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**ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09**

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1. I am delighted to present the Annual Report of Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee to Council on behalf of Members of that Committee. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Members for their contribution to the work of this Committee, with particular thanks to those Members who participated in Scrutiny Reviews and who are referred to later on in this report. Their support to the scrutiny process is invaluable and the work of the Committee would not have been as effective without their support and commitment over the last year. I also wish to acknowledge the effort and the help of the several Officers who support the Committee, in particular Steve Petch, Planning and Economic Strategy Manager, Lead Officer for Economy and Environment Scrutiny and Karen Graves from Democratic Services. Special thanks are extended to the following Cabinet Members for their continued support - Councillors Williams, Leader of the Council and Economy portfolio, D.A. Lyonette, Transport portfolio and Wallis, Sustainable Environment and Climate Change portfolio.
2. Over the year, as seen in the appended work programme, the Committee has handled all the elements of scrutiny, including policy development, project progress, consultation and monitoring functions and reviews of particular services. It has gained in experience and confidence using various techniques as appropriate.
3. The Committee continues to look at ways in which it can, through the Scrutiny process, contribute to the work of the Council and enable all its Members to analyse, contribute and comment on ways of developing the scrutiny process further.
4. As part of its monitoring role it has continued to examine the Service Plans under the control of Economy and Environment Scrutiny which are Consultancy and Development and Regeneration. Members received a summary of performance at the end of the Municipal Year 2008/09 which clearly highlighted overall performance against targets. It is the intention of this Scrutiny Committee to set up Task and Finish Groups, as appropriate and necessary, in order to scrutinise performance in identified services and/or for individual performance indicators.
5. The Committee undertook site visits to Countryside Wild Spaces and the Council's nature reserves, in order to see the work in progress which is aimed at improving areas of wild open space, access to the, and levels of bio-diversity. The visits proved to be highly successful and Committee will continue to undertake an Annual Site Visit as part of its future Work Programmes.

6. The Committee also continues to undertake street furniture inspections to highlight potential small-scale maintenance works, and requirements for general tidying and cleaning of areas.
  7. On planning matters, the Committee undertook site visits, along with Members of Planning Applications Committee, to various developments within the Borough in order for Economy and Environment Scrutiny to fulfil its monitoring role of the Development Control process.
  8. Committee was requested to comment on the content of the Darlington Rights of Way Improvement Plan which is a statutory requirement on all Highway Authorities. It represents the first opportunity that Darlington has had to fully review the value of its Rights of Way network, how it serves the public, how people feel about it, and how it is used. It also provides the evidence needed to enable the Council to access additional funding required to improve the Rights of Way network. The Committee will continue to monitor the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
  9. The main Reviews of this Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal Year 2008/09 have been Development Control Functions and Waste Minimisation. The Development Control Review was established following concerns expressed regarding the Performance on BVP109 which related to the speed of processing planning applications received by this Council. We followed with interest the work undertaken by Joan Reese, Interim Manager and Trevor Roberts, Consultants. These two pieces of work were invaluable to us in undertaking this Review. The Waste Minimisation Review Group was established in order to investigate ways of reducing and reusing waste across the Borough. We met with interested groups, organisations and Town Centre traders in order to gain their views and opinions of how to encourage waste minimisation.
  10. A small Task and Finish Review Group was undertaken at the request of Monitoring and Co-ordination Committee to determine the carbon footprint of the new build at North Road Primary School. We were delighted to receive a presentation by Mr. Simon Allan, Design Architect on proposals for the School and the design challenges presented. Another Task and Finish undertaken by this Committee was to investigate the impact of Traffic Regulation Orders on the Pedestrianisation of Skinnergate, this Review is still ongoing.
  11. Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee have been heavily involved in the ongoing process of the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy Preferred Options preparations. The LDF details the long term spatial vision and strategy, set out broad locations for development and selected land use and development elements of other strategies, namely the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Climate Change Strategy. We will continue to monitor its progress.
  12. Also in connection with the LDF we have commented on the Design of New Development Supplementary Planning Document (Design SPD) which highlighted the proposed approach for securing high quality design in the Borough.
  13. As a Committee we have actively taken part in two Talking Together Events one giving consideration to Cycling Through the Town Centre, the other on Supported Bus Contracts. Both events were held in the Dolphin Centre and were heavily attended by the Public and
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interested organisations. The events gave us, as a Committee, the opportunity to engage fully with the public, to listen to their concerns and take forward their suggestions and comments on the two issues. Two special meetings of Scrutiny were held the day after the Talking Together Events to pull together our recommendations after taking all available information into account. We subsequently considered the Code of Conduct for Cycling Through the Town Centre and our comments were again taken on board prior to Cabinet consideration.

14. Mr. Johnathan Spruce of the Joint Strategy Unit attended Scrutiny and gave an informative and detailed account of the formation of Tees Valley Unlimited and the development of the Multi Area Agreement.
15. We continue to monitor the progress in delivering the actions of the Darlington Open Spaces Strategy, adopted by Council during April 2007, and which covered a ten year period with a mid-term review programmed for 2011.
16. We recently received an update on the status and condition of Darlington's 20 Scheduled Ancient Monuments which had been inspected by English Heritage resulting in some being classified as 'at risk'. Scrutiny are to undertake a tour of the Monuments once the audit has been completed and we will notify you of our findings in future reports.
17. Conservation Area Appraisals continue to be produced with a target of two or three per year in line with the Conservation Appraisals programme. There are 16 Conservation Areas which had been designated between 1968 and 1997 and we welcome the appraisals as they help in the achievement of high quality and distinctive development and regeneration for the Borough of Darlington.
18. Other areas of work undertaken by this Scrutiny during the Municipal Year 2008/09 are detailed at **Appendix 1**.
19. I am very pleased to advise you all that Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee has made a real difference to the people of Darlington.
20. Finally, I would like to express my thanks to Members of the Committee who have brought so much zest and commitment to the work of the Committee. It is determined to develop the Scrutiny functions using good practice and harnessing the experience and interests of all its Members, to the benefit of the town's population in the drive to improve services and look after the environment for everyone. The Committee is working more effectively on behalf of the people of Darlington.

### **Chair of Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee**