

**COUNCIL**  
**26 SEPTEMBER 2019**

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**OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY AND REGENERATION PORTFOLIO**

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

**Release of Capital Programme Funding for Land Assembly, Site Design and Development in the Town Centre**

2. Cabinet has approved the release of £10 million capital funding from the Tees Valley Indigenous Growth Fund for land assembly, site design and development and to bring forward regeneration projects and prepare sites for development within Darlington Town Centre, which supports the delivery of the Town Centre Strategy 2019-2030.

**Town Centre**

3. Consultation on the Town Centre Strategy commenced in July and will end 30 September 2019. The strategy has been available on the Council website and promoted via numerous social media platforms. In addition, open meetings and exhibition stands have been organised over the consultation period. The strategy has also appeared in the recent One Darlington magazine.
4. Members will recall that the Council submitted an Expression of Interest bid to Government for funding from the Future High Streets Fund. It is pleasing to report that our bid was successful, and officers are working up a business case for submission in February 2020. As detailed in the Future High Street Fund prospectus any application must look at developing alternative uses for land other than retail. Our business case will focus on the redevelopment of land for residential use which is one of the main objectives of the Town Centre Strategy.

**Estates & Property & Business Investment**

5. The first of the Town Centre Strategic Acquisitions has taken place with the purchase of 12 Skinnergate, formerly occupied by St. Teresa's Hospice but severely damaged by fire. Negotiations with the owners of adjoining and other strategic buildings in the Town Centre are ongoing.
6. There has been a marked increase in the number of pre-start enquiries over the last two months, with around 20 enquiries being received. These will be monitored to see which move on to become trading businesses.
7. Two businesses in the town are in the process of taking on new larger premises in the Morton Park area in readiness for their growth plans which will see an additional 20-30 jobs being created in the next twelve months.
8. From the latest figures produced in July 2019, there are currently 2,875 Darlington residents claiming out-of-work benefits. This equates to 4.4 per cent of all

residents which is 0.1 per cent higher than the North East figure. Great Britain's figure is 2.8 per cent. This shows an increase of 105 claimants in Darlington since April 2019.

9. It is important to note however, under Universal Credit a broader span of claimants is required to look for work than under Jobseeker's Allowance. As Universal Credit Full Service is rolled out in particular areas, the number of people recorded as being on the Claimant Count is therefore likely to rise.
10. Business Week preparations are well underway with around 20 events planned for the week utilising a number of Darlington businesses and venues. The events will include a Recruitment Fair, which 18 companies have taken a stand for so far and who have active job vacancies. A tour of 'Feethams House' is also planned giving potential occupiers/businesses an opportunity to inspect the new offices under construction. Completion anticipated Spring 2020.

### **Redevelopment of the Victorian Indoor Market**

11. Cabinet has approved the allocation of funds for the redevelopment of Darlington Victorian Indoor Market, to contribute to the further economic wellbeing and vitality of the Town Centre.
12. In 2017, the Council entered a partnership agreement with Market Asset Management Ltd (MAM) for the management, refurbishment of the Victorian Indoor Market and the management and improvement of Darlington's outdoor market.
13. As part of this partnership agreement, MAM was obliged to produce and deliver a redevelopment scheme and committed to invest £1,500,000 (plus VAT).
14. Further developments have also been discussed and following a public consultation exercise by MAM in March 2019 on two refurbishment options it was identified that Option 2, which included the proposal for food and beverage outlets and a 'winter garden' was the preferred option. The necessary planning applications have been submitted.

### **Environmental Health**

#### **APSE Service Awards 2019 -Best service team of the year - Environmental Health**

15. The Environmental Health Team have been selected as finalists in this year's APSE awards. This year's awards presentation evening was held at the end of APSE's annual seminar 2019 which took place in Newcastle on Wednesday 11 and Thursday 12 September. The awards have been extremely competitive as always, with over 100 organisations taking part from across the UK. Only the very best submissions have been shortlisted in each category.

#### **Free Food Allergy Training**

16. The Environmental Health Section organised a free training session for food businesses in Darlington to assist them in complying with food allergy regulations. In the North East there are approximately 34,000 people with food allergies and recent media cases have highlighted the fatal outcomes for consumers who are not provided with adequate information about food allergens. Approximately ten

people die every year from food related allergies as a result of eating from restaurants and takeaways. The free training was held at The Kings Centre on Whessoe Road on 27 August and approximately 80 people attended.

17. The 2019 Air Quality Annual Status Report for Darlington which is available on the Council website has been submitted to Defra for approval. The report details the air quality monitoring carried out by the Council and concludes that in areas where the public may be exposed air quality in Darlington is generally good when compared with Government Objectives and there has been no need to declare any Air Quality Management Areas. The report outlines actions taken to improve air quality for example the use of and provision of infrastructure for electric vehicles, sustainable transport initiatives and a Licensing Policy promoting a cleaner taxi fleet.

### **Local Plan**

18. Work is ongoing regarding evidenced based traffic modelling in relation to the proposed access through Springfield Park and the implications on traffic movements the removal of that access may have.
19. It is anticipated that the modelling work will be completed in time to bring a report to Cabinet and Council in December.
20. I would like to remind Members of the importance of having an up to date Local Plan both for the growth and prosperity of the Borough and to ensure planning decisions can be taken locally.

### **Development Management**

21. 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. Further work is being undertaken with regard to the Development Management Charter, which sets out the reasonable expectations of both Developers and objectors within the Development Management System. A report will be brought back to Members for consideration when complete.
22. An engagement process with Parish Councils has also been commenced to explain the planning process with particular focus on Section 106 legal agreements. A presentation will be given by the Head of Development Management and Environmental Health to the Association of Parish Councils.

### **23. Climate Change**

A Climate Change Emergency was declared at the last Council meeting. I am pleased to inform Members we are making progress on this key issue, as follows: a Members Seminar was held on 23 September 2019; recruitment has commenced for a Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer, who will bring appropriate expertise and knowledge into the Council; and, effective working relationships with specialists within the TVCA and other local authorities are being developed. A cross party working group will be set up and, ensuing from that, an Action Plan will be developed for Members to agree at a forthcoming Council.

**Councillor Alan Marshall**  
**Economy and Regeneration Portfolio**