

**Changes made to the Medium Term Financial Plan since approval for consultation by
Cabinet on 14 January 2009.**

Page no	Paragraph	Line no	Changed from	Changed to	Reason for change
13	57 (c)	1 & 3	2,860 hours	2,340 hours	Correction
14	57 (g)	4	£17	£12	Correction (reported verbally at Cabinet 14.01.2009)
69	“These efficiency ... at present”	5	40	Approximately 35	Correction
120	35 - table	Last line, col.4	£72.252M	£75.252M	Correction
149	“Medical referee fee”	“New charge”	10.00	18.50	Correction to reflect revised statutory charge
164	Table	6	£34,000	£20,000	Correction
164	Table	New line		Corporate supplies and services; £14,000	Correction
177	Table	7	Parking	Parking (increase with effect from 30.03.2009)	Clarification
179	Table	5 & 14	Copy documents	Copy documents (exclusive of postage)	Clarification
179	Table	6	1.00	0.10	Clarification
		8	1.20	0.20	“
		12	2.50	3.00	“
		15	2.00	1.00	“
		17	3.00	2.00	“
188	Table	17	£455,000 £453,000	£468,000 £466,000	Correction (£13,000 moved from line 18)
		18	£2,128,000	£2,115,000	Correction (£13,000 move to line 17)

Consultation Responses Prior to Cabinet Agreeing Proposals on 14 January 2009

Summary

No. Received	Comments from Residents via: -	Positive about Council Tax	No to Increase in Council Tax	Other CT Comments	Leisure	Street Scene	Waste/ Recycling	Children & Youth	Housing & Vulnerable Groups	Regeneration	Transport	Miscellaneous	Total
15	E-Mails	1	0	1	5	1	3	1	0	3	0	12	27
44	Talking Together Leaflets	4	6	0	8	7	5	8	7	0	5	6	56
5	Post	0	4	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	4	0	12
64	Total	5	10	2	13	9	9	9	8	3	9	18	95

Individual Responses

E-mails

Council gets it right

- Recently attended the international day at the Forum, and picked up a leaflet on spending proposals. The proposed rise of 4.9% will not present a significant problem for our budget, I would be quite happy with higher raise. (Age 34 DL36 EN)
- It is nice to be asked for my views and I am glad to give them (DL3 7SF)

Leisure / Parks

- Impressed with the kids play area recently built at the end of Greenbank, however on the few occasions I have taken my 16 month daughter there, there have been some young teens vandalising the play area with marker pens, cigarette lighters or breaking glass bottles. I have confronted the youths whenever I have witnessed the vandalism, and to be fair they did listen to me and pick up the glass they have smashed, but this is a concern for me if the problem persists that a child could be cut from some glass in the area. (Age 34 DL36 EN)
- As a 41 year old full member of Stressholme Golf Club living in the DL1 area of Darlington i would like to know what proportion of my membership fee is actually spent on the golf course as the course has deteriorated considerably over the last several months (poor weather is to blame for some of the problems but not all) - are there any future investment plans?
- In these times of financial hardship, the Council ought not to put on the fireworks event. The thousands of pounds it cost to put on for what amounts to 2 hours entertainment is not justified when essential services are threatened with cuts.

- Introduce a recruitment drive for staff to use leisure facilities at a reduced rate to promote a healthier workforce and bring more income into the facilities. (Staff Suggestion)
- Feethams Sports Centre, Archer Street, Larchfield Street Sports Centre and Gladstone Activity Centre have all been closed down and are near to the town centre. The policy of locating sports club to school is not working. There is difficulty in getting to the schools at night time because of lack of busses and children do not like to attend schools out of their area. The town centre is neutral territory and needs only one bus journey. Another sports centre is needed in the town centre to combat the monopoly of the expensive Dolphin Centre.

Street Scene

- One of my priorities is keeping the town clean. Nothing increases a feeling of depression and deprivation like dirt. When I go into the town, starting right outside my front door, there is a LOT of litter blowing about, getting into the town there are fast food boxes which still have fast food in them, amongst other things. My road is supposed to be in a conservation area and yet it is constantly full of litter. Is no-one policing this? We need enforcement of rules and also litter clean up.

Waste Disposal/Recycling

- I note that the Local Government Association is running a campaign to return the revenue from landfill tax to councils. Is Darlington Borough Council part of this campaign or has a Darlington Borough Council officer written to Government in support of the campaign. The Government may be persuaded to at least freeze the tax for this year due to the current financial problems to allow the Council to retain more of its council tax. (Staff Suggestion)
- My next priority is that rubbish continues to be removed on a weekly basis. I moved from an area which went to once a fortnight and it was hellish and very upsetting and disturbing for residents. I hope that the Council here will continue to respect residents by providing a decent service. (DL3 7SF)
- There is still a large number of commercial premises who have their waste collected for free by the council who pick up black bags for free. This leads to the council missing out on collection charges and paying extra landfill tax. (Staff Suggestion)

Children/Youth Services

- School Pedestrian Crossings - I would like to state for the record that I believe the above scheme should be made a priority by the council when considering their budget for the coming year. I have noticed a considerable improvement in the pedestrian road safety of the youngsters around Darlington in recent years. Given the amount of traffic in the area, I trust that this scheme will continue in the future. (Age 32 DL3 7SZ)

Regeneration

- Overall, I would like the Council to find ways of attracting more capital investment to Darlington. What has been done in Hartlepool is a good example, and whilst we have no seaside/marina here, is there not more we can do to attract new companies here? This would lead to an influx of diverse sorts of people and would help enliven the town in various ways. Certainly it would provide the Council with additional revenue! If you

would like my participation in this sort of thinking, I would be happy to hear from you. I would also like to know what has been done so far. (DL3 7SF)

- A simple plea for economic development, particularly during times of economic crisis, under CAA inspections and corporate plan reviews the Economy is always headlined as a key priority for the Council but each year the budget for business/economic development gets reduced. (age 45 DL3 0JR)
- For authorities to spend money we have to make money as an economy - these are desperate times for many of our business's, let's show a vote of confidence in our local economy by allocating it a budget appropriate to the priority given to it in strategy documents.

Miscellaneous

- We recently moved from Stanhope Road South to Greenbank road, and initially thought we had made a huge mistake when we learned of the level of drug dealing fairly near to our house, however we have since learned in a policing operation the ring has been smashed, and we no longer see the dodgy looking youths hanging about on the corners. Police presence is high on my wish list, and I would fully support any spending along these lines. Age 34 DL36EN
- I have campaigned for many years and spoken to many councillors about the sloping footpaths on the Oakfield Lodge Estate, to no avail.
The footpaths slope to allow cars to have access to the drives and garages, this causes great problems to elderly people when walking on the footpaths.
I have been told that the slopes are to specification, however this does not help me or the disabled people of this town.
It is impossible to walk on the footpaths, this causes me to have to walk on the road, an accident waiting to happen.
Darlington Council have spent a fortune on roads and highways, and this problem still exists
I would like to know what the council is going to do about this situation, before somebody is run over.
- It is very likely that the Authority already does this but I would recommend a review whether the gas and electricity supplier for the authority's buildings is providing energy at the most cost effective price. Is there room for negotiation on the charge? (Staff Suggestion)
- I am sure you are aware of many people's disappointed view of the town centre renewals and I hope that spending is now stopped on this. (DL3 7SF)
- What is the point of asking for the public's view of next years spending plans in the Town Crier, when in reality a Council Tax rise of 4.9% has already been set? (Staff Comment)
- When producing reports etc, which are to be circulated to stakeholders, and internal and external partners could consideration be given to producing the document for on-line viewing rather than being distributed by post. (Staff Suggestion)

- Recently CLG have made some of their documents for on-line viewing only, rather than producing hard copy, glossy documents. If we could do this we could save on printing and postal/transportation costs, as well as helping the environment. (Staff Suggestion)
- I think it would be more prudent if **all** Council officer meetings including teachers were held within council premises to save on the use of expensive hotel facilities. This has many advantages including the utilisation of Council catering facilities and parking.(Staff Suggestion)
- Introduce a freeze on conference and meetings held outside Darlington for one year to save on fees and travelling expenses (Staff Suggestion)
- Remove the alleged upfront mileage and parking allowance given to some staff. (Staff Suggestion)
- Speed up the accommodation and transport review (Staff Suggestion)
- Darlington Borough Council Cost Saving Proposal

I propose that all (possibly only attractive to full time) DBC employees are given the opportunity to take Darlington Borough Council up on a new working arrangement scheme. This is to temporarily select a half-day in the week (see later for other options), which they would wish to not work. Effectively, a reduction of 10%in the individual's working week.

I would also suggest widening the scheme to include a 20% reduction option (1 full day a week). I would say that this will appeal to a different individual and may prove more or less popular than the half-day option.

Another strand to the flexible hour's scheme above could be to also offer buy back on holidays. I acknowledge the already high holiday entitlement at DBC of 31 days, but a 2 day additional option (with a possible 5 day maximum) on a fulltime10% uptake would also generate approx.

Other benefits of the Proposals: -

With the recent CPA review just completed and Sickness/Absence being identified as an area of DBC performance improvement.... a more flexible and accommodating set of options available to address an employees personal circumstances may also result in a more proactive improvement, rather than a new set of HR reactive measures to seek improvement.

Reduced working hours/days (together with a wider adoption of 'Working from Home' arrangements) would also lead to a reduction in car miles. This could be evaluated and monitored and fed into DBC sustainable and reduced congestion targets.

Darlington Borough Council could run the scheme as a trial, short-term, long-term, with many options or a few or in response to financial pressures of the day.

Talking Together

Cornmill 10th and 11th November

Forum 16th November

Council gets it right

- Got priorities right (DL1 5TQ Age 39)
- Impressed by Darlington. Good town centre. Impressed by schools
- Got priorities right. Do very well (DL3 7HA Age 43).
- Overall I'm really happy with decisions that are made.

