

## **Cabinet**

**12 February 2020**

**Council Activity Report**

**Ordinary Decision**



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### **Report of Corporate Management Team**

**Terry Collins, Chief Executive**

**Councillor Simon Henig, Leader of the Council**

#### **Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

#### **Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To provide an update on work to support some of the council's key priorities.

#### **Executive summary**

- 2 The report provides an update on progress towards delivering some of the council's key priorities.
- 3 This month's report covers:
  - (a) Update on work to tackle climate change
  - (b) Strategic investment sites
  - (c) Homelessness

#### **Recommendation**

- 4 Cabinet is recommended to note the contents of this update.

#### **Background**

- 5 The council undertakes a great deal of work across the county.
- 6 This report provides an overview of some key projects.

## Climate change

- 7 Immediate action is necessary if we are to address the impact of the worldwide climate emergency.
- 8 In February 2019, we declared a climate emergency, pledging to work towards a 60 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030. We will also investigate what further action is necessary to make the county completely carbon neutral by 2050.
- 9 We've already taken many steps to make changes and have successfully reduced our carbon footprint by 47 per cent since 2008/9. However, we continue to look at ways in which we, as a council, can become more eco-friendly.
- 10 This Christmas, Gala Theatre hosted its most successful panto ever. Behind the scenes at the Durham City venue, staff were busy installing replacement LED stage lighting, which will save 20 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year. The move comes only months after the theatre, in Millennium Place, ditched plastic confetti, which is showered over the audience at the end of a pantomime, in favour of a more environmentally friendly paper version.
- 11 And it's not just the lighting inside our buildings which has changed – 60,000 street lights around the county have now been retrofitted with more energy efficient LEDs.



- 12 In total, we have replaced more than 17,000 lights with LEDs including streetlights and those in council buildings.
- 13 Meanwhile, motorists on the A689 near Sedgefield in County Durham are now driving along a 'plastic road'.
- 14 We are the first local authority in the region to try out a new technology as part of recently completed work to resurface a section of the A689 with hot rolled asphalt.
- 15 Traditionally the surface of the county's roads is made up of stone aggregates with a bitumen binder to hold the asphalt together. In this scheme, we used 6.5 tonnes of plastic which is the equivalent of 60,000 plastic shopping bags.
- 16 At our leisure centres we have taken away the plastic shoe covers traditionally used when walking poolside while, in our restaurants and canteens, we have swapped plastic coffee cups for reusable ones and plastic cutlery for Vegware, which is gentler on the planet.
- 17 Our clean and green teams are embracing electric machinery such as road sweepers and bin hoists on refuse wagons, with the first two electric vehicles taking to the road in January this year. The carbon footprint of electric sweepers is a third smaller than that of conventional machines. Our fleet of 26 pool cars are now also electric, while our EV Roadshow, held in Bishop Auckland in November, showcased the benefits of electric vehicles. We have successfully applied for £250,000 funding from Innovate UK to launch the SOCI (Scaling on Street Charging Infrastructure) project which enables those who live in flats or terraces, for example, to access electric charging points.
- 18 We've also added solar panels to 38 buildings and worked to make our larger buildings more efficient while also developing a solar farm at Tanfield Lea, which will be used to power nearby council buildings.
- 19 The BEEP project has helped small and medium sized businesses in County Durham find ways to reduce their energy bills and has proved so successful that we are now preparing to launch BEEP 2 in the coming weeks. The LoCarbo project recently saw a group of Swedish delegates visit the county. They were impressed by our use of the Systems Link technology which keeps emissions low at council buildings.



- 20 Last March we launched our Single Use Plastics Pledge which asks County Durham residents and businesses to do their bit, however big or small, to reduce the amount of unnecessary plastics which ultimately could end up in our oceans. To date, we have had almost 300 sign ups with the latest, St Joseph's Primary, in Ushaw Moor, set to put pen to paper and sign next week. St Bede's Primary in Sacriston, pictured, was one of the first schools to sign up, even managing to persuade County Durham's own Matt Baker from The One Show to sign up too.
- 21 We're also undertaking a substantial programme of tree planting, which is supported by successful schemes such as the £820,000 Woodland Revival project and £1 million Urban Tree Challenge Fund, as well as new schemes such as a commitment to plant 10,000 trees in each Area Action Partnership area. In total, this will see an estimated 358,000 trees in our county, in addition to the 950,000 planted since 2000.
- 22 Next steps include considering feedback from residents, businesses and visitors who took the time to give us their views as part of the recent climate change consultation. Feedback is being used to develop an action plan to shape future policies.

