

## COUNTY COUNCIL

31 OCTOBER 2018

### QUESTIONS FROM AREA ACTION PARTNERSHIPS

#### 4 -Together AAP

Public transport and scheduling still continues to be a neighbourhood issue for residents in the 4 Together Partnership area. A simple example is that you can't get a direct bus from Chilton to Bishop Auckland hospital until 6.45pm. If we want to encourage more use of public transport then we need to make access to services more convenient through high quality, competitively priced, service focused transport. How is the County Council working with the bus operators to extend their current offer and how can residents feed in their concerns to ensure that local transport meets local need?

#### RESPONSE

I would like to thank the 4 Together Partnership for their question.

The County Council works closely with bus operators on service planning, identifying opportunities for growth, promoting public transport and tackling some of the key problems faced by buses, such as congestion on the highway network.

As Cabinet Member I meet quarterly with the bus company managing directors alongside our Head of Service, to promote partnership working on issues such as smart ticketing and technology. We jointly fund an annual passenger survey as part of a national engagement approach by Passenger Focus, which this year saw overall satisfaction with Bus Services in County Durham rise to 91%.

In this last year we have also worked successfully with bus companies and colleagues across the North East Combined Authority to standardise the age of eligibility for young peoples' fares – helping to simplify the complexities of ticketing and remove some of the barriers to young peoples' travel.

We share a common aim with the commercial bus operators of promoting as comprehensive a bus network as possible, to serve the residents of County Durham. However, bus services are expensive to run and they rely on income from passengers in order to be viable. Inevitably there are situations where services that would be desirable are not able to cover their costs through fare income, and are therefore not profitable to run as commercial services.

The Council spends over £2.5 million each year on contracts for bus services to address these gaps in the commercial network. But unfortunately, funding constraints mean that it is not possible to meet all concerns.

Notwithstanding this, we always welcome feedback and suggestions from residents; and this can be done through any of the Council's normal channels including raising issues with local members, the AAPs or contacting us directly through the public transport links listed on our website.

## **GAMP AAP**

Newton Aycliffe has recently benefitted from a number of positive economic developments in the town including Hitachi, University Technical College and the Forrest Park development. However, unemployment levels within the GAMP area, remain relatively high. What are the County Council's next plans for the Great Aycliffe Economy and what can GAMP do to assist?

## **RESPONSE**

Firstly, can I thank the members of the GAMP partnership for their question.

Our ambition is that County Durham is a great place to invest, start and grow a business thereby generating excellent local employment opportunities and with the excellent success in the GAMP area in recent years, it has proven that it is an attractive location for businesses leading to increased local employment opportunities which should be gaining increased traction with the local employment rates.

Building on the success of investments by Hitachi Rail of £100m with over 1300 jobs, Business Durham has been working with II-VI (pronounced 2 6) to support workforce recruitment and new business development. II-VI Inc acquired the former Fujitsu site for \$80m last summer. The site is of national and international importance with highly skilled workers making products for the semi-conductor sector with applications for defence and communications.

Newton Aycliffe continues to attract investment from Husqvarna, a Swedish company locally known as Flymo making robotic lawnmowers primarily for export, and currently recruiting.

With the backing of Hitachi Rail and Gestamp Tallent, the University Technical College South Durham is sending young people armed with STEM qualifications into work having picked up apprenticeships with Ineos, Husqvarna, Hitachi Rail, South West Durham Training and others going onto university to study engineering.

The new strategic site in Newton Aycliffe at Forrest Park with £13m investment from the NELEP is forecast to bring an additional 3,200 jobs and Station Park adjacent to Hitachi will bring forward much needed new employment land to meet the needs of new inward investors and existing companies looking to grow.

Earlier this month the County Durham Engineering Network hosted its annual engineering exhibition at the Xcel Centre in Newton Aycliffe with 100 exhibitors and close to 500 attendees to showcase the strength of the manufacturing capability of the County.

In conclusion, between the 500 companies employing over 8000 people, the new employment land being brought forward and the investment by private companies, the GAMP area is well positioned to benefit from increased economic growth benefitting local residents.