

COUNCIL
26 MARCH 2020 (This meeting is cancelled)

OVERVIEW OF LOCAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO

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

Highway Improvement Schemes

2. Works on an improvement scheme to change the B6279 Tornado Way throughabout to a conventional roundabout is nearing completion. Resurfacing works are proposed in April. The whole of the section towards the Haughton Road East Coast Mainline bridge will be resurfaced as part of the scheme in order to avoid future roadworks.
3. Lingfield Way/Yarm Road traffic signalled controlled junction is also nearing completion.
4. Highways England have commenced work on a scheme to provide a third lane on the northern approach to A66 Little Burdon Roundabout. This will involve the creation of a dedicated left filter lane onto the A1150 west bound carriageway, which will significantly reduce queuing, particularly in the evening peak hour.
5. Works have also commenced on the new roundabout on A68 at Humbleton Farm, to provide access to the new Darlington Farmers Auction Mart site. The scheme is expected to be complete in May as the new facility is programmed to open then.
6. A scheme to improve access to Darlington Station is due to commence towards the end of March. The scheme will improve footway and cycle connections between the town centre and the station.
7. A Local Highways Maintenance Challenge Fund bid was submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) on 30 October 2019. The scheme 'A68 Growth Zone Maintenance Programme' would tackle maintenance issues on the rural sections between A6072 Swan House roundabout to the borough boundary and in the urban section that links the town centre to A1(M) Junction 58 (Woodland Road and West Auckland Road). The bid is for £2.26m DfT funding with a local contribution of £603k from the 2020/21 maintenance programme. An announcement expected.
8. An Expression of Interest (EOI) has been completed for the Department for Transport's Local Pinch Point Fund. This has been developed by Officers but was submitted by TVCA, in line with Government guidance, on 31 January 2020. The estimated scheme cost is £4.5m and we are successful with the EOI we would be likely to submit a full business case to Department for Transport in the summer 2020.

Highway Maintenance Schemes

9. Highway Maintenance schemes due to start:
 - (a) Patching prior to Micro-asphalt (Various – 31 locations).

Transport

10. The Tees Flex on-demand bus service was launched on 24 February. Funded by TVCA and delivered by Stagecoach, the service uses state-of-the-art mobile app technology to enable residents to book and pay for their journeys. The service is available in three areas of the Tees Valley, including Bishopton, Brafferton, Great Stainton, Little Stainton, Low Dinsdale, Neasham and Sadberge in the Darlington area.

Capital Works Required at Crown Street Library

11. In order to enable the refurbishment and restoration of the Crown Street Library, Cabinet has approved, subject to Council confirming the allocation of £2.9 million for the refurbishment of Crown Street Library in the Capital Plan 2020/21 to 2023/24, that the funds be released.
12. Cabinet also agreed that procurement be delegated to the Council Procurement Board and updates on contract awards be reported to Members in the Procurement Annual Plan Report.

Darlington Rail Heritage Quarter

13. Cabinet welcomed an update on the Master Plan and gave consideration to the proposals for Darlington Rail Heritage Quarter. The release of £20m allocation was approved from the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA). The changes to the phased approach to delivery will be delegated to the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services who will liaise with myself as portfolio holder.
14. It was also agreed that officers work with representatives of the Darlington Railway Preservation Society (DRPS) to relocate to a suitable location to enable the priority works to the Goods Shed to be carried out with a view to returning to DRHQ once the whole site was refurbished and that once reopened, entry to the Museum be free with a paid for immersive experience.

Permit System to Manage and Coordinate Roadworks

15. Cabinet has approved the introduction of a Permit Scheme and the schedule of Fees and Charges to improve the management and coordination of roadworks and to ensure the duties under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (NRSWA) and the Traffic Management Act 2004 (TMA) are fulfilled.
16. The Council has worked collaboratively with North East and Tees Valley Authorities to develop a common scheme that will be managed by the individual authorities and the fees and charges are based on Department for Transport information and will cover the administration costs associated with the permit scheme.

Darlington Hippodrome

17. On 17 February, the Hippodrome held a sold-out family open day during half term. The day was a 'pay what you decide' event running between 10.30am and 3.00pm. The day included professional workshops from dance company BalletLorent, craft workshops and a theatre tour which offered a backstage look at the technical workings on stage.
18. On 10 February, the Hippodrome held its second event for teachers and people working in education after the first event sold out in January. These free events offered an overview of the Theatre's education offer and included a backstage tour, networking and a demonstration of classroom activities and workshops. The event has increased the theatre's school network and has already increased engagement numbers with schools.