### **Strategic investment sites**

- 23 The council works hard to promote County Durham as a place for businesses to grow and invest. As well as raising awareness of the

many economic and geographic benefits offered by the county for those considering investing here, this work also includes ensuring the necessary infrastructure is in place to meet modern business need.

- 24 The council provides and supports a number of key strategic employment sites around the county, which continue to grow and flourish.



### *NETPark, Sedgfield*

- 25 North East Technology Park (NETPark) has developed over the last 15 years and comprises a range of buildings that includes over 120,000 sq. ft. of space managed by Business Durham together with the Durham University Research Institute and two buildings occupied by the Centre for Process Innovation (CPI).
- 26 The CPI hosts several high-tech companies at its National Centres for Printable Electronics, Healthcare Photonics and Formulations Centres providing state of the art development facilities to enable companies to develop, prove, prototype and scale up the next generation of products and processes.
- 27 Durham University’s Centre for Advanced Instrumentation (CfAI) is based in the NETPark Research Institute. CfAI is one of the major research groups in University’s physics department with an international reputation for the development, design and construction of state-of-the art instruments for optical and infrared astronomy.
- 28 NETPark is one of the UK’s premier science, engineering and technology parks for the commercialisation of cutting-edge research

and development for major international organisations, universities and entrepreneurs and is currently home to more than 35 high-tech businesses employing more than 550 people.

- 29 NETPark is the only UK science park to house two UK Catapult Centres - North East Satellite Applications Catapult, which helps to stimulate the space sector in the region, helping businesses to identify commercial and research opportunities in a rapidly growing sector of the economy, in addition to the High Value Manufacturing Catapult managed by CPI.
- 30 More than 200 acres of land owned by Durham County Council is set aside for development with a primary focus on applications in the medical/pharmaceutical, defence, space and communications sectors. As part of its third phase of development NETPark offers a number of opportunities for investment and development centred on individual development plots ranging from one to four acres with outline planning permission. The phase has over 13 ha of serviced land that aims to provide more than 250,000 sq. ft of new space for science-based businesses employing up to 1,000 people in the next ten years.

#### *Forrest Park, Newton Aycliffe*

- 31 Forrest Park is a new employment site located alongside Junction 59 on the A1(M), immediately adjacent to Aycliffe Business Park. When combined, Forrest Park and Aycliffe Business Park make up the largest employment site in the North East by land area.
- 32 Forrest Park extends to 135 acres and has the capacity to accommodate 1.75m square feet of industrial floor space. Based on existing development projections, the site could provide in excess of 3,200 new jobs over the next ten to 15 years. The site also has the potential to accommodate a rail freight terminal, which would be the first in the region.
- 33 In 2015, the owners of the land, the Forrest family, and the council agreed to form a joint venture company to support the development of the site, with the council holding a 51 per cent interest in the company.
- 34 In 2016, the council was successful in securing £13m from the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to provide infrastructure to enable the site for development. These works, which included new highway access, a 23 MVA electricity supply and other utility works were completed in 2018.
- 35 The announcement that development partner, Richardson Barberry, had been appointed to work alongside the Forrest Park board resulted in a number of enquiries from companies expressing an interest in being located at Forrest Park.

- 36 Along with Jade Business Park, Seaham, the site is part of the UK Trade and Industry (UKTI) pitchbook of prime international investment opportunities.

### *Integra 61, Bowburn*



- 37 Adjacent to Junction 61 on the A1(M), the Integra 61 development at Bowburn covers 205 acres and will accommodate a developable area of 101.1 acres and two housing developments. There is also additional capacity on the edge of the site.
- 38 The site is operated by Citrus Durham Ltd but the council has undertaken significant highways infrastructure work around the junction. The works have been funded by Highways England and the council, with on-site infrastructure and highways work being jointly funded by the developer and through grants from the Local Growth Fund.
- 39 In December 2018, Tritax Big Box signed a deal with a major international company for a distribution and fulfilment centre with up to 1,951,637 sq foot of floorspace on four floors. The facility will provide more than 2,200 FTE jobs and will be fully open in 2020.

### *Jade Business Park, Seaham*

- 40 Jade Business Park, formerly known as Hawthorn, was granted Enterprise Zone status in 2015 as part of a wider North East Local

Enterprise Partnership (NELEP) offering. The 55-acre employment site is located less than a minute from the A19 immediately south of Murton and 11 miles south of the Nissan manufacturing plant (NMUK Sunderland), making it ideally suited for businesses in the automotive manufacturing supply chain. The site is also adjacent to Dalton Park retail centre with its shopping, leisure and food facilities.

- 41 The NELEP is providing funding for power and other utility services while junction improvements are being part financed by Highways England through funding of £10.6 million. In April 2019, the council agreed to fund the development of 156,000 sq. ft. of modern industrial units at Jade with sizes ranging from 10,000 sq. ft. to 51,000 sq. ft. The factory units, which are due for completion in June 2020, will be managed by Business Durham and should support up to 400 jobs.
- 42 The project is being delivered in partnership with Highbridge Developments, the company behind the UK's largest office park, Cobalt, in North Tyneside.
- 43 Sumitomo Electric Wiring Systems (Europe), a Japanese owned supplier to Nissan has already agreed to take the first and largest unit. Highbridge Properties retains an option on the rest of the site which could see the development of a further 300,000 sq ft of industrial and office space supporting up to 2,000 jobs depending on use.
- 44 Phase one is due to complete in summer 2020 and will deliver a total of seven new industrial units, equivalent to 155,000 sq ft of new space for distribution, technology, and advanced manufacturing businesses.

### *Aykley Heads, Durham*

- 45 A new business district, located on the Aykley Heads site, will offer high-quality office developments set within an exceptional landscape close to the Durham Cathedral and the university. The site's northern zone is already home to more than 40 businesses employing 1,300 people including Atom Bank, IT and business consultants Waterstons, the North East England Chamber of Commerce, and the Salvus House Business Centre with a range of occupiers.



- 46 The overall area covers around 32 hectares and aims to provide up to 50,000 sq m to accommodate up to 6,000 jobs in high quality, professional roles and emerging technology sectors.
- 47 The site has excellent transport links and is located next to an East Coast Mainline railway station and is less than one mile from the A690 which provides direct access to the A1(M). There are a range of opportunities for developers and occupiers on the site.

## **Homelessness**

- 48 The housing solutions team runs a number of initiatives aimed at supporting those who are homeless or at risk of losing their home. Below is an overview of the team's progress towards achieving some of the service's key priorities.

### *Homelessness Reduction Act – one year on*

- 49 In September, the team reviewed the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 on the service one year on from its adoption.
- 50 It was acknowledged that Durham County Council was in the top five of all local authorities in England for the prevention of homelessness during the first three quarters of the year since the act was introduced.
- 51 It was also recognised that Durham already had an ethos of early intervention and prevention, making the process of meeting new statutory requirements much easier.
- 52 Research has found that having a strong early intervention/prevention ethos leads to significantly less use of bed and breakfast/temporary accommodation, meaning lower costs for the authority.
- 53 Following a recent visit by representatives from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the service was praised for delivering a very effective homelessness prevention service in County Durham.
- 54 MHCLG believes that County Durham may well be an authority that others can learn from, notably in respect of embedding a culture of prevention and minimising temporary accommodation placements through its early intervention and preventative approach.
- 55 A further review of front-line operational staffing was undertaken following work to assess the Homelessness Reduction Act one year on in order to ensure resources are deployed effectively.
- 56 It was also recognised that the housing solutions team needs to review the accommodation options available to its customers and support

customers to access decent accommodation within the private rented sector.

### *Performance*

- 57 Between 2018/19 there were **7,279** contacts made to housing solutions due to the household either being homeless, at risk of homelessness or requiring general housing advice.
- 58 Of these, **4,090** were assessed as needing advice or early intervention, **2,349** were assessed as being at risk from homelessness within 56 days and **840** were homeless.
- 59 In **605** cases homelessness was **avoided**, while in a further **203** cases those who had been made homeless were supported in finding alternative accommodation. In only **57** cases did the authority have to provide accommodation.