No Increase in Council Tax

- I don't want it to go up. I think we are paying too much
- No increases in Council Tax. Efficiencies? No service cuts! Link it to wages/RPI
- I think the Council Tax is pretty nifty stuff. I look forward to paying such a hefty sum.
- I think the Council Tax is too high. I don't look forward to paying that in future. I think the housing price should go up anymore as it's a lot harder to live especially if you have a poor job. All the rest is about right and I wouldn't mind if it went up.
- I'm not bothered whatever you do will be an improvement.
- Reduction in council tax. (DL3 6BA Age 30)

Transport

- Urgent need for bus station, bus situation chaotic now especially High Row and Tubwell Row. It's a matter of time before someone is hurt or worse.
- Bus station would be nice.
- Bus stops – change back to how they were
- Transport – bus station
- Investment in bus services

Waste Disposal/Recycling

- Garden waste removal is a big problem
- It isn't right to be paying for waste disposal.
- Recycling facilities,
- Spend more time and money and refuse and recycling e.g. pick ups on time.
- More incentives for recycling (DL3 6BA Age 30)

Housing

- Housing Repairs/Branksome – Programme of works – damp courses
- Housing programme – kitchens, bathrooms, doors. Branksome (Warwick Square) DL3 0DH (age 21)
- Would like to see more resources spent on Council houses repairs. Programme for double glazing, new front doors, etc. (DL1 2SZ age 37)
- Affordable social housing
- Would like to see double glazing and new doors for Council houses (Midd St G) (DL1 2SZ age 37)
- More low cost social housing, like council houses (DL3 6BA Age 30)

Children/Youth Services

- More money schools (DL3 6PP age 42)
- More activities for young people – youth clubs (DL1 2LE age 60)
- More youth facilities
- More money spend for youths
- Activities for Young People , like sport, carnivals (DL1 4QG Age 12)
- Education and schools important (DL1 1 JY Age 39)
- Support children and young people.
- With such a pot of cash going to Children’s Services, I would like to see facilities built for youths to play games. There should be no shortage of MUGA’s in all areas. (DL3 8HY)

Leisure / Parks

- Sports facilities – swimming pool at Doli. (DL1 4DQ age 19 and 20)
- Proper exhibition centre – Model Railway Club. Dolphin Centre quoted £5000. Possibilities where new cattle mart (Burtree) going to be built. (DL1 3BN age 75)
- More music events – festivals (DL2 1HG age 16)
- Parks, ice skating rinks, cafes etc.
- More greenery, plants, parks, ice-skating rink
- More on sports and leisure.
- Against 2 tier market. Angry about £29000 cost of Feasibility Study when a mere £6000 would complete funding for bandstand in North Lodge Park.
- The only comment I’d like to raise is that the park in the denes should be policed to stop the alcohol, swearing people from spoiling it.

Street Scene

- Complaint from resident in Corbridge Crescent about parking on grass verges – lady has complained via email and had no response. Verges look a muddy mess.
- Streets to be cleaner (Denes) (DL3 6NQ age 49)
- Seats and bins are very appropriate e.g. upstairs in Cornmill.
- Bins – help prevent littering! More seating in the Cornmill/more indoor seating.
- River Skerne in town centre is very dirty. I suggest to clean it up.
- It isn’t right to be paying for Street Scene
- My overall complaint re Darlington is the disgusting and unhygienic mess on the paving outside the County Court at the bottom of Coniscliffe Road, caused by pigeons. One has to walk very near the outside of the pavement in order to avoid picking up the mess on ones shoes. I understand that the roof of this building does not belong to the Council but surely the landlord could be obliged to erect wire mesh to prevent the pigeons being there, as has been done with the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square. Failing that the Council should be obliged to clean the pavement every morning.
 - ALSO, why is there no deposit for cigarette ends outside this court, such as that supplied for ‘Twenty-2’ a little way up the road? The cigarette ends are a disgrace.
 - We have lived at this address for more than 45 years.
 - This area must make Darlington one of the dirtiest towns in the North-East.
 - Please CLEAN IT UP. (DL3 7RM Age 75)

Vulnerable Groups

- More money from Council taxes spent on vulnerable groups i.e. mental health.

Miscellaneous

- More community development workers (DL3 6BA Age 29)
- Cut running costs of town hall by turning heating down, having energy efficiency light bulbs in corridors. Only send mail at 2nd class. Travelling 2nd class only and in house training if possible.
- Public facilities, benches, sheltered areas for students, seating in Cornmill
- Better shops in Darlington
- Tackle obesity. Police on beat. (DL3 6HU Age 42)
- Buildings and safety. (DL3 6PP age 42)

Consultation Responses After Cabinet Proposals Were Agreed on 14 January 2009
Open Public Consultation

Number Received	Comments from Residents via	Aviary in South Park	Mayors Charity Shop	Pedestrian / Cycle Training	Public Conveniences	Head of Steam	Car Parking Charges	Other Specific Services	TOTAL
24	Emails	6	3	9	6	1	1	6	32
3	Telephone				1		1	2	4
17	On-Line	9	3	2			2	3	19
44	Total	15	6	11	7	1	4	11	55

Comments by E-mail

I see that one of your proposals is to close the public toilets in the Cockerton shopping area. In the 21st century this is a very uncivilised act to remove what is a basic human necessity particularly for older people.

You are trying to encourage people to walk or cycle to shops yet removing the facility that is needed for a longer trip.

I suspect that the main costs involved are in cleaning & repairing vandalism in the male cubicle. This could be blocked off leaving just a urinal.

A huge saving could be made by turning the street lights off between 1.00am & 6.00am

This consultation is not long enough for everyone to comment plus there is now breakdown of costs.

I am personally against the closure of the aviary in South Park, the Mayors Charity shop and the Head of Steam.

Yours faithfully,

DL1 5TF

School Pedestrian Crossing

I would like to state for the record that I believe the above scheme should be made a priority by the council when considering their budget for the coming year. I have noticed a considerable improvement in the pedestrian road safety of the youngsters around Darlington in recent years. Given the amount of traffic in the area, I trust that the funding for this scheme will continue in the future.

DL3 7SZ aged 32 years.

I strongly disagree with the Council's proposals to charge for cycle training and pedestrian training because it will put children's lives at risk, especially the most vulnerable children who are least likely to have parents who can afford to pay, and it is an extra tax on hard working families. It is probably these children who are more likely to be in need of this type of training in the first place...

It has been brought to my attention that you are planning to begin charging parents for road safety training. this is a ridiculous idea and should be stopped immediately. surely in our current climate road safety and cycling are things that we should be encouraging not putting parents off the idea. if the local council feel they are falling short financially, then if they send traffic wardens round at the beginning and the end of school time. they would make an absolute fortune charging irresponsible parent s for parking illegally outside the school. thanks for taking the time to read my email.

Hi

I would like to voice my opposition to the proposed changes to start charging parents/schools directly for cycle and pedestrian training. This is a threat to children's safety, as well as another bill for parents when times are hard. It will result in parents being unwilling or unable to pay. This will mean cuts in a service that has cut accident and fatality rates and costs less than £55000 for the whole town. Finally it is likely that those children who most need the training will be least likely to have parents who are willing or able to pay.

Please save the pedestrian and cycle training from the service review, this is a potential life saving service and should not be taken out of the budget

Dear Sir

I am resident in the borough and read briefly last week about the latest budget proposals. I have now downloaded a copy but not had time to read it yet, so apologise for that! However, I was thinking about a couple of things. In the small bit I read last week, it said that rates would go up, which is a perennial event I suppose, but in these rather tricky times, it will have more impact, I am sure, on residents and businesses. Also, parking prices are to rise. I wondered if the proposal to increase parking costs might be re-jigged, with the following idea in mind. In quite a few local towns, the use of discs is employed, allowing people to park for up to 2 hours free. This keeps custom moving, but allows people the freedom to pop into, say Yarm, with no parking costs- and we all like the touch of bargain that this gives us! I wondered if Darlington might consider using this idea in part - for example, every rate payer could have a parking disc sent with their next rates bill. A charge of £1 would be added to the rates bill, and therefore it would be funded straight away. More could be sold at various locations in the town. There could then be an allowance of 2 hours for parking between certain times, and I was thinking of the quieter times in town, such as 8.30-10.30 am and 3.30-5.30 pm. This might persuade people to visit the town a little more, bringing in more trade, and give that 'good bargain' feel factor to consumers. I have a number of friends who also take children to after-school pursuits, such as swimming or gym, and they have often said that the real cost of these also includes the parking cost, and the fear of a fine if they have paid the literal time-in-pool - and some have gone to other pools such

as at Thornaby simply because of this! A parking disc would alleviate this problem, and again bring more custom to the town.

I also wondered if the 'green' rubbish, ie vegetation, might be recycled at, say, the council's garden site, so that people could bring down such stuff and it would be used to make compost for the whole area, or even for residents to buy - albeit it would take a couple of years to be produced. Maybe some rubbish could also be re-directed to somehow make heat for the town - this must be possible, and such generation would save money for the council in the long run, and employ people building such a scheme in the short term.

Could there also be some kind of moratorium on the council tax rise, such that it remains at present levels for 3 or 4 months and then rises by the 3.7% in the 4th or 5th month. It would give everyone some breathing space, and yet also allow the council to know that extra money would be coming in.

DL3

Sir/Madam,

I read with interest the recent proposal to charge local residents for the children's cycling and pedestrian training scheme in Darlington and would like to express my opposition to this idea. In an increasingly busy urban environment road safety training should be a right, not a privilege.

Kind Regards,

DL3 8EF

Dear Sir

For the past two years I have regularly used the South Park, my two year old son is growing up watching the birds in the aviary.

As a baby he was just interested in the colours and the movement of the birds, now we use it as a source of learning about birds and colours as well as looking for the famous Max. I watch many other parents and grandparents in similar positions all making the pilgrimage to the aviary either the first port of call on the park visit or the last.

This does not just apply to the young, many of the older generation visit the aviary as part of their daily walk, standing chatting to the birds can often make someone lonely and frail very happy.

It also encourages conversation I myself have lost count how many times I have spoken to a complete stranger with regards to the birds. All of this adds to a community spirit, is this not at the heart of what a successful attraction provided by the local authority should bring. **A SENSE OF COMMUNITY.**

The other major point as to why the aviary **MUST** be saved is the local heritage. South Park is a true Victorian Park in every sense of the word right down to this aviary, if it was to be demolished this Victorian Park would lose its heart and turn it into just another park along side others in the town and surrounding areas.

