

Statement by the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Finance

23 February 2021

Vibrant Market Towns

In Stokesley officers have been liaising with the Stokesley Bounce back group to understand local business support needs. A grant of £1538 has been awarded to Stokesley Town Council as a contribution towards the cost of printing a business-focus town map and the development of an on-line business directory.

In Thirsk work continues with the 'Thirsk Vibrant Market Town Team', a partnership between Thirsk and Sowerby Town Councils, the Thirsk & District Business Association and Hambleton District Council which will focus on post-covid economic recovery in the Market Place. An 'Action Plan for Thirsk' has been agreed with priorities including the promotion of Thirsk's weekly markets, the hosting of a programme of events throughout the year and the development of a new website to promote local businesses and attractions. It is anticipated that this group will evolve into the 'Town Futures Team' for Thirsk as described in the Council's Economic Response and Recovery Plan. £1504.89 has been awarded to Thirsk Town Council as a contribution towards (a) new artwork for interpretation panels in Castle Garth and (b) the costs of re-opening the public toilets following the Covid-19 pandemic.

In Bedale improvements to signage at the entrances to the town are being explored in partnership with the Town Council and the Bedale & Villages Community Forum, together with opportunities for improved provision of coach parking and links with Thorp Perrow for coach excursions.

In Easingwold we are continuing to work with the Town Council and the Town Team on traffic and parking issues and support key changes to make the visitor and customer experience of Easingwold more pleasant.

Future High Streets Fund

On the 26th December the Council received an in-principle offer of £6.1m of funding for Northallerton through the Government's Future High Streets Fund. As 1 of just 6 towns in the Yorkshire & Humber region to be successful this is a significant achievement and will support the delivery of 3 key schemes: Treadmills Phase 2, Town Centre Living through conversion of the upper floors of shops to residential and the Town Hall Square to provide an events space in the heart of the High Street. Together these schemes will diversify the current retail offer in the town by providing opportunities for social and leisure activities and developing the night-time economy. This is of particular importance as we consider the future sustainability of our High Streets following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Workspaces

Lettings across the Council's industrial units and managed workspaces are performing very well with occupancy rates at good levels considering the pandemic with workspace units having 100% occupancy levels at the end of Q3. Springboard and Evolution have some movement of tenants but still a high occupancy rate. The Business and Economy team continue to work closely with businesses and are supporting tenants with rent deferral in some cases and grant advice as required.

Business Support

As well as paying out business grants the Business and Economy Officers are providing 1:1 business advice to businesses who are growing and diversifying, some who have seen opportunities due to the pandemic. We are continuing to work with partners to ensure businesses have the support they require, through the Federation of Small Businesses, the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership and the local chambers of commerce. During this situation we are also signposting businesses to government advice on other COVID schemes such as loans and Self Employed assistance.

C4Di

The Digital Hub is due to open in March 21 with a launch event in May 21. The interior fit is progressing well and there will be internal photos available to view in the very near future. The Agritech project has been very successful and a number of virtual events have taken place including a successful International AgriTech Event 'Connecting Britain and Poland Post Brexit'. It was virtually attended by 77 attendees from around the world. The first official member of C4Di Northallerton, Glas-Data, a Cornish Agritech company who will have a virtual base in Northallerton. One of the founders Rob Saunders studied in York so knows the area well, as with any Tech company they are able to work remotely, but by having the opportunity to have a virtual base in North Yorkshire will enable them to broaden their customer base and ultimately their business. There are six other businesses that we are currently engaging with including a Corporate business all who we are hoping to become part of the C4Di Northallerton Community.

Apprentices and Graduates

The apprenticeship programme funded by Hambleton District Council continues to deliver support to businesses to employ young people in apprentice positions across all market towns. This year has seen a high number of successful applications to the fund which has resulted in a waiting list by the end of quarter three. Unfortunately, there have been fewer applications to fund graduate positions than anticipated, which has allowed me to agree to move some of the graduate funding to support up to an additional 10 apprenticeship positions in the district.

Graduates are seen as a key part of future business growth and I have therefore asked officers to review how we can support graduates into local businesses, particularly through digital skills and the links we now have with C4Di.

Hambleton Business Conference

I am pleased to confirm that the Hambleton Business Conference will be held virtually this year in May with a date to be confirmed, the theme is 'Embracing the Digital Revolution' which aims to showcase how business can use digital technology to maximise their competitive advantage. We are working in partnership with C4Di to host the event which will be part of a longer event over 3 days showcasing C4Di and launching the Northallerton Digital Hub. We can expect the same mix of engaging speakers and high quality workshops at this year's Hambleton Business Conference.

Councillor Peter Wilkinson
Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Finance