

## COUNTY COUNCIL

20 JANUARY 2016

### QUESTIONS FROM AREA ACTION PARTNERSHIPS

#### QUESTION FROM SPENNYMOOR AAP

The current marketing and promotion of the Kynren extravaganza in Bishop Auckland, alongside the other attractions currently being planned for the town e.g. Spanish Art Gallery, indicate how Bishop Auckland is set to benefit from investment over the coming months and years. Can the Council let us know if there are plans to ensure that surrounding towns e.g. Spennymoor will also benefit from this investment and the potential for a huge increase in visitor numbers to South West Durham?

#### RESPONSE

Firstly may I thank the Spennymoor AAP for their question, I very much welcome the opportunity to comment on the exciting proposals developing in Bishop Auckland, where we anticipate major increases in visitor numbers into the wider south Durham area.

Bishop Auckland will start to receive an influx of visitors from this summer with the opening of Kynren in July where there are 14 night shows planned over the summer months. We will also see a significant increase in visitors to the Castle and other planned attractions when they open in 2018.

Both the Eleven Arches Trust and Auckland Castle Trust are directing potential visitors to the "This is Durham" website to book hotel and B&B accommodation across County Durham. Accommodation providers within Spennymoor will be able to offer these visitors overnight accommodation, although I would like to stress how important it is that these accommodation providers are registered with "This is Durham". Should they need any advice or assistance, the team at Visit County Durham would be delighted to assist.

Spennymoor itself also has a rich cultural and arts heritage which, with the support of Culture & Sports Services, we would hope to develop in order to add to the emerging offer in South West Durham. Work is already underway to look at an artist's trail, based around arguably the County's most famous artist Norman Cornish, together with other support to both the Gallery and Mining Museum offer in Spennymoor. We will be working on these and other projects, to ensure we can make strong links to the developments taking place in Bishop Auckland, extending the offer and attracting interest and visitors to Spennymoor. We are also starting to receive interest from developers who are keen to develop in Spennymoor in order to benefit from wider south Durham opportunities, so overall I hope that we will see strong economic growth on the back of these developments.

## **QUESTION ONE FROM DERWENT VALLEY AAP**

Over the past year, access to services and social isolation in respect to older people living in Derwent Valley has moved up our agenda. The Derwent Valley Partnership has financially contributed to and supported a number of new local initiatives such as Derwent Valley Diners offering one to one social interaction and a nutritional meal to older residents and our Making Connections IT project has provided learning opportunities for older and more isolated residents to access services online. What does the Council feel the Derwent Valley Partnership's key role should be in relation to supporting older people in our local area?

## **RESPONSE**

Thank you for your question and for raising the important topic of social isolation. This topic was the key focus of the last report from the County's Director of Public Health which focussed not only on the consequences of social isolation but also highlighted the work that is taking place to address the social, political and economic dimensions that impact people's lives and can lead to social isolation.

The Health and Wellbeing Board for the County has also considered this issue as social isolation and loneliness are an important and growing health challenge for County Durham's population which can have a significant negative effect on health and wellbeing across the course of a person's life. People with stronger social networks are more likely to be healthier and happier, whilst those with weaker social networks can become isolated and, as a result, more likely to experience poor physical and mental health and increase the reliance on local health and care services. Social isolation is identified as an action in the County Durham Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Board is working along with the Area Action Partnerships to focus on this issue.

Within the Council one of our commitments is to build on the principles of wellbeing, building stronger communities, prevention and social value. Through this approach we are able to target resources to meet the needs of our most vulnerable citizens.

The initiatives already identified by Derwent Valley Partnership are very much in-keeping with our approach to a more inclusive community based approach to caring for the most vulnerable people in the County. A key role for DVP is to continue to focus on prevention and community based solutions which build resilience and capacity to meet need. Encouraging and promoting the involvement of individuals and neighbourhoods in the co-production of service responses which meet the needs of people in the locality is essential.

Officers within the council's Children's and Adult Service would be keen to work with members of the AAP to pursue the development of such initiatives and I have asked officers to meet with the officers supporting the partnership to explore practical ways that we can work together on this important agenda.

## **QUESTION TWO FROM DERWENT VALLEY AAP**

Through the Derwent Valley Partnership's Employment, Education and Training Task Group, a strong emphasis is being placed on supporting the development of higher level Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) skills / qualifications for young people in the fields of creative industries, financial, professional and business services, digital industries and life sciences. This focus reflects the proposed approach of the NECA Economic and Regeneration Advisory Board. What are the Council's plans for supporting this development at a local level within Derwent Valley?

### **RESPONSE**

Thank you to Derwent Valley AAP for the opportunity to comment on this important agenda. There are three key points to make.

Firstly, as we know how vital working with businesses is on this agenda, through every programme that the Council's employability team delivers, we engage businesses from all different types of sectors, including STEM, to encourage them to recruit new apprentices/trainees as well as supporting them to tackle their higher level skills needs. This has seen us support various STEM employers (county-wide) over the last 4 years to create 155 STEM related apprenticeships and we still have £12,000 of funding available to support employers create STEM related apprenticeships in the Derwent Valley area. We have previously conducted a survey with engineering and manufacturing businesses across County Durham to identify both their future skills needs as well as their recruitment plans and we have continued to engage and support these employers.

Secondly, based on feedback from employers and the Economy & Enterprise Scrutiny Committee, we have a forthcoming programme looking to encourage the take up of higher level skills amongst employers across County Durham with a strong focus on STEM employers. This programme is currently awaiting funding approval but we would hope to start delivery in the coming months.

Finally, in terms of links with young people, through the NETPark outreach programme schools across the County have been able to participate in a wide range of STEM activities. These have included science and technology related talks, teacher CPD and visits to NETPark. Future Business Magnates (FBM), the enterprise competition for secondary schools, has had a STEM related theme for the past 3 years. Schools participating in the competition have taken part in STEM workshops delivered by industry professionals. During the competition, schools are partnered with a business to help them develop their business ideas. North Durham Academy, Consett Academy, St Bedes and Tanfield School have all participated in FBM and attended STEM outreach events. Dyer Engineering, Lanchester Dairies and DETS are amongst the businesses who have participated in the programmes.