

**COUNCIL
5 DECEMBER 2019**

OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY PORTFOLIO

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

Town Centre

2. Members will be aware that the Council's Expression of Interest for funding from the Future High Streets Fund was successful. Officers are now completing the early draft business case which needs to be submitted to Government by 30 January 2020. To support the development of the business case the Council has been granted £150,000 to commission external support with the final business case being submitted by 30 April 2020.
3. In September the Council launched the Shop Front and Business Improvement Scheme and several businesses have already applied for funding. Initially the scheme is aimed at business premises along Post House Wynd but will be extended to businesses in the town centre conservation area in the new year.

Towns Fund

4. In November it was announced that Darlington had been selected to form part of the Towns Fund initiative. With local partners, the Council will act as the lead authority in developing a Town Deal which if successful could release £25m of government funding into the borough. The aim of this funding is to help to increase economic growth with a focus on regeneration, improved transport, better broadband connectivity, skills and culture. Government expects the Council to submit its Town Deal by summer 2020

Estates and Property and Business Investment

5. A further Town Centre Strategic Acquisition has taken place with the purchase of the former Argos property at 13-16 Skinnergate. Negotiations with the owners of the adjacent building is expected to be concluded imminently. Designs for the proposed residential development will be finalised before the end of the calendar year with a planning application being submitted in Spring 2020 following public consultation on design and proposals.
6. Business Week took place from 7 to 11 October 2019 and great feedback has been received from companies hosting events and attendees. There were 26 events spread across the week, aimed at supporting businesses of all sizes and stages. Numbers of attendees throughout the week were around 500. Through the Business Development Team appointments have been made with a number of companies looking at business growth and premises expansion needs on the back of the events held.
7. The recruitment fair had 28 businesses attending and 622 members of the public visited on the day. Early feedback from the companies was very positive with all

wanting to attend next year and some already commencing recruitment from applicants identified through the fair and interviews are taking place over the coming weeks.

Development Management

8. Over the last few months permissions have been granted for the development of Stag House and Section 106 Agreements have been completed for Oak Meadows Farm, Middleton St. George which means that the commencement of development is imminent. Further work is being undertaken relating 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.
9. An engagement process with Parish Councils has been completed to explain the planning process with focus on Section 106 legal agreements. A presentation was given by the Head of Development Management and Environmental Health to the Association of Parish Councils.

Environmental Health

10. In October 2019 a presentation was given to members of the Place Scrutiny Committee on the work carried out by all aspects of the Environmental Health team. The presentation was well received by members and they fully appreciated the extensive and important work carried out by officers. Examples of some of the work are detailed in the paragraphs below.
11. **Allergy Training for Business:** In recent years the Environmental Health section were receiving a significant number of complaints from consumers who had an allergic reaction following the ordering of food at premises or where the knowledge of the food business was lacking with regards to allergens. To deal with this we have carried out the following (using funding provided by the Director of Public Health team):
 - (a) A series of 4 training sessions were implemented targeting these business (caterers/take-aways/lunch clubs & Indian/Bangladeshi restaurants). These were done free of charge for the business and held at The Kings Centre Church & local restaurants where participants were likely to feel most at ease and so that practical activities could take place to aid understanding. Businesses were also provided with an information pack and signposted to information in other languages. We experienced a very good turnout and the feedback following the events was very positive.
 - (b) Training has been provided at Darlington College for 1st Year Catering students in order to engage with the chefs of the future.
 - (c) Formal food samples have been obtained from food premises where intelligence suggests more action is needed (currently being tested at a public analysts' laboratory).
 - (d) The Environmental Health team have been the lead authority in a partnership with Public Health England in setting up a pilot hospital notification system that will allow A&E departments to notify other local authorities about patients

attending hospital as a result of an allergy attack linked to a food premises. (Shortly to be trialled at Darlington Memorial/ Northern Children's hospital/ & RVI) If successful this trial could be rolled out nationally

12. **Disused Garage/Warehouse, Four Riggs:** Following the receipt of complaints from residents, the Environmental Health Team led a multi-agency operation to close down an illegal and dangerous construction project in Four Riggs Darlington. Officers found Chinese nationals working in appalling welfare conditions with their employer appearing to be failing in their responsibilities in relation to Health & Safety legislation. The operation also involved the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Immigration, the Environment Agency (EA) and the Gang Masters and Labour Abuse Authority have all been notified and are to carry out their own investigations into the relevant parties.
13. **Shisha Bar, Northgate:** Following the opening of a Shisha Smoking Bar on Northgate officers from Environmental Health received complaints relating to customers smoking in prohibited areas within the building. A joint visit with Northern Gas Networks at the premises found that residents living in a flat above the business were exposed to dangerous levels of carbon monoxide and the business was subsequently served with a prohibition notice. The officer established that the lighting of the coals in the Shisha Bar was being carried out in a dangerous manner.
14. The Environmental Health Section responded to 1354 requests for service in Quarter 2. The main categories of these requests are:
 - (a) Food (133)
 - (b) Licensing (100)
 - (c) Noise (215)
 - (d) Planning Consultations (80)
 - (e) Refuse (69)
 - (f) Pest (202)
15. Additionally, the Commercial Team carried out the following proactive Food Inspections:
 - (a) Food Safety (139)
 - (b) Food Standards (105)

Local Plan

16. Officers continue to work on the Local Plan with further updates expected in the New Year. I would like to remind Members of the importance of having an up to date Local Plan. The adoption of an up to date, sound and sustainable Local Plan will ensure the Council has control as to where, how and when development can take place and give clarity and confidence to residents and other partners. In addition, our new Local Plan will act as a major instrument for the delivery of our overall corporate objective for growth and prosperity of the Borough.

Climate Change

17. Following the successful climate change seminar held on 23 September 2019, a meeting of the Climate Change Cross Party Working Group has been held on 29

October 2019 and Terms of Reference agreed for the group. The group chaired by Councillor Lee and joined by Councillors Curry, Howarth, Snedker and Tait will report back to Cabinet and Council at regular intervals.

18. In October we advertised for the recruitment to our Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer. We had a tremendous response to the advert with 21 applications. Interviews have been held in late November and officers are completing the recruitment process.

Councillor Alan Marshall
Economy Portfolio