
OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY AND REGENERATION PORTFOLIO

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

House of Fraser

2. I am delighted to report that agreement has been reached that Sports Direct will retain the former House of Fraser store in the Town Centre. The Council was involved in many discussions with both Sports Direct and the building owner and will continue to work with Sports Direct on its future plans. It has signed up for an initial short-term period of up to two years.

Darlington Farmers Auction Mart

3. Members will have seen the recent excellent news that agreement has been reached that secures the long anticipated relocation of the Darlington Farmers Auction Mart (DFAM) from the Town Centre. This was a time consuming, complex and very difficult deal to put together that has a number of very exciting outcomes, not least:-
- (a) Relocation of DFAM from Bank Top to Humbleton Farm opens up further regeneration possibilities;
 - (b) Acquisition of land to accommodate social and affordable houses at Neasham Road;
 - (c) Private sector housing at West Park; and
 - (d) Humbleton Farm site capable of a sustainable agricultural cluster.

Red Hall Regeneration Master Plan and Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy

2. Cabinet welcomed the progress on the execution of the Red Hall Master Plan and Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (adopted in April 2016 as the framework for neighbourhood regeneration at Red Hall) and its integration with the Healthy New Town initiative and, in doing so, considered revising the action plan in the light of current circumstances and evidence.
3. The Regeneration Programme consisted of three key work streams which come together in an integrated approach, namely Red Hall Master Plan, the overarching plan for regeneration that will improve the quality of life on Red Hall and help build a sustainable community; Red Hall Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy 2015-2017 a

framework to ensure Red Hall becomes a sustainable community; and regeneration of Red Hall with £5.5 million from the Housing Capital Programme to support the regeneration of the housing estate at Red Hall.

4. There has been considerable progress on the physical infrastructure of the area with over 380 homes being improved, helping to address energy efficiency and overall appearance; and the building of 39 new homes through the Housing Revenue Account Homes England affordable homes programme.
5. A new park and play area has also been created; planning permission granted for 80 new homes on the former Red Hall Stables site; and further projects are ready for execution including the Healthy New Town benches and the Community Centre Car Parking.
6. Additional projects are pending and will be generated by the Burdon Hill development to provide favourable conditions to consider further development in the central area for housing and local facilities.

Darlington Town Centre Footfall Strategy Update

7. I held my first Town Centre Private Sector Reference Group, a supportive sounding and advisory group to the Council, in respect of master plan work and other operational Town Centre matters.
8. Cabinet supported the ongoing positive work with regard to the Town Centre, following implementation of the recently approved Footfall Strategy presented in November 2017, and agreed that a refresh of the Town Centre Masterplan was required due to the fast pace of retail change currently being experienced.
9. Key actions within the Strategy are to boost the reputation of Darlington as a Market Town, improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre and remove barriers by working with partners to reduce fear of crime and social behaviour, improve signage, review Town Centre parking and develop joint working to promote the Town.
10. A significant amount of work has taken place on delivering the Town Centre Footfall Strategy and Officers are working closely with Town Centre businesses and other partners to continue to develop and deliver the strategy.
11. Performance indicators in relation to footfall, car park usage, retail units and crime and disorder will help monitoring throughout the year.

Darlington Borough Local Plan 2016/36

12. Consultation on the Draft Darlington Borough Local Plan took place over a six week period between 21 June and 2 August 2018. Over 1300 comments were received from almost 300 individuals, organisations and statutory bodies. The main areas of concern from respondents relate to:

(a) Quantity of and need for housing proposed in the plan;

- (b) Deliverability and reliance on a number of large strategic housing sites;
- (c) Loss of agricultural/greenfield land;
- (d) The two sites that have raised most objection are Skerningham and Blackwell Grange East;
- (e) Impact on highway network; and
- (f) Future of the Town Centre.

13. A full report of comments will be submitted to Members in due course.

Business Investment Team

14. The Invest in Darlington website managed by the Business Investment Team has generated 133 property searches year to date.
15. Currently there are 56 live investment projects, all with varying degrees of probability of success. If successful, they could create an additional 500 jobs for Darlington. An enquiry by a hotel operator to convert the redundant Northgate House into a hotel is no longer pursuing. Currently Darlington is limited in terms of good quality business space serving the manufacturing and logistics sector. Tees Valley Combined Authority is in the process of conducting a Tees Valley wide business accommodation study which is hoped will address these needs.
16. Year to date, the Team has supported the creation of 274 new jobs through business support and engagement activity. This includes HC-One which has now completed the recruitment of 120 additional staff based at the group's headquarters on Archer Street (HQ) in the Town Centre. This follows the expansion of the company following the acquisition of BUPA care homes. The Darlington based HQ houses all back office, HR, accountancy, payroll, IT and Senior Management Team for the entire company, which now employs in excess of 25,000 staff across the UK.
17. The construction of a 1.5million sq. ft. warehouse and distribution centre development at Symmetry Park is now well underway. There are currently over 200 construction personnel working on site, with increasing numbers expected by Q4 in 2018. Much of the construction work will be subcontracted out and the Team will be working alongside the main contractor ISG Construction to develop supply chain opportunities for local businesses and residents.
18. A workshop with the North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO) was delivered on 16 August for Darlington businesses interested in finding out how to register and bid for public sector tender opportunities.
19. Plans are being developed for a second Darlington business week. This is scheduled for week commencing 8 October and will feature a range of events to promote the various schemes available to Darlington businesses to support business growth. The week will also include a Jobs Fair at the Dolphin Centre on 10 October 2018.
20. There have been a further two independent businesses supported by means of a grant towards their first year Business Rates, for taking on a former empty unit in

the Town Centre.

21. The Team is currently undertaking a research project with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) alongside Birmingham University. 'Creating Further Demand and Growth Outside London' is aiming to identify barriers to growth in the Professional and Business Services sector in Darlington.
22. According to the latest figures available from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) unemployment levels are estimated to have fallen by 500 from 3200 to 2700 between January 2017 and March 2018.

Development Management Matters

23. The following sites have been granted planning permission since the last report to Members:
 - (a) 80 dwellings at Springfield School;
 - (b) 75 dwellings at Walworth Road Heighington; and
 - (c) 20 dwellings at Cockerton Club Woodland.
24. Other significant applications which are awaiting determination include a Reserved Matters application for 95 houses at Hurworth, an application for 1500 houses at Coniscliffe Park and an application for a Lidl supermarket at Faverdale together with a Home Bargains and a Starbucks.

Councillor Chris McEwan
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio