

COUNTY COUNCIL

22 February 2023

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Question from Mr Hails

I understand you might be reopening the DLI building.

If so, will you house the full DLI collection and restore full artistic exhibitions to the museums remit and should you decide not to house the full DLI collection or display art exhibitions, can you justify spending what will possibly be a significant amount of the Council taxpayers money therefore, please inform me of the net running costs.

Response

Can I thank Mr Hails for his question.

In June 2021, following the local elections in May 2021, the Cabinet of Durham County Council agreed to review options to reopen the Durham Light Infantry Museum and Durham Art Gallery.

The outcome of that review was presented to Cabinet in September 2021, which identified a preferred option to bring the building back into use as an exhibition centre, gallery and cafe venue incorporating a dedicated display space for items from the DLI Collection to complement plans for the exhibitions in *The Story*, acknowledging that *The Story*, as the county's new History Centre, would be the permanent home for the full DLI Collection, its storage, care and curation.

While the redevelopment of the site will see a dedicated display of this collection, which holds such a significant place in the county's history, the full DLI Collection will not be on display at the new venue as it is not physically large enough and never was in any event pre-the closure by the previous administration in 2015.

The DLI Collection currently contains over 200,000 archive items and 15,000 objects and continues to grow with donations from members of the public. Given its vast size the entire DLI Collection has never been on display in one

location at any one time. Typically, museums around the world display only 5% of their collection.

Alongside the dedicated display space for the DLI Collection there will also be space for changing/ temporary exhibitions. This exhibition space has been designed to meet appropriate British Standards and the requirement of the Government Indemnity Scheme and as such will be the first time Durham City, and indeed the county, will have a large exhibition space able to attract and secure significant loans from national and international galleries and museums, as well as the capacity to show the county's collections in new ways, and to work with creatives and curators to originate new exhibitions.

The operational business plan for the new venue is expected to attract in the region of 150,000 visitors per year, and is being developed to ensure resilience, sustainability, and value for money for the long term. This business plan was considered alongside the forecast capital costs of bringing the building back into use as outlined in the September 2021 Cabinet report and was agreed by Cabinet in April 2022.

It is currently forecast to have a net cost of £600k per annum to operate the new larger and much improved facility, with permanent free access for all to the DLI exhibitions and the new public spaces inside and outside the building. Provision for this has been made in the Councils Medium Term Financial Plan from 2024/25.

Importantly like any public infrastructure the Council has invested in a facility that is free at the point of use for all. last year we saw County Durham short listed for the UK City of Culture 2025, with a vision to build a great future on our proud past and ensuring that key facilities like the DLI and the Story are here for future generations is imperative.

Going forward, officers are continuing to develop the business plan and refine the forecasts and if it is possible to reduce the expected running costs we will, but it was important that Cabinet were aware of the estimated running costs when we made the decision to reopen the facility.

This venue is an important commitment as part of our inclusive economic strategy, ensuring that culture, heritage, and creativity are inclusive, rooted and ambitious, building on the proud history of our county. The new exhibition gallery along with the DLI space, sensitively designed extension and the sustainably landscaped grounds and reflective garden will provide a contemporary cultural venue, filling a significant gap in our infrastructure.

The new DLI venue and The Story at Mount Oswald, will together create a significant new draw for visitors and local people alike, contributing to both our visitor economy and to local pride.

Question from Mr Thorley

Are there any future prospects of council funded CCTV cameras being installed at 'problem areas' in and around the areas of Shildon and Brusselton to deter the issue of fly-tipping and other rural crime in the area.

Many councils in England have secured direct grants for CCTV in the last 18 months as the increase in fly-tipping continues along with other rural crimes.

Response

Can I thank Mr Thorley for his question.

We share your concerns around fly-tipping, which as a Council we also find abhorrent as there is simply no excuse for it.

DCC operates and monitors numerous public space CCTV cameras in the Shildon area, currently focused on the town centre and Hackworth Park. The CCTV Service does not currently operate or monitor any public space cameras in Brusselton / Brussleton Lane.

There is a process to be followed for any new public space CCTV cameras to be erected, this entails following the Home Office CCTV Code of Practice and the corresponding DCC Policy.

If funding is available and all other aspects of the process are satisfied, final approval for any new application would be given by the Safer Durham Partnership, this is a necessary safeguard given the intrusive nature of public space surveillance.

The Council also has a number of mobile cameras including those supported by Government grants, which are deployed to known hotspots in the area. There are 5 cases that are due to come before the courts from the Shildon area as a result of this targeted work. These mobile cameras are not monitored by the DCC CCTV control centre but are used in response to a particular demand or investigation.

As a Council we are determined to crack down on fly-tipping, it is at the lowest level that it has been for several years, down by over 35% in the last two years, but we are far from complacent as it remains a scourge in our communities.

We are scrapping discounts for fly-tipping fines and we welcome any intelligence that brings to justice the minority in our community that spoil the environment for us all.

Chair, I'm More than happy to speak with Mr Thornley about this and his specific issues in the future should he wish me to, and to visit Brusselton.

Question from Mr Elliott

My question relates to the signing of the Devolution deal on behalf of County Durham.

How will the funding be a good thing for County Durham and will full Council have the opportunity to fully debate the devolution deal in the future before any final decision is made?

Response

Can I thank Mr Elliott for his question.

On 18 January the Councils Cabinet considered a report which evidenced why that the 'minded to' LA7 devolution deal represents the best option for County Durham residents and businesses and endorsed in principle that the "minded to" devolution deal should be taken forward. A copy of the deal that has been negotiated with government was attached to the report and is available on our website. Members of the public, and any councillors, are able to attend and ask questions at cabinet meetings - and this opportunity was available when the devolution report was considered.

The January Cabinet report also outlined the findings of the governance review that has been undertaken. This review set out that a new mayoral combined authority would improve the exercise of statutory functions across the region. The proposals are being consulted on until the 23 March.

Prior to the January cabinet meeting, it is also important to note that there was a full debate about devolution at an Extraordinary meeting of the Council on the 7th December 2022 - which resulted in a motion being passed by council that stated - "cabinet secure a devolution deal that is best for County Durham residents and businesses".

The proposed regional deal would see a significant shift of powers, funding and responsibility from central government to our region. Working alongside our colleagues in the other authorities, it would allow us to pursue our ambitions for the growth of our area and the wider region, which will benefit everyone who lives in the north east."

An LA7 deal will give this council access to more funding and additional powers and more opportunity for deeper devolution. By becoming a part of one of the largest devolution deal in the country, we will also have greater influence at a national level.

There will also be more flexibility as to how money can be spent and more opportunity for private investment.

By joining the regional deal, County Durham will have access to £120 million more in funding than it would have through a standalone county deal, while economic estimates suggest that 6,500 new jobs could be created in Durham within a LA7 deal – 2,000 more than in a county deal.

It is also estimated that the LA7 deal will attract £1.34bn private sector investment into the county, some £400m more than that estimated in a county deal.

Following the conclusion of the statutory consultation, the Cabinets of all seven councils consider the outcome of the consultation and next steps. There is no requirement for a report to be brought to Council.