Head of Steam

19. The museum held its popular Toddler Takeover Day on 14 February. The event, aimed at children aged five and under, encouraged them to take over the jobs at the museum, such as a gallery attendant, a collections packer or a cleaner.
20. February half term activities at the museum included a transport workshop, Lego workshop and crafts activities where children were encouraged to develop their paper engineering skills to build a glider or paper plane.
21. The exhibition 'Street Wise: What's in a Name?' opened on 14 March and runs until 28 June. Darlington's streets are named after mayors, industrialists, landmarks and many more surprising people and places. The exhibition discovers Darlington's history through its street names in an exhibition curated by Robin Coulthard.

Crown Street Library

22. To celebrate 150 years of The Northern Echo, there was a display of photographs, publications and newspapers in Centre for Local Studies during January, which was very well received. Chris Lloyd, Deputy Editor of The Northern Echo gave a talk on the former editor of the newspaper, WT Stead and Darlington's links with the Titanic, which was fully booked.
23. The Library was filled with witches and wizards on 6 February for the annual Harry Potter celebrations. The event was a sell-out; 80 people attended to see magic from award winning magician, Graeme Shaw and learn about the owls from the 'Harry Potter' series with a visiting falconry group.
24. On 14 February, Elly Griffiths, the bestselling crime novelist, spoke about her latest novel 'The Lantern Men' and signed copies of the book.
25. For February Half Term, the Library partnered up with TIN ARTS and Creative Darlington to offer a more inclusive programme of events aimed at children who may benefit from smaller group sessions. Over 100 children attended the programme of creative arts.

26. BookFest; the book festival for children and families in Darlington, is now in its second year and celebrated the wide-ranging activities offered through libraries with a week of performance and puppetry, children's theatre, family workshops, gaming, stop animation and storytelling, which commenced on 29 February, with the aim of inspiring and enthralling children to encourage them to spend time reading, writing and enjoying stories. Approximately 900 people accessed events at Darlington Library with a further 450 accessing the schools programme, comprising of author and illustrator visits, and writing and performance workshops that were enthusiastically taken up by 11 schools.
27. To launch this year's Bookfest, the Library employed the expertise of Darlington Academy of Performing Arts (DAPA) to work with pupils from Corporation Road School and Springfield Academy to create a show using popular song and dance routines for a showstopper to launch the Libraries' annual celebration of reading. Following the show, pupils and their families were treated to a celebratory concert featuring the Hootones.

Creative Darlington

28. Blimey! is a female led Darlington based artist collective who work across a diverse range of creative practices. They secured Arts Council England project funding alongside Darlington Borough Council support and have utilised this to take forward the Blimey! Lucretia programme. This included two February 2020 participatory sessions in the gallery at Darlington Library, followed by a short film screening and artists discussion at Darlington Library on 14 March 2020, alongside a Blimey! Lucretia exhibition at The Bowes Museum from 7 March to 10 May 2020.
29. A performance of 'Rose and Robin' by Mad Alice Theatre Company at Darlington Library on 15 February 2020 was fully booked, with 40 tickets sold. Darlington Borough Council allocated budget support to Mad Alice Theatre Company who secured Arts Council England project funding that supported the tour of Rose and Robin, which was aimed at ages 7 to 70.
30. Creative Darlington allocated budget to support the development of an accessible February 2020 half term programme at Darlington Children's Library working with TIN Arts.
31. Creative Darlington has supported ODDMANOUT in delivering a programme in 2019/20, which offered opportunities to explore theatre and was also supported by Darlington Hippodrome. The programme has secured Arts Council England project funding and explored routes for local actors to develop their practice.
32. A new exhibition by Darlington based artist, Jonny Lancaster opened in the gallery at Darlington Library, on 7 March 2020.

Events

33. More than 20 venues signed up to #Love Darlo restaurant week which was held from 23 February to 1 March. Diners were able to enjoy a range of offers including two courses for £10 or less and the chance of other discounts at town centre restaurants and eateries across the week. Discount diners were able to choose from Italian, Indian, pub food, café selections and much more.

Environmental Services

Ground Maintenance

34. The annual pruning of bushes and shrubs, which takes place during the winter months is ongoing and is scheduled to be complete in good time in readiness for the forthcoming grass cutting season.
35. In November last year, the North-East experienced sustained rainfall making the ground saturated and therefore not suitable for grass cutting operations. As a result, the grass has been slightly longer during the winter period and therefore grass cutting operations for the forthcoming growing season are to commence slightly earlier in an attempt to ensure satisfactory levels of cut.
36. The second year of garden waste collections will commence the first week in April. At the end of January all those people who subscribed last year were contacted advising that subscriptions for this coming summer season were now available and these have been taken up accordingly.

Councillor Andy Keir
Cabinet Member with Local Services Portfolio