
OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Environment Scrutiny Committee has undertaken :-
 - (a) **Visit to Nature Sites** – During the month of August the Committee undertook a tour of five of Darlington’s Nature Sites as part of this Committee’s remit. We found the visits informative and interesting with a wide range of varying aspects to each site. Skertingham is an impressive site and overlooks Ketton country, Drinkfield Marsh is a striking urban site and although Firthmoor is not finished it demonstrated what could be achieved.
 - (b) **Work Programme 2004/05** – We have given consideration to the Work Programme of this Committee for the Municipal Year 2004/05 and in doing so examined Cabinet’s Forward Plan for particular areas of interest and concern. We are constantly updating and monitoring our Work Programme and have recently agreed to monitor ‘A Town on the Move’ which was the subject of a recent presentation to all elected Members.
 - (c) **Social Inclusion Strategy for Darlington** – A draft of the Social Inclusion strategy aimed at improving the life chances of those who are suffering or are at risk of suffering discrimination or disadvantage has been considered by the Committee and we look forward to further details on the Action Plan in due course.
 - (d) **Town Centre Pedestrian Heart** – Ms. Catherine Xavier of Gillespies, the Lead Consultant on the ‘Pedestrian Heart’ of Darlington Town Centre gave a presentation to Scrutiny Committee on the design of the ‘Heart’ together with the results of the Consultation and Public Consultation Exhibition held in July 2004 on the proposals. The aim is to achieve an improvement in the quality, environment and economy of the Town Centre by providing new development thus bringing new shops and businesses to the Centre in order to enable Darlington to better compete with the rest of the region.
 - (e) **Town Centre Business Plan** – We were asked to comment, as part of a wider consultation programme, on the draft Darlington Town Centre Business Plan and annual Action Plan. The aim of the Plan is to give continuous strategic direction to the development of the Town Centre in order to raise the profile of Darlington and its position as a premier destination for visitors, shoppers and business.
 - (f) **Darlington Economic Regeneration Strategy – Support for New and Existing Business in Darlington** – We were given an overview of the Council’s business support activity over the past three years, including areas of activity, funding and results. The Council’s business support activity which was designed to meet a hierarchy of regional and local strategies and action plans including the Regional

Economic Strategy, produced by One NorthEast, the Darlington Partnership Community Strategy and the Economic Regeneration Strategy 2004 to 2009.

- (g) **Winter Maintenance Plan 2004/05** – We received a report on a review of the Highway Winter Maintenance Operational Plan which set out the Council’s policies and actions in respect of winter services and were advised of the production of a leaflet to increase public awareness of salting routes which also contains tips on winter driving.

- (h) **Policy Review -**
 - (i) **Review of Progress on Policy Review Items**
 - a) **Street Lighting** – We gave consideration to a report on the implementation of the street lighting ‘white light’ conversion programme which informed us that the quality and levels of lighting were improved, light pollution and future maintenance liabilities were reduced, safety and security were enhanced and substantial energy savings were provided.

 - b) **Street Furniture Inspection –Central Ward** – A street furniture inspection of Central Ward was undertaken on 19th August where several areas of concern were highlighted. These matters, mainly of a maintenance or upkeep matter have since been resolved.

**Councillor Stella Robson
Chair of Environment Scrutiny Committee**