I urge you to take this letter on board and **NOT** to demolish the Aviary, as a cost cutting exercise I believe this is extremely harsh there are not that many facilities in Darlington that give so many people pleasure and truly benefiting society. In this current climate I believe it is not the appropriate way forward.

If you wish to contact me I would be more than happy to discuss this further.

Dear Sir

I feel bitterly disappointed about your proposal to close the South Park Aviary. The aviary is a recognised well loved feature of the park and removing it robs the townspeople of an attraction that makes South Park different from other parks within the Borough and beyond.

The park was granted Heritage Lottery funding in 2005 - have the Heritage Lottery been consulted about your proposal to remove the aviary? Surely it was an integral part of the Stage One and Two HLF bid which was endorsed when the HLF agreed to fund restoration and improvement works.

Removal of the aviary is also completely contrary to the South Park Maintenance and Management Plan 2006, in particular the section on Vision for the park on page 4. How can you make this decision when the Council has adopted this plan?

I feel it is a short sighted cost saving and urge you to retain and conserve this feature.

My family and I would like to express our concern at the suggested closure of the South Park aviary.

We thoroughly enjoy visiting Max and the other birds. The aviary provides very many people, particularly pensioners and young families, with a great deal of quiet pleasure.

We would be extremely sorry to see it removed.

If it is demolished, the many people who use South Park will inevitably feel its removal to be a particularly mean-spirited action on the part of the Council, when compared to the money spent on the demolition of the old shed near the lodge and its replacement with a new building.

I would like to express my outrage at the proposal to charge for cycle training and pedestrian training to our school children.

I read with interest and pride that road deaths have fallen in our area. Road safety is a multi approach of which cycle and pedestrian training are part of. Take them away (which is what is essentially being proposed because parents and schools will not be willing to fund this I suspect) then road deaths will increase I have no doubt.

Please do not cut our valuable work.

Tees Valley Rural Community Council

Response to Darlington Borough Council

Budget Consultation 2009/10

TVRCC welcomed the opportunity to meet with Council Officers on two occasions (7th Nov 2008 and 16th Jan 2009) to discuss the current Budget Proposals.

The details given in the article to be publicised in the Town Crier, are simple to understand and give those who wish, an opportunity to respond in several different ways.

TVRCC feels that the approach of for 'efficiency savings' are justified and that the recommendations are sensible at this time. However, we do have a number of issues and suggestions relating to some the proposals:

- Close public conveniences at Cockerton, Heighington and Middleton on Row.
-

We feel that it is a shame that more public amenities be closed, especially those in the rural areas where access to services is a high priority. However, we understand that these facilities are expensive to maintain.

Once these are closed, what will the buildings/land be used for and will there be signage telling the public where they would find the nearest similar facilities?

- Reduce highways and transport planning and policy work

Can you assure TVRCC that this reduction will not affect the Local Authority funding of rural bus services and improvements to rural highways?

- Car park charges

TVRCC believes that most people will be in favour of the suggestion to increase Short Stay charges by 20p an hour and retain the three for two offer, but will the Council consider offering cheaper parking for those people who may need to spend longer than 3 hours in the town, such as those who work or visit the town? Cheaper long stay car parking would encourage people to shop in Darlington instead of going to Stockton or Middlesbrough.

- Restructuring and removing 60 jobs

TVRCC is pleased to see that the Council is planning to slim down its staffing and hopes that this can be undertaken by 'natural wastage' and not through redundancies. TVRCC also hopes that this will not affect any voluntary sector posts, employed through the Council.

- Joint procurement initiatives

TVRCC would like to see more 'Joint Procurement Initiatives' being undertaken by Darlington Borough Council, possibly involving the Voluntary Sector to maximise benefits.

- Proposed Council Tax increase of 3.5%

TVRCC feels that this is a manageable rise in Council Tax charges, but would like the Council to be aware that homes in rural areas may be in a higher tax band and examples of this cost increase should be considered in any publicity material. Front line Council services must continue to be maintained at the same level if not higher, any efficiency savings must not effect the service to tax payer receives and all tax payers should receive the same level of service, no matter where they live (including those who reside in the more remote rural areas of the Borough).

- Reduction in some external grants

TVRCC hopes that this proposal will not affect any finance to voluntary and community organisations or to services currently being delivered by this sector.

I hope you will pass this on to the department that is involved with the proposed closure of the aviary at South Park.

As a resident who lives opposite the aviary, I was very distressed to read in the newspapers the other day that the council is to consider closing (not just closing but totally demolishing) the

fabulous aviary that the town of Darlington should be so proud to own.

When I moved my family up to Darlington from Maidenhead in the south east, one of the many reasons we moved to South Park was because of the super park and accompanying aviary opposite our new house. It gives my my two little girls such a thrill to see and talk to the birds and it also creates a fabulous back-drop of noise in our house which we all love to hear. It is great to see so many families and people enjoying the facilities that have cost so much money to refurbish, and now, at the swipe of a bureaucratic axe, you wish to get rid of it. This is such a waste of a wonderful asset.

Surely in the great scheme of things it cannot possibly cost that much to keep running does it? Have you ever sat there on a sunny afternoon and seen a disabled child in a wheelchair look into the aviary?, their face lights up, or the old granddad being wheeled out to get some fresh air? it brightens up his day no end, I bet even you can't walk past without saying "hello" to the African grey parrot (I know he has some choice expressions, but he's only telling you what he thinks of your idea!!). Surely this is priceless and worth every penny it cost to keep it open and perhaps even to improve it more rather than destroy it.

Lets face it what would you leave there instead, the foundations sticking up out of the ground? Wow that's a great incentive to take the family to the park on a sunday afternoon, NOT! So come on get your thinking caps on, and find something really worth while doing to save money rather than the knee jerk reaction you have so far come up with. I know we've all got to pull our belts in a bit at the moment, but if you destroy this wonderful place, when things do pick up on the economy front, are you going to build another one and how much do you think that will cost?!!! (I think for example you're looking at 2.5- 3.0k just to replace the two parrots!!).

I am attending the friends of South park emergency meeting tonight and do hope you will attend as well.

Kind regards **Parkside resident.**

I echo the views expressed in the online discussion forum, the Northern Echo and talking to people generally about this issue.

I urge you not to take action on the following, but to think of other ways to save money:

1. Please do not close the Mayor's Charity Shop
(It is a much needed service, and maintenance should have been carried out and monitored all along, bringing it up to the standard of other charity shops in town where business is booming).
 2. Please do not introduce a charge for pedestrian/cycle training in schools.
(Parents already have to pay for school meals and extra curricular activities).
 3. Please do not increase car parking charges for short stay.
(These charges are high enough).
 4. The recent "Dine" incentive seems to have been an expensive outlay, when restaurants etc are already introducing discounts on their own to the general public.
 5. It is my opinion, and that of others I speak to, that the Council, although trying hard for the town, invests too much money on different initiatives when it doesn't necessarily need to. Common sense, and aiming for higher standards should prevail.
 6. Why not drop the Fireworks event until the recession is over.
(Last year's really was a "damp squib", and very rarely matches up to the amount spent, particularly when drowned out by the unnecessary fairground noise. You could always reintroduce it, bigger and better, with a "bang" when the Council's finances are in order.
-

The public convenience on the front at Middleton one row would be missed by ramblers, anglers and families picnicking in the summer.
My proposal is this, I live on the front and work from home and would be willing to take over your responsibilities for 50% of what it costs you now.
My details are

DL2 1AS

In the various pieces of information available, I see no mention of headcount. I spent all of my working life in large companies in the private sector and, invariably, one of the most effective ways of controlling costs was to apply strong management to headcount requirements.
When necessary there would be a severe restriction in how many staff were to be employed and, although at times it might have appeared impossible to carry out a function with fewer staff, it is remarkable that ways were always found to do things more efficiently. The necessity to reduce costs and thereby maintain profits is very powerful in the commercial world.
I wonder if such stringent control over headcount is exercised in Local Government in general and Darlington Council in particular.

I object to the Council's proposal to charge for pedestrian and cycling training on the following grounds:-

If, as is likely, parents and/or schools are unwilling to pay, the present training is likely to be reduced or stopped completely. This will have a number of adverse effects -

- 1) Children's safety may be compromised along with that of other pedestrians, motorists, passengers and cyclists who may be involved in any accident or near accident caused by a child acting in an unsafe manner. The knock-on effects could be considerable, including potential costs to the NHS.
 - 2) If parents are not confident of their children's safety on roads and pavements they are more likely to take them to school by car, resulting in increased congestion and danger around schools and detrimental effects on the children's health due to reduced physical activity. Parents are also less likely to allow their children to play outside the home which may also adversely affect their physical and social health.
 - 3) A number of workers (pedestrian and cycle trainers) may lose their jobs. In the current economic climate the effects on the rather low paid individuals may be considerable. As two members of my family are currently employed in this area, this is of particular interest to me.
-

I wish to object to the Council's plans to charge parents for the road/cycle safety lessons currently provided free of charge in Darlington schools.

As a parent nothing is more important to me than my child's safety and I feel that your decision to stop funding these lessons will have a negative impact on the safety of all local children

I already pay council tax and income tax and do not believe you should ask parents for more money. Please do not let a child get hurt before you realise how important this service is.

We object to the removal of public conveniences in Cockerton due to the fact that it is the only toilet facility and it is greatly used. The last time I took my 2 year old there was a queue. The children use it, the elderly use it, people who have been out for a walk to the shops or passing through are caught short use it. You cannot remove it as what are the public supposed to do when they need to go.

Regards

I read in the Town Crier that the public toilets at Cockerton are scheduled to be closed as a cost cutting exercise.

As a mother with two young children, we often use these when we are in the village when they get 'caught short'. I appreciate that cost will have to be cut and that savings will be made, but if they do close these facilities, could some arrangement be made where the ones in the library can be made available for the public?