### *Service development and next steps*

- 60 Crisis (the national charity for homeless people) has been working in partnership with housing solutions throughout the Homelessness Reduction Act transition. One of the main areas in which Crisis is supporting the council is through the production of an easy-to-read procedure for staff.
- 61 A review of the Housing Advice Line has been undertaken to ensure the service has the appropriate resources to deliver under the Homeless Reduction Act.
- 62 In October 2019, the corporate customer services team became the first point of contact for the Housing Solutions Service, and corresponding Golden Number, allowing Housing Advice Line officers to support housing officers with case work. Customer services are able to ensure all calls are dealt with speedily and efficiently. Some advice calls that are outside of homelessness but require greater expert advice, are passed to Housing Advice Line officers.

- 63 It is also acknowledged that the development of a Local Lettings Agency will greatly assist the prevention and relief of homelessness within the county.

- 64 A review of intensive housing support provided to customer with complex needs presenting as homeless is



currently underway and will ensure that services are delivered effectively and meet the support needs of customers.

### *Rough sleeping in County Durham*

65 Between 2015 and 2018, the estimated number of people sleeping rough on a given night increased from three to 12. As a result of the this rise, a Rough Sleeper Partnership for County Durham was set up.



66 Through the partnership, an outreach worker was appointed. Funded by housing solutions and delivered by Changing Lives, the initiative was initially launched as a pilot project in Durham City centre. In year one, the outreach worker identified 101 individuals who were sleeping rough and was able to provide information and advice on support services to 98 people. They also helped 49 of these individuals access accommodation. The worker was able to build trust with individuals, addressing any health and wellbeing concerns and providing support into finding suitable accommodation.

67 The Rough Sleeper Partnership has multi agency representation from across County Durham, including: housing solutions, Durham Constabulary, Durham University, the voluntary sector and the council's neighbourhood protection and public health teams.

68 The partnership meets as a strategic group and has ownership of the Rough Sleeping Action Plan for County Durham which has four key themes:

- Prevention: no-one should arrive on the streets
- Intervention: rapid action when somebody is on the streets
- Recovery: support so that nobody returns to the streets

- Education: communications campaign for staff, partners and public to understand the realities of homelessness and what they can do to help
- 69 At an operational level, a Rough Sleeper Action Group has been established, where cases requiring a multi-agency response are discussed and actions allocated accordingly. It has been acknowledged that often individuals who sleep rough have complex needs and can be chronically excluded. Supporting these individuals can be difficult. However, by setting clear actions and having the correct representation at action group meetings, it is hoped there can be further positive outcomes for the project.
- 70 The council has led on successful regional bids from MHCLG under the Rough Sleeper Initiative and Rapid Rehousing Pathway, providing funding to enable the outreach worker to cover the whole county. It will also enable the creation of a number of new roles to support the project. These are:
- Rough sleeper co-ordinators
  - Rough sleeper navigator
  - Prison accommodation officers
  - Substance misuse worker
  - Tenancy sustainment officers
- 71 This funding has also led to the introduction of a Somewhere Safe to Stay hub in County Durham, providing direct-access, short-stay emergency accommodation for rough sleepers or those at imminent risk of sleeping rough.
- 72 The partnership continues to meet as does the Rough Sleeper Action Group, which has already supported some of the county's most entrenched rough sleepers into finding accommodation.

### *#iamhomelessaware campaign*

- 73 The council is currently developing the #iamhomelessaware campaign, which will see the launch of an e-learning module with five key messages:
- Prevention of homelessness
  - Support for somebody who is homeless

- Concerned somebody is sleeping rough?
- Donating
- Volunteering opportunities

74 For staff or agencies unable to access the training digitally, a series of short seminars will be delivered by housing solutions.

75 A social media campaign and roll out of the e-learning package for the general public is to follow.

### **Background papers**

- None

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

Not applicable.

### **Finance**

Not applicable.

### **Consultation**

Not applicable.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

Not applicable.

### **Human Rights**

Not applicable.

### **Crime and Disorder**

Not applicable.

### **Staffing**

Not applicable.

### **Accommodation**

Not applicable.

### **Risk**

Not applicable.

### **Procurement**

Not applicable.