

COUNTY COUNCIL

19 SEPTEMBER 2018

QUESTIONS FROM AREA ACTION PARTNERSHIPS

DERWENT VALLEY AAP

We recognise with austerity that services are being impacted. What is noticeable in Consett town centre and in the heart of many of our surrounding villages is the quality of the 'environment' (street scape, and some buildings) in these economic centres are continuing to deteriorate. While we welcome initiatives like 'Operation Spruce up' taking place in Middle Street, Consett in October, which will have a positive impact, it still remains that with the lack of large investment in the environment of the economic centres over a number of years that decline is inevitable. What investment plans or opportunities are being explored for investment in town (and village) centres physical environments?

RESPONSE

Thank you for your question which highlights a key concern in terms of how we manage the built environment and encourage others to do so. Since 2010 the Council has invested almost £12 million in our town centres, focussing on creating jobs but in most cases making improvements to the streetscape, improving car parking and working with local businesses to improve their premises.

In Consett we have seen a particular focus on investment and change in the local environment with over 500 new houses built around the town and investments of over £44 million providing new high quality school and leisure facilities. In addition, over £1million has been spent directly in the town centre with improvement works to Front Street and the bus station area, support for 26 town centre business and plans developed for future improvements along the length of Middle Street.

You rightly highlight however that it's not simply the upfront investment we make that is important. With the current pressures on all high street retail areas as both shopping patterns and shopper expectations change, maintaining a high quality environment is ever more important. All our expenditure is planned with long term maintenance factored in from the outset. In addition we've undertaken further targeted work to clean up areas through initiatives such as 'Operation Spruce Up', which we know from surveys that over 90 percent of residents report as making a significant improvement. Schemes such as these are at their best when they have strong support from local businesses, community groups and we welcome support from AAPs to galvanising this interest for further targeted programmes.

SPENNYMOOR AAP

Spennymoor AAP are continuing in their efforts to improve and increase the appeal of Spennymoor Town Centre. These enhancements have come in the form of the delivery of events and the physical improvement of buildings and communal areas. Spennymoor AAP are however very aware that the Festival Walk area of the town is of huge importance in terms of future prosperity. The significance of the Festival Walk site is reflected in the volume of questions received from members of the public. Considering this, Spennymoor AAP would like to request an update from Durham County Council on the progress with the development of Festival Walk and what the opportunities for formal engagement with the Spennymoor AAP will be moving forward?

RESPONSE

Thank you for highlighting the concerns that I know are paramount amongst Spennymoor residents and town centre users.

As a Council we have recognised the importance of redeveloping the Festival Walk and we are frustrated that the plans to deal with the comprehensive redevelopment are taking longer to finalise than we originally hoped, despite the efforts of the site's administrators the Hellens group and Aldi.

In recent months we have been finalising the design of the proposed new car park on the former Kwik Save site which we know responds to local concern about lack of parking. At the same time, we are continuing to work with Hellens Group and Aldi over their proposed scheme and how we deal with onsite utilities, the demolition of the existing facilities and the construction of a new supermarket can be undertaken to minimise disruption to residents and remaining businesses.

All parties involved with the process welcome the strong local interest in the plans and are committed to ensuring that once all the detailed designs are ready, a comprehensive pre-planning consultation exercise is undertaken to allow residents and businesses to see the totality of the proposals along with the Council's plans for the next stage of improvements in the adjacent marketplace area.

We welcome the AAPs continued interest and support and hope soon to be setting out a programme with the AAP to ensure there are appropriate opportunities for residents and businesses to fully consider the proposals.