If they are used infrequently then it is unlikely to cause a significant distraction to the librarians, as there are usually 2 or 3 ladies there.

Alternately, you could look into a WC provision like they have in the Scottish town of Aberfeldy where Perth & Kinross Council runs a scheme whereby local businesses let people use their facilities free of charge or without the need to be a patron as they too closed their local facilities. Please look into this on the internet for all the three sites proposed.

Please consider this suggestion when making your decision

I look forwards to your reply

Please don't close the Cockerton toilets. If anything, please provide more public toilets in the town. Provision is very poor, especially first thing - can be a problem if one has a long onward journey to make - one of the reasons a bus station would be an asset for the people of the town. If you want a standard to aspire to, try the fantastic public toilets in the new harbour development in Portsmouth!

I regret I am unable to attend the meeting on 10th February to discuss the DBC budget proposals. I do have a comment which I would like to register and would ask that this be fed back and noted.

As a resident of Great Stainton, one of the villages surrounding Darlington our community has never had any recycling facilities. I have contacted the council on many occasions to find out whether a service could/would be set up. To little avail. I now see in your plan that "A major

Council initiative in 2009-10 will be the start of the new waste management contract and that will significantly increase recycling in the Borough."

Can you please ensure that Great Satinton is included in this expanded service

In the crier an item NHS regarding help is at hand for people with bladder problems also proposals to save 25k by closing public conveniences Heighington, Middleton One Row and Cockerton if you divide 25k by 3 about 8 divide by 353 it works out at about 25p a day to keep these conveniences open then you have the NHS trying to help people with bladder problems
70s

e-mails how many people in their 70s have computers? Just passing comment people in my age profile there aren't many people who complain about things and they don't go to meetings and they

European style toilets with automatic doors its gone back to the standard situation

Was there much research re people travelling on buses used to get the bus to cockerton and go to the hospital was their much consultation re buses to train provision of bus routes and why people have to change at the town centre to the train station and hospital

DL3 9NE Aged 72

There is too much consultation if the charity shop and the aviary have to go because they lose money then they should go.

Stop paying for the full services for elderly care and reduce expenditure on services that get good CPA ratings (eg communications, flyer/crier) at the expense of front line services that the public want

Gavin Doherty, c/o Newcastle University (formerly of Darlington)

Comments by Telephone

Protest about closure of Cockerton Toilets which is very frequently used.
141 Staindrop Road

DL3 9AY

Comments re suggestions for making savings and he would like to know whether any of the comments have been taken on board – nothing in the paper (re 2 months ago form have your say)

How to make a lot of money parking – every street is filled up with cars to do away with all this to make it residents parking and 2 hour restrictions it would.

As far as parking concerned I live in Elmfield Terrace you daren't move your car or you'll never get it parked again.

No traffic wardens on the yellow lines.

Wages – big concern for the council because they pay a lot out how much is forked out for the 53 councillors and also the money that's paid to the top people in the town hall why can't they reduce some of those wages to get the deficit down. The streets the back lanes are a disgrace ways of saving money but not at the bottom. Why council tax going up 3 x inflation?

2-3 chief execs had a trip to Australia who paid for that?

Top priority parking if you cure that you will cure the deficit.

DL3 6NA Aged 63

Business rates - no incentive to pay a years rates in advance. He pays monthly, which must incur admin costs. He would be willing to pay a year up front if there was an incentive.

DL1 1TF Aged 31

On-Line Forum

The recently proposed money saving cuts seem to be in the right areas where least impact will be felt - that is perhaps apart from pedestrian training and cycling proficiency in schools.

There will be a lot of people disappointed if go ahead with the closing of the south park aviary. it is one of the main attractions in the park.

There doesn't seem to be many options to choose from.

While they seem ok it would be nice to have a range of things to comment on instead of having a decided list. Makes it difficult to make a choice or comment on.

I just walked past the South Park Aviary and there were five people, with children, watching the birds at the Aviary.

I'd like my street to be clean

The aviary in South Park was modified and extended during the recent park restoration. Surely it cannot be cost effective to demolish it after only 2-3 years and what will be left in it's place? Many young children regularly visit the park and know the birds by name and will surely be upset if the birds are taken away. Perhaps the Council could consider

cancelling the firework display during this economic downturn instead. It is scandalous that so much money is sent up in smoke and so much damage is done to the park just for half an hour of entertainment when users of the park can get pleasure from the aviary all year round.

I agree that the firework display should be shelved during the recession. This year it was very much a "damp squib", and wasn't that great in previous years. They should drop it, have a rethink, and bring it back with a "bang" when the economy is better.

I also do not think it's fair to: put a charge on pedestrian/cycle training in schools or increase short stay car parking.

And the decision to close the Mayor's Charity Shop is just unbelievable. Someone writing in the Northern Echo said the situation should have been monitored regularly and the shop maintained properly - it wouldn't take that much money. I hardly ever go in because of its state. If it had been maintained like other charity shops in the town, trade would have been booming.

I think it would be a great shame to lose the aviary, the new one is a lot better than the old one and it is popular with people visiting the park. Perhaps the council should look at trimming it's social services budget which seems to go up every year by far more than inflation. Also there always seems to be unlimited money to throw at council estates whilst those of us who actually pay the council tax get very little in return. Many of the cutbacks harm many of the cultural and educational services the council provides for everyone in the town. I think it would be better to shut down some of these community centres, if people on the private housing estates can manage without them why do council estates need them.

As the Council have listed energy prices as being part of the reason for the need for cutbacks I would like to know what is being done to improve energy efficiency in its buildings. Examples of energy waste that I have noticed include the Town Hall meeting rooms that do not have thermostats in them causing the need for doors to be left open and fans to be employed and our premier visitor attraction, the museum, which was refurbished last year but does not have draft excluding on many of its doors and windows.

I think it is disgraceful that park visitors, in particular children, are to loose out for the sake of £35,000 a year. Surely there are other ways that this amount of money can be saved without causing such a permanent loss to the enjoyment and education of our younger generation.

The closing of the charity shop seems a very inconsiderate move to take especially at a time when the number of low-income earners is on the increase. If the present location requires maintenance then why not look to move it to one of the council's many vacant properties such as the old tourist info shop.

Moore - I totally agree with your comment regarding the charity shop. It would certainly be the best idea to relocate it to another empty property.

Don't know where they get this it takes £ 35,000 to run the south park aviary.

I think it is a shame that the aviary is closing it gives people visiting the park such pleasure and it is always packed with children looking at the birds. Why not ask 'the friends of the South Park' if they would like to take over the care and feeding of the birds I'm sure the public would contribute and a rota could be organised for feed times. I live by the park and I'm sure that would be a welcome idea instead of just closing it.

I agree that the aviary shouldn't be closed, it would be a shame for the park and the public. In this day and age when we are being advised to embrace outdoor activities, keep fit etc it would be a loss to the community. its not like we have too many places to take kids in the local area(free of cost)and there are no zoo's or fun farms in Darlington so kids do enjoy the aviary, i know my daughter has done. Perhaps the council should look at how it is run and make use of volunteers to help in the maintenance of the park.

I agree with most of the proposals. Closing the Mayor's Charity Shop is a good idea, it's shabby and there are plenty of other charity shops in the town. My objection is to the increased minimum car parking charges. It's particularly unfair if you have a doctor's surgery in town and you only need to park for 5 minutes.

The proposal to close the aviary in the park is a shame. The Aviary with birds and animals at one time have given much pleasure to many people over decades. Having lived in Darlington for most of my adult life the Park and the various attractions have become symbols of the town.

Visiting the park today a Sunday and very cold, the Aviary was a centre of attraction to many young and old. Many travel from outside the town to see the aviary.

Please keep the Aviary it is part of the park and Darlington. In order to gain some revenue why not make a nominal charge to see the fireworks.

As is necessary for the council to make cuts in certain areas, might I suggest that this proposed cycleway is not a priority and should be shelved.

What Haughton cycleway?

Town Crier Responses

	Waste Management / Recycling	Housing / Vulnerable People	Transport	Street Scene	Capital Schemes	Crime & Disorder	Miscellaneous	Council Tax
No of Comments / Objections	3	7	6	4	2	2	2	3

Responses to the Town Crier article have generally been comments about specific services, rather than responses directly relating to the budget proposals. They are, nonetheless, relevant to the Council's budget, medium term plans and services.

From May to October there should be a weekly collection of garden waste from people's homes. Older people should not have to spend money on petrol to get to the tip. Nor should anyone contribute to the increase of carbon emissions by individual journeys there. It's time Darlington Council did something to remedy this problem.

Age: 57 Postcode: DL3 9QG

You could do up the Risecarr Area. Like opposite to the houses and get rid of the people who deal in drugs because there is a lot of kid live near. And put new front doors on the houses and OAP's flats and more lights street lights and doors in homes and draft proof

Age: 32 Postcode: DL3 0XH

Wages too high for top people working for DBC. You will say they compete with other councils. They would not get a job for other councils. Why pay 53 councillors excessive amounts of money. Who paid for people to go to Australia to check Dolphin Centre Equipment.

Age: 63 Postcode: DL3 6NA

With the gas and electric increases plus water, why put more pressure on pensioners. With the pension increase based on last years inflation figures we will only get 2.2% increase. With the proposed 4.9% council tax plus rent this outweighs the pension increase. Why is so much money spent on services police? We never see one in our area (Branksome). When we asked for an extra radiator in the porch and toilet we were refused.

Age: 69, Wife 68 Postcode: DL3 9RX

Housing should be transferred to an association. Reduce the number of Councillors by ½ . Far too many council employees – reduce numbers and cut out those departments not required. Reduce the pay of top level council officials. Concentrate on core responsibilities. Its not only about which services should receive more or less funding – its about efficiency, working practices and excellent management. Maintain Council Tax at the present level – especially now the credit crunch is upon us.

Age: 63 Postcode: DL3 8HZ

As the biggest town in Durham Constabulary's area is it not time we had a bus station comparable with Newcastle, Middlesbrough and Sunderland? Highly unsatisfactory, particularly people awaiting long distance buses – no facilities available surely it warrants priority

Age: 76 Postcode: DL3 9FB

In my view more should be spent on cleaning the streets of the whole town, gutters and pavements – they are absolutely filthy with dirt that when it rains the dirt is washed into the drains and blocking them leading to flooding – Darlington must be one of the dirtiest towns in the country. I am surprised that council members and Street Scene Wardens cannot see this – they are not doing their job – what has happened to road sweepers with brushes? The machine is rubbish.

Age: 62 Postcode: DL3 6QL

Love cyclin' thro Darlo Town Centre – fantastic vision – 10/10 – you have created a mini Amsterdam – love Darlo and Cycle to shop is brillio

Age: 56 Postcode: DL3 6HS

I think you should organise your budget properly and not waste council tax payers money on the likes of the pedestrian heart and the new road scheme, and get those concerned to pay their council tax and rent arrears. It's the likes of them that the council tax goes sky high every year since you are in the council, honest people like myself as to pay because the don't also stop giving the police extra monies every year for doing nothing

Age: 62 Postcode: DL1 4AT

Please continue the funding for the bus service No. 20 which serves the Milbank Road/Cleveland avenue area of the town and allows residents to get into the town centre conveniently.

Age: 74 Postcode: DL3 8LZ

Hello I work in Darlington and travel in by train. I walk down Victoria Road and the amount of dog mess there is vast – please could you clean this area

At the moment the price of heating the flat I am in has heaters in what went out with the ark. Also and double glazing the windows are running with condensation. How can I save on heating when the heat is going out the window. What house has no double glazing in today's world. I think that's where some money should be spent

Mowden Terrace

There appears to be too many small groups of police under the umbrella of services Each ward seems to have various different action groups and most of these are ill attended as are not known what they do or where they operate from not everyone has a computer.

Age: 64 Postcode: DL3 9AF

Increased crime and disorder in Park East. Now is the time to increase spending on Police and crime prevention.

Spending cuts will only lead to more crime and violent on Darlington streets. Please include local volunteers in any council plans

Postcode; DL1 5TN

Put Council Tax on hold/improve services in care homes its all wrong people with a small savings have to pay working people who paid taxes all their lives while other scroungers get care free and illegal immigrants = the whole system is not geared up for British born residents/ the welfare system was set up to give people free care from birth to death

No Post Code supplied

NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS SENT REFER TO:

BRITAIN'S BENEFITS MADNESS – ITS NO WONDER THEY'RE SMILING – Migrant mum of 7 lives in £1.2 m mansion for free. Her landlord gets £12,000 a month rent from council

Do not remove the Parish Council allotted money lower councillors allowances

Start fining illegal and bad parking especially villages. Stop using RIPA to spy on people. Name the 4 poor schools that are failing.

No postcode supplied

Darlington could be “greener”. Street collections are basic – paper and clear plastic. As some residents have a 14-mile round trip to the tip, better kerb-side collection would result in greater recycling. A green waste collection is also needed – how about the Borough producing compost for sale?

Age 64, DL2 1AQ

Something needs to be done for disabled children - there is virtually no after school activities for them, that I am aware of, the poor things just seem to be forgotten.

Would it not be a good idea to make terrace streets one way i.e. up one down another, it would make it easier for cars and buses alike, but please no more speed bumps, they are extremely uncomfortable for people with disabilities.

Age 62 DL3 8SD

We need a BUS STATION. It is shameful that we have to meet visitors to our town at the side of the road. Surely we could utilize the present station, foundations and steelwork are already there and there could be a turning circle in front. If we lose this site there is nowhere else central. Other local towns all have a decent bus station.

DL1 5TE (over 70)

Kerbside recycling of cardboard and carrier bags would be an improvement of services.

Smoother roads in Darlington please.

No name or dob

After wasting millions of pounds on the town centre, why oh why, will this council not provide Darlington with the bus station we so desperately need? The town Centre is a complete mess dangerously cluttered with buses unable to get into the stands allocated to them and out of town buses add to the congestion. If we had a bus station all of the out of town buses would then have to enter and leave Darlington via the ring road. Touring coaches would also benefit

DL3 8RR – My age is none of your business

With costs going up why doesn't Darlington Council work to greener options for heating etc and do more to encourage businesses, schools etc to reduce, recycle and reuse? Other Councils have and are reaping the benefits as are their residents. Why have you got rid of the gardeners? The Denes is now suffering because of this short-term, ridiculous move. **No postcode or age supplied**

Consultation following Cabinet on 14 January 2009 – Letters to The Leader

Dated	Ref	Name & Add	Matter
16.1.09	01	Elly Weston e.weston90@ntlworld.com	Cycling/Aviary/Mayor's Charity Shop
19.1.09	02	Paul Taylor Paul.polly@btinternet.com	Mayor's Charity Shop
14.1.09	03	B J Hunter 4 Front Street Westgate in Weardale DL13 1JN	Mayor's Charity Shop
14.1.09	04	ATW & MI Marsden 25 Vane Terrace Darlington DL3 7RB	Mayor's Charity Shop
15.1.09	05	Peter Corbishley 36 Langholm Cres Darlington DL3 7SX	Mayor's Charity Shop
10.1.09	06	Jean Pounder 79 Marshall Street Darlington DL3 6NW	Mayor's Charity Shop
13.1.09	07	Mary Gravenor Darlington Friends of the Earth	Mayor's Charity Shop
15.1.09	08	Volunteers of the Mayor's Charity Shop	Mayor's Charity Shop
20.1.09	09	Mr P A Taylor 63 Longholm Crescent Darlington DL3 7SX	Mayor's Charity Shop
25.01.09	10	Mark Sawyer 34 Thornbury Rise Darlington DL3 9NE	Mayor's Charity Shop
25.01.09	11	Susan Lay Flat 1, Polam House 2 Blackwell Lane Darlington DL3 8QD	Aviary – South Park
06.02.09	12	John Throw Friends of South Park	Aviary – South Park
Bulk Responses	31 nr. 425 nr. 27 nr.	PETITION STANDARD –Darlington STANDARD –Out Of Borough	MAYOR'S CHARITY SHOP
TOTAL	495		

DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL :

REPORT OF MEETING OF THE CITIZENS' BUDGET PANEL

JANUARY 2009

CONTENTS

1.0	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	3
2.0	BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION	6
	Purpose of the Consultation	6
	Purpose of Second Meeting	6
	Process of the Meeting	6
	Recruitment and Profile of Panel Members	7
3.0	INITIAL VIEWS OF PARTICIPANTS	8
	Council Tax Level	8
	Concerns re Possible Impact	9
4.0	COMMENTS ON CHARGES FOR SERVICES	11
	Pedestrian and Cyclist Training	11
	Car Parking Charges	12
	General Increase in Charges of 3%	12
5.0	EFFICIENCY SAVINGS	13
6.0	SERVICE REDUCTIONS	15
	Head of Steam	15
	Public Toilets	15
	Eastbourne Sports Centre	15
	Mayor's Charity Shop	16
	Aviary	17
7.0	SUGGESTED CHANGES TO PROPOSALS	18
8.0	OVERALL ACCEPTABILITY OF BUDGET PROPOSALS	19
	Copy of transcripts of final session – groups summaries	20

APPENDICES

- 1 Information sent to Panel Members prior to the meeting
- 2 Copy of presentation slides
- 3 Topic Guide
- 4 Profile of Panel Members

1.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1.1 The purpose of the consultation was to review with a broadly representative cross section of residents of Darlington Borough, the budgetary pressures currently or likely to be experienced in the immediate future and the likely effect upon Council Tax.

1.2 Initial responses to the proposals were that participants felt that a 3.5% increase in Council Tax would be 'generally expected' and considered to be 'acceptable' by members of the public and would not be thought 'excessive'. The increase was less than participants had been led to expect from the previous meeting, (when 4.9% had been discussed) and therefore was welcome.

1.3 **A number of participants in all groups expressed the view that they believed there is scope to increase Council Tax further in order to safeguard services.**

1.4 Although there was argument in all groups that the Council Tax increase proposed might be too low, it was noted that those residents living in higher Council Tax band properties would carry a heavier burden in respect of increased tax. Some participants held the view that those on the lowest incomes will receive support and that therefore the 'most vulnerable' are protected. However, this was not the view of all as some participants were worried about people in low incomes who fall just outside of the band where they might be supported and who would find the increases difficult to pay.

1.5 There was a perceived need for the Panel and for members of the public to hear more of the detail and reasons for where the extra money is going to enable better understanding. One group raised issues relating to the use of reserves and how this might impact upon the future as a concern about the long-term implications of the impact of the proposals.

1.6 A number of issues were raised in regard to proposals for efficiency saving and the impact upon staff. It was felt that it was essential to maintain staff training as a reducing number of staff; with others taking on additional roles and responsibilities could be counterproductive to efficiency and to the quality of services.

1.7 There was a high level of disagreement in respect of the proposals for charging for cycling and pedestrian training in schools. Firstly the revenue generated from this was thought to be minimal in the overall scheme, but more importantly because of the perceived impact on the children from less well off families who could not afford to pay this amount.

1.8 Overall participants did not object to the proposals for increased car parking charges during the discussions with this being confirmed with the majority, (17 of the 20 completing exit questionnaires), being in favour of these when responding to the exit questionnaire.

- 1.9 There were comments on the use of sports and leisure facilities with participants expressing concern about increases in costs for these as this may militate against their use at a time when children and adults are being encouraged to live healthier lifestyles.
- 1.10 Although 'efficiency savings' are a self evidently positive approach to the way in which Darlington Council considers its budget making some participants did wonder whether it is possible to continue to make such savings year on year.
- 1.11 The majority of participants, (13 of the 20 completing the exit questionnaire), were in favour of the efficiency savings to Children's Services. However participants were uneasy about these and other savings that were not explicit, especially in respect of services that affect more vulnerable members of the community such as children or vulnerable adults. The majority of participants were in favour of the efficiency savings proposals for Community Services, (15 of 20 completing the questionnaire); Chief Executive's, (13 of 20); and Corporate Services, (15 of 20).
- 1.12 A number of participants questioned why there were no efficiency savings from Highways, with the issue of street lighting rose again, (explained in the question and answer session as to why this was not a viable savings option). Better coordination of 'digging up roads' was also spoken of here.
- 1.13 Participants felt that in the longer term it would be an inefficiency to cut back on small business support during the current economic climate.
- 1.14 The majority of respondents, (18 of 20 responding to the questionnaire), were in favour of the proposals relating to the Head of Steam railway museum although there was concern that income was not lost because of the proposed closure.
- 1.15 Although some members of the Budget Panel, (4 members) were against the proposals for the closure of public conveniences 9 were in favour.
- 1.16 Proposed changes to the opening hours of the Eastbourne Sports Complex were not well received with 9 participants recording on the exit questionnaire that they were against this and only 8 being in favour. One group was particularly vocal in this respect expressing the view that the running costs of shorter opening hours may not provide savings and with serious concerns about the choice of venues. The Dolphin Centre was said to be a more expensive option than using the Eastbourne Sports which was thought to be more 'user friendly for younger people'. Therefore changes to the opening hours were much regretted in the group with the most younger members of the Budget Panel.
- 1.17 Generally, if the Mayor's Charity Shop is not making money for charities it was thought best to close it. However, some surprise was expressed that this was the case as other charity shops appear to do well.
- 1.18 Although 9 participants were in favour of the proposals for closing the aviary in South Park, 7 were against, showing a clear split in opinion. The cost of the aviary at £35k per annum was a surprise to many participants and it was suggested that the upkeep and support of the aviary could be taken over by volunteers or a voluntary group.

- 1.19 Participants noted that the Cabinet proposes the Council undertake nearly £100 million of spending on assets over the next four years, using £82 million of Government funding with the rest of the money coming from borrowing and housing income. The main areas of spending will be on schools (£29 million), housing (£33 million), transport (£12 million) and economic development (£22 million). Participants felt that they should have been given further information on these as part of the Budget Consultation and thus have been able to discuss them.
- 1.20 When participants considered what changes they would wish to suggest to the proposals two key issues were mentioned in all groups. These related to the Cycle and Pedestrian training and to Eastbourne Sports Centre.
- 1.21 There was general contentment in the group in respect of the reasonableness of the proposals for a 3.5% increase in Council Tax. Only two members of the Panel considered the proposals unreasonable, one of whom was seeking a higher level of tax in order to maintain or increase services.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Consultation

- 2.1 The first meeting of the Budget Panel was held in November 2008 and the purpose of that consultation was to review with a broadly representative cross section of residents of Darlington Borough, the budgetary pressures currently or likely to be experienced in the immediate future and the likely effect upon Council Tax. Participants discussed and commented upon options put forward by Officers of the Council. The findings from that meeting are the subject of a previous report and were reported to Cabinet prior to Cabinet making proposals in January 2009.
- 2.2 A second meeting of the Budget Panel was held on 17th January. This meeting was held in the context of the Cabinet having considered the results from this and other consultations about the Budget and making proposals at its meeting on 14th January. These proposals were made in the context of the overall vision of the Council, the challenges it faces and the financial constraints under which the Council is working. These proposals are subject to a further period of consultation until 17th February when a report from the consultation will be considered prior to Cabinet making its final proposals to the full Council.

Purpose of the Second Meeting of the Budget Panel

- 2.3 The purpose of the second meeting of the Budget Panel was therefore twofold:
- To inform the panel of the Cabinet proposals, the consultation processes currently being undertaken and the role of the budget panel in this consultation
 - To review with the panel, as informed members of the public, the impact of the detail of the proposals on individuals to ensure that the consequences have been explored as thoroughly as possible
 - To receive feedback on the overall acceptability, or otherwise, of the package of proposals contained in the budget

Process of the Meeting

- 2.4 The process for the Budget Panel second phase of consultation was in several parts.

Prior to the Meeting

- 2.5 Prior to the meeting participants received a broad agenda, copy of the summary of the report from their previous meeting and information provided by Officers of the Council. This information is attached as Appendix 1.

Plenary Session 1 - Presentations

- 2.6 The meeting commenced with a presentation of Cabinet proposals including:
- Context of the proposals (i.e. Vision and current challenges for the Council and for residents, and overall effect of the proposed 3.5% increase in Council Tax)
 - What will stay the same and what changes?
 - What do the proposals mean – current understanding of the impact of the proposals
 - How the proposals have been influenced by the consultation
 - What else has influenced the Cabinet's thinking

Copy of the presentation is attached as Appendix 2.

Syndicate Group Discussions

- 2.7 Following the presentations the Panel split into three facilitated workshops. The purpose of Syndicate Group 1 was to review with Panel Members:
- Comments or initial thoughts they would like to make about the detail of the proposals they have heard
 - Any additional issues they feel should have been considered
 - Any questions they feel they need to ask prior to the final session on their opinion

2.8 During a break for coffee questions raised by Panel Members in the first session were responded to by Officers. The second syndicate group session concentrated on the extent of the acceptability of the overall proposals and what, if anything, they would prefer that the Cabinet change (and why) prior to Cabinet making their final recommendations to Council.

Final Plenary Session

- 2.9 The final session fed back final comments on the proposals from the groups. Panel members also completed individual exit questionnaires. In total 20 of the 23 participants complete questionnaires. The topic guide for the sessions is attached as Appendix 3.

Recruitment and Profile of Panel Members

- 2.10 Panel members were recruited from members of the public who had previously completed Community Survey questionnaires and had expressed an interest in taking part in further consultation on behalf of Darlington Borough Council. Approximately half of all participants had previously taken part in consultation and half had not. Detail of the profile of Panel Members is shown at Appendix 4

3.0 INITIAL VIEWS OF PARTICIPANTS

- 3.1 Participants were asked to give their initial views following the presentation and receipt of information sent out prior to the meeting. The information they were given relating to the Cabinet's Proposals was as follows in respect of background and proposed level of Council Tax:**

There is a gap of £5.7 million between the estimated cost of providing the services that the Council currently delivers, and the money available to pay for them. The money available includes a proposed increase of 3.5% in Council Tax. At the last meeting, in November, the Panel discussed a possible 4.9% increase. A variety of views were expressed. Cabinet has considered the general economic climate and now propose a lower increase to help residents meet their individual financial challenges.

The reasons for the gap are: -

- *The effects of the credit crunch and the economic downturn*
- *Increased demand for services*
- *Above-inflation increases in energy and some other costs*
- *Reduced income from parking and other services*
- *Reduced income from investments and sales of land*
- *Reductions in some external grants*

The Council's Cabinet proposes to close the gap by: -

- *Making saving of £4.9 million each year by improving efficiency*
- *Reducing some services, saving £400,000 each year*
- *Increasing charges for some services, raising £200,000 each year*
- *Using cash balances to bridge the remaining gap*

*Cabinet has proposed a budget for 2009-10 of £260 million: **The main points of Cabinet's proposals are: -***

Council Tax

- *3.5% increase*
- *This would keep Darlington's Council Tax amongst the lowest in the North East.*
- *For 95% of households, the proposed increase is less than £1 per week*
- *For band A council taxpayers, the proposed increase is 50p per week.*

Council Tax Level

3.2 Participants felt that a 3.5% increase in Council Tax would be 'generally expected' and considered to be 'acceptable' by members of the public and would not be thought 'excessive'. The increase was less than participants had been led to expect from the previous meeting, (when 4.9% had been discussed) and therefore was welcome.

3.3 A number of participants in all groups expressed the view that they believed there is scope to increase Council Tax further in order to safeguard services. Participants commented that during the previous consultation the majority of Panel members had opted for maintaining services rather than keeping Council Tax low and that an increase of over 3.5% would have been acceptable to them if the increased revenue had been used to improve services.

'Council tax should reflect general rising costs'.

3.4 However a contrary view was also expressed during the discussions in one group, that raising taxes would reduce the inclination of the Council to seek efficiency savings and in another that the Council needs to ensure 'good housekeeping as residents have to

deal not only with council tax increases but with bills for utilities. In addition savings are impacted upon in the current economic climate and the Council should take cognisance of the effect of this on pensions.

Any Concerns about Possible Impact?

- 3.5 Although there was argument in all groups that the Council Tax increase proposed might be too low, it was noted that those residents living in higher Council Tax band properties would carry a heavier burden in respect of increased tax without receiving any better service. The difference in the level of tax between the bands was said to be substantial. One group even wondered whether increases for those in higher band properties could be 'capped', (i.e. a differential rate set for those who would pay the highest level of Council Tax).
- 3.6 Some participants held the view that those on the lowest incomes will receive support and that therefore the 'most vulnerable' are protected. However, this was not the view of all as some participants were worried about people in low incomes who fall just outside of the band where they might be supported and who would find the increases difficult to pay. There is, it was thought, a possible need for a benefits awareness campaign.
- 3.7 Whilst the initial views of participants were 'favourable' in respect of the proposed level of Council Tax some concerns were expressed that without further detail it was difficult to be assured that the impact of what is to be affected would be minimal. It was suggested in one group that should support for key valued services be reduced (examples included support for bus services), then the preference would be for Council Tax to be marginally increased, (say to 4% instead of 3.5%). It was recognised that this may receive an adverse reaction from other members of the public but it was thought that an adverse reaction was inevitable when Council Tax increases are published, whatever the level.

'People will be up in arms if the increase were only 1p'.

- 3.8 There was a perceived need for the Panel and for members of the public to hear more of the detail and reasons for where the extra money is going to enable better understanding.

'Would be able to see what it is about and better understand – if people see the reason would not mind as much paying more'.

- 3.9 Some of the information produced for the Budget Panel gave 'bullet points' setting out the detail of the changes. It was suggested that it would have been helpful if all information had been produced in this manner. An example here included the proposed increase in charges for services.
- 3.10 One group also raised issues relating to the use of reserves and how this might impact upon the future as a concern about the long-term implications of the impact of the proposals.

- 3.11 A number of issues were raised in regard to efficiency saving and the impact upon staff. It was felt that it was essential to maintain staff training as a reducing number of staff; with others taking on additional roles and responsibilities could be counterproductive to efficiency and to the quality of services. In one group it was suggested that participants would be prepared to pay additional Council Tax, (say of 1p per week), to avoid staff cuts. Participants also asked whether it is possible to make efficiency savings related to administration rather than for 'front line' jobs.

4.0 COMMENTS ON CHARGES FOR SERVICES

4.1 Information given to participants relating to charges for services in the proposals was as follows:

Charges for Services

- Car Park charges – increase from 80p to £1 per hour for short stay parking, but retaining the ‘3 hours for the price of 2’ offer. This would be the first increase since 2001.
- A new charge for cycle and pedestrian training in schools
- Other charges increasing by an average of approximately 3%, generally in line with increases in costs.

Pedestrian and Cyclist Training

4.2 There was a high level of disagreement in respect of the proposals for charging for cycling and pedestrian training in schools. Firstly the revenue generated from this was thought to be minimal in the overall scheme, but more importantly because of the perceived impact on the children from less well off families who could not afford to pay this amount.

‘Any charges would affect children from poorer backgrounds, essentially excluding them from a service which could increase their safety on roads’.

‘Good idea to have but concerned that disadvantaged families may not pay for it or be able to pay for it’.

‘Voluntary aspect means if they choose not to pay it’s the children losing out’.

4.3 It was suggested that subject to CRB checks volunteers or voluntary organisations might be able to support or provide this service. Alternatives to charging included developing partnerships with local cycling shops, (with the potential of the shops recovering costs because children become interested in cycling and therefore buy bikes from them); involving members of the armed forces to provide training or providing subsidies for children from families who cannot afford to pay.

4.4 A suggestion that the costs might be reduced if children brought their own bicycles for the training did not prove popular as it was thought that this might disbar those who did not currently have a bike and could introduce an element of ‘competition’ as to who owned the ‘best bike’.

4.5 Less than half of those completing the exit questionnaire supported this proposal, (9 participants), with 7 participants being against this. Further comments included on the questionnaire on this subject included that the charges would be ‘counterproductive’ in that cycling should be encouraged as a ‘green’ form of transport and the charges would introduce a barrier to taking this up. The costs may also prove to be a barrier to take up of the service thus reducing any income and consequently become dangerous for children no longer receiving the training.

Car Parking Charges

- 4.6 Overall participants did not object to the proposals for increased car parking charges during the discussions with this being confirmed with the majority, (17 of the 20 completing questionnaires), being in favour of these when responding to the exit questionnaire. Only two members of the Budget Panel said that they were against these proposals.
- 4.7 Although a number of participants felt that there should be additional charges for Sunday parking as suggested in the previous budget panel meeting, (£1 per day), the reasons for being against the proposals were concerns about town centre trade.

'We need to support local businesses during the economic down turn'

'Any increase will affect town centre trade which is already in decline on Sundays'

- 4.8 It was further suggested car parking away from the town centre should cost less than that in the town centre itself.

General Increase in Charges of 3%

- 4.9 Whilst the proposals for a general increase in costs of 3% was generally supported, (14 participants in favour and only 3 against, with 3 participants being neither for nor against), comments earlier on the requirement for more detailed information pertained here.
- 4.10 There were comments on the use of sports and leisure facilities with participants expressing concern about increases in costs for these as this may militate against their use at a time when children and adults are being encouraged to live healthier lifestyles.

'Not increased charges for leisure centres. We are as a nation trying to encourage children and adults to be healthier'.

'Consideration should be made to youngsters using the Dolphin Centre to keep fit'.

'At the moment the Dolphin Centre charges are staggered amounts depending on the way you use the facilities, discriminating against those who can only use them at weekends. If the charges were fair and even all week this increase is acceptable'.

- 4.11 As can be understood from the above comments, some participants felt that the differential charges at different times of the day/days of the week preclude the use of the Dolphin Leisure Centre, (and potentially Eastbourne Road Centre). The acceptability of the proposals for a 3% increase to charges was therefore dependent upon making changes to address what was seen to be inequitable treatment of those people only able to attend at weekends.

5.0 EFFICIENCY SAVINGS

5.1 Information given on efficiency savings was as follows:

Efficiency Savings

Saving up to £4.9million each year by improving efficiency: -

- *Children's Services £1.7 million*
- *Community Services £1.3 million*
- *Chief Executive's £1.3 million*
- *Corporate Services £0.6 million*

*Efficiency savings will be made by restructuring and removing some posts, improving procedures for buying goods and services and making better use of funding such as Government grants. Further information about the proposed efficiency savings is **attached**. The Council is rated as 4 out of 4 for value for money, so has a good track record, but there is probably less scope for further improvement than most councils, so this will be challenging.*

- 5.2 Although 'efficiency savings' are a self evidently positive approach to the way in which Darlington Council considers its budget making some participants did wonder whether it is possible to continue to make such savings year on year.

'Every year the term 'more efficient' crops up in budget leaflets – surely the Council must have achieved those aims by now?'

- 5.3 The majority of participants, (13 of the 20 completing the questionnaire), were in favour of the efficiency savings to Children's Services. However participants were uneasy about these and other savings that were not explicit, especially in respect of services that affect more vulnerable members of the community such as children or vulnerable adults.

'Would like more information on what is included in 'Children's Services' – more clarity required to enable a judgment to be made'.

'Not comfortable with Children's Services being savings'.

'Would like more information on 'Care Services' before making any comments'.

- 5.4 The majority of participants were in favour of the efficiency savings proposals for Community Services, (15 of 20 completing the questionnaire); Chief Executive's, (13 of 20); and Corporate Services, (15 of 20). The only comment made on the questionnaires relating to this queried why such saving had not previously been made: this in contrast to the comments previously quoted suggesting that efficiency measures may have been exhausted.

- 5.5 Other measures suggested by participants included encouraging Library Services staff to make savings or deliver additional services to generate funds. In order to encourage the entrepreneurialism of staff such savings/additional funds could be kept within the individual libraries to fund further services. In a similar vein it was asked whether the Council could market and sell services at which they excel, for example community services, in order to generate revenue. As in the previous session of the Budget Panel

comments were made about the perceived under-use of buildings and the potential opportunities that might exist in letting out Council owned buildings to local business.

- 5.6 A number of participants questioned why there were no efficiency savings from Highways, with the issue of street lighting raised again, (explained in the question and answer session as to why this was not a viable savings option). Better coordination of 'digging up roads' was also spoken of here.
- 5.7 Participants felt that in the longer term it would be an inefficiency to cut back on small business support during the current economic climate.

6.0 SERVICE REDUCTIONS

6.1 Participants were given the following information relating to service reductions:

Changes to Services

Saving £400,000 each year by some changes in services -

- *Reduced opening times of -*
 - *The Head of Steam railway museum, not opening in mid-week during the winter, and*
 - *Eastbourne Sports Complex, not opening to the public between 9 am and 3.30 pm Monday to Friday (the centre will be available to schools during these times and public facilities are available at the Dolphin Centre*
- *Closing –*
 - *The aviary in South Park,*
 - *Public conveniences in Cockerton, Heighington and Middleton-One-Row, and*
 - *The Mayor’s Charity Shop*
- *Changing priorities of the Economic Regeneration and Transport Policy teams*

The proposals would remove approximately 60 posts. Around 35 of these are currently filled.

Head of Steam

6.2 The majority of respondents, (18 of 20 responding to the questionnaire), were in favour of the proposals relating to the Head of Steam railway museum although there was concern that income was not lost because of the proposed closure.

‘As long as income is not lost’

‘Focussed on quiet periods when public footfall is reduced. The facility needs to remain accessible when the public need it’.

‘Part of historic heritage – try marketing harder and further afield’.

6.3 Other participants tended to be against the proposals on the grounds that the museum reflected the heritage of the town and that further marketing to a wider area may generate more interest.

Public Toilets

6.4 Although some members of the Budget Panel, (4 members) were against the proposals for the closure of public conveniences 9 were in favour.

Eastbourne Sports Centre

6.5 Proposed changes to the opening hours of the Eastbourne Sports Complex were not well received with 9 participants recording on the exit questionnaire that they were against this and only 8 being in favour.

- 6.6 One group was particularly vocal in this respect expressing the view that the running costs of shorter opening hours may not provide savings and with serious concerns about the choice of venues. The Dolphin Centre was said to be a more expensive option than using the Eastbourne Sports which was said to be more 'user friendly for younger people'. Therefore changes to the opening hours were much regretted in the group with the most younger members of the Budget Panel.
- 6.7 A further comment made on this matter was that residents of Eastbourne were less affluent than other areas of the town and therefore could neither afford to travel to the alternative facility at the Dolphin Centre nor the increased charging applied at that venue.

'Eastbourne Sports complex – more user friendly for teenagers and cheaper – easier to get to – don't have to trek to Dolphin Centre'.

'Eastbourne is a deprived area so asking people to opt for a more expensive one and reducing hours – not good'.

'This will impact heavily on low-income families living in this area – Dolphin Centre is more expensive and a distance away'.

- 6.8 It was therefore suggested that concessions should be introduced for younger people and other incentives offered such as 'buddies' rates, (one person pays full rate and the second person in the party pays half of the full rate). Another suggestion was that of offering incentives such as 10 uses in one month entitles the user to free usage for say 5 sessions in the next month.

'Buddies rate – one person take another 2nd person cheaper – buy one get one free – if invest in health save on NHS bill later'.

'Something that encourages more use by 10pcm at costs then get 5 free swims next month'.

Mayor's Charity Shop

- 6.9 Generally, if the Mayor's Charity Shop is not making money for charities it was thought best to close it. However, some surprise was expressed that this was the case as other charity shops appear to do well.

'If other charity shops survive why can't this one?'

- 6.10 It was suggested that the Mayor's Charity shop could be updated, in a more accessible place and better presented and marketed. If this occurred then it would perhaps 'pay for itself'.

'If it was updated and less smelly would be more popular'

'This shop always looks dismal, uninviting and lacks imagination. Window displays always appalling'.

Aviary

- 6.11 Although 9 participants were in favour of the proposals for closing the aviary in South Park, 7 were against, showing a clear split in opinion. In one group it was noted that it can sometimes be difficult to encourage their children to go out and that the visit to the aviary is often the only incentive that the children respond to, this making this a valued asset for those with young children.

'Much pleasure is gained by children visiting the aviary and feeding the birds and it is assumed that the running costs are minimal '.

'Once it has gone will it ever come back. It's a reason to go to South Park'.

- 6.12 The cost of the aviary at £35k per annum was a surprise to many participants and it was suggested that the upkeep and support of the aviary could be taken over by volunteers or a voluntary group.
- 6.13 The length of time the aviary has been associated with South Park was noted as well as the concern that the actual cost saving may be little in comparison to the pleasure the aviary brings to visitors. Even if it proves necessary to close the aviary participants hoped that building would remain so that in times when more money is available the aviary can be used again.
- 6.14 Participants noted that the Cabinet proposes the Council undertake nearly £100 million of spending on assets over the next four years, using £82 million of Government funding with the rest of the money coming from borrowing and housing income. The main areas of spending will be on schools (£29 million), housing (£33 million), transport (£12 million) and economic development (£22 million). However, participants felt that they should have been given further information on these as part of the Budget Consultation and thus have been able to discuss them.
- 6.15 No one was against 'changing priorities of policy teams' with 13 participants saying that they were in favour of these although again information had not been available for participants to debate these.**

7.0 SUGGESTED CHANGES TO PROPOSALS

- 7.1 When participants considered what changes they would wish to suggest to the proposals two key issues were mentioned in all groups. These related to the Cycle and Pedestrian training and to Eastbourne Sports Centre.
- 7.2 Changes to the opening hours and reducing access to sports facilities was thought to be contradictory to the vision of improving health and staying healthy. Whilst it was recognised by some participants that if usage is low then this is an issue and needs to be addressed. However, support for reducing opening hours was low and the preference of many panel members was for attracting more use of the centre rather than restricting access.

'Eastbourne complex needs more marketing to increase usage rather than cutting back hours and closure.'

- 7.3 Younger members of the panel, some of whom were regular and frequent users of sports and leisure facilities, suggested that the costs of accessing these facilities was already too high, (especially the Dolphin Centre), and was reducing their usage.
- 7.4 The second aspect of the proposals where the majority of participants did not support the suggestions was in respect of pedestrian and cycling training for children. A number of participants professed that they were 'shocked' at the level of the possible charges and were concerned about the implications of introducing them. Alternatives were suggested as noted in the report to charging at a level that it was felt neither parents nor the schools could afford.

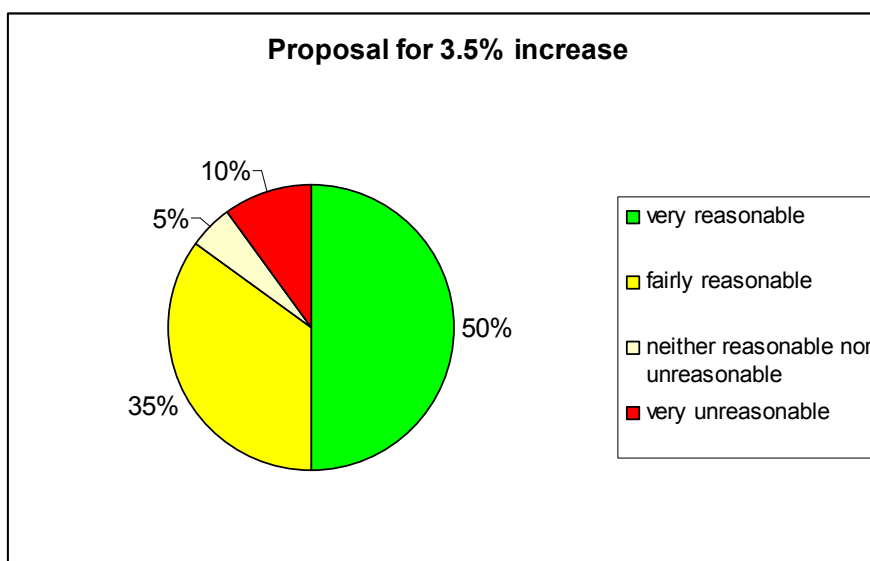
'This will hit families on low incomes and could end up being subsidised by wealthier families.'

'Shocked at the £45 cost per child cycling proficiency. Need to look at alternatives – volunteers/teachers trained to do it, parents could help as always good turn out with sports.'

- 7.5 Other issues where a substantial minority of participants would like to see changed in the proposals related to parking, with a charge for Sunday parking being introduced and low or no cost short term parking, (say 20 to 30 minutes). Again the issues relating to the closure of the aviary, with participants not wishing to see this occur, and retaining some of the public conveniences proposed for closure.

8.0 OVERALL ACCEPTABILITY OF BUDGET PROPOSALS

- 8.1 There was general contentment in the group in respect of the reasonableness of the proposals for a 3.5% increase in Council Tax. Only two members of the Panel considered the proposals unreasonable, one of whom was seeking a higher level of tax in order to maintain or increase services.



- 8.2 Overall, the proposed increase was considered to be the *'best in the current circumstances'* with the Cabinet being praised for making a *'genuine attempt to look at everything considering the economic climate'*.

- 8.3 Participants again pointed out that they felt:
'there seemed to be some clashes within their strategies i.e. health and fitness'
and that they were concerned that consistent effort towards regeneration and attracting new business was required in order to assure the future of the town economically.

'Seem to be wanting to save money NOW instead of the future - the regeneration one seemed negative, should focus on getting new business especially those doing well – as in the future there may be a gap. If we don't compete to attract new business here may pay the price in the near future and these same businesses will be looking to locate elsewhere in the UK'.

- 8.4 Nevertheless given the concerns about such issues and the perceived need for additional information, (especially about capital schemes), participants were generally supportive of the proposals and felt that the response was a reasonable approach to difficult circumstances. Key parts of the transcript of the final session by group are shown overleaf.

PLENARY SESSIONS SUMMARIES

RED GROUP

"The general view of the Red Group was that it is a reasonably acceptable budget. I think the major area of significant disagreement was on the cycling and pedestrian

training charges – the £45 for cycling we suspect would not be taken up by a lot of people and therefore that would kill it. That was the overall view.

Another particular concern from one specific member was about the reduction from 4.9% to 3.5% on the basis of expected savings, particularly if those savings were not achieved when you would lead yourself into problems for future years with capping. Clearly, not knowing much about the mechanisms of capping and the like, superficially we suspected there might be a problem.

Overall we thought we lacked a lot of detail so it was very hard to make a number of comments till you filled in some of that detail. If we actually had more detail in advance, it would help us a lot, and one specific area of £200M budget, you also then mentioned £100M capital budget on top of that, about which we had zero detailed discussion whatsoever. OK £18M contribution from Darlington, there is still the rest of the £82M out of our general taxes – should we not actually be consulted on some of what are obviously big schemes there.

Another specific point about the bus station, if you don't actually see that you are going to get any more revenue, why waste money on making it into a car park?"

BLUE GROUP

"Changes to the proposals – first of all, shocked at the £45 cost per head for cycling – who on earth is in charge of tendering? That is an outrageous amount – per child – I wouldn't pay that. I would love to know where that figure has come from. We need to look at alternative ways, perhaps using volunteers or teachers – I would happily give up some of my Saturdays to teach the children and there are other people in the room who would do the same. There will be parents who would do that – think how many parents give up Saturdays for football; sports always attracts. There as a suggestion that £45 cost was perhaps because the organisers had to bring along bikes – get the kids to bring their own bike in and if they don't have a bike they don't need the teaching – bit harsh, but that is what we thought. That needs to be addressed. That is too expensive

Keep the Council tax at 4.9%. We thought the reduction down to 3.5% - that is an extra 30 pence a week and is it really going to make that much difference? Is it going to be that painful, particularly if that amount of money was ploughed back in again to something good. For example, the closure of Eastbourne Sports Complex – brilliant having young people on the team – what we didn't realise is that Eastbourne provides full athletics equipment, is the only one with a full size running track and the only one with Astroturf, and it has different facilities to the Dolphin Centre and during the day it is sometimes the only time that the further education kids can use it. So we know schools still have access during the day, and adults won't, but for further education, can you please leave it open to those groups. Use the Dolphin Centre instead, as was pointed out – Eastbourne, deprived area, lower incomes, by the time the kids have paid for the bus and paid £3 or whatever for a swim that is a lot of money. This all seems to be flying in the face of healthy nation that we should be pushing for with the idea of exercise – why is that the bit that suffers, so keep Council tax higher and support more exercise and leisure facilities. A way round that, we thought that if they are paying for two swims at the Dolphin centre, give them the third for free and if they get 10 swims, get a stamp for each and get another 5 for free, so you are still getting the footfall but encouraging this healthy nation idea by getting them to go more frequently and you are not going to suffer from income. Consider the bigger picture about long term health benefits – we have covered that, and the idea of it being a clash of us trying to be the healthy nation

The final point was we don't want to see the aviary closed. Is it possible to stick in a booklet to say, we need voluntary donations as we are about to shut it? You might get a few pounds - £300-400 – that is a bit. Could you do some sort of charity work, why not? RSPB might get involved. You might get a private person or organisation or even volunteers that would put aside a weekend to put a lick of paint on it and make it look nice. We all live in Darlington and all want to improve it. If the money won't go far, utilise the volunteers

Overall as a group we were quite satisfied, we thought it was quite a good proposal. We think that genuinely the Council have tried to look at everything and attempt to come up with good proposals, so yes, overall good. We do see some clashes, we have covered that and we want some money now –

This was regeneration – we thought that pulling money back from regeneration seems quite negative – this is just the time when we should be attracting new businesses into Darlington – we appreciate the current climate and cutbacks but there are some sectors of industry that are thriving at the moment and we think perhaps they should be targeted and try to bring those into Darlington. There are perhaps people who are looking to close offices in London and bring them up here. Newcastle – why go there? It has got an airport, train station, motorway links, well so has Darlington, so why not come here?"

GREEN GROUP

"Largely the proposals are acceptable – we used words like inevitable rather