for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.
 - (d) Establish new anchors within the town such as a revitalised, refurbished and refreshed Victorian Indoor Market.
 - (e) Invests in our heritage assets, utilising their charm and attractiveness by holding regular events and activities.
 - (f) Reduce the retail footprint of the town replacing empty shops and derelict pieces of land with appropriate, sustainable and high-quality residential accommodation and employment space.
 - (g) Ensure any future developments of the town centre strategically fits and complements forthcoming investments into the Bank Top Train Station and the Darlington 2025 programme of projects.

6. As part of the Town Centre Strategy, Cabinet has authorised the acquisition of 12 Skinnergate. The purchase and subsequent work on the property will ensure a general improvement in appearance of the Grade II listed building and will improve the general amenity of the Skinnergate area.

Development Management

7. Our development management team continues to work with residents and developers. Over the last few months permissions have been granted for the development of Stag House and various section 106 agreements have been completed which means that the commencement of certain developments is imminent.

Environmental Health

8. Officers within the Environmental Health Section continue to ensure the communities within the Borough are protected through various interventions, guidance and enforcement and have responded to 831 requests for service in Quarter 4. The main categories of these requests are:

- (a) Food (113)
- (b) Licensing (81)
- (c) Noise (120)
- (d) Planning Consultations (87)
- (e) Refuse (75)
- (f) Pest (116)

9. Additionally, the Commercial Team carried out the following proactive Food Inspections:

- (a) Food Safety (194)
- (b) Food Standards (116)

Business Investment

10. There has been further interest in the Faverdale area, with two local companies expressing an interest in land for expansion. Negotiations are ongoing.
11. Further investment opportunities in Darlington continue to present themselves with discussions with a regional company ongoing, which will see approximately 44 staff working from a new Darlington site.
12. From the latest figures produced in April 2019, there are currently 2,770 Darlington residents claiming out-of-work benefits. This equates to 4.3 per cent of all residents which is the same level as the North East figure. Great Britain's figure is 2.7 per cent. This shows an increase of 25 claimants in Darlington since March 2019 (0.1 per cent increase). Both in the North-East and nationally there has been a 0.1 per cent increase too.

13. Of those claiming out-of-work benefits, 575 are aged 18-24 (7.6 per cent), which is an increase of 5 claimants since March 2019, and 355 (8.6per cent) are aged 18-21, which is an increase of 15 claimants in the same period (0.4 per cent). These two age groups are those which are most notable in variance compared to Great Britain as a whole at 3.6 per cent and the North East at 6.1 per cent for the 18-24 age range, which equates to a 0.2 per cent increase; and 3.9 per cent and 6.5 per cent respectively for the 18-21 age range, which is a 0.3 per cent increase.
14. Planning for Business Week, which will take place week commencing 7 October, has commenced. There is a large amount of interest already for partners and organisations wanting to be involved.

Councillor Alan Marshall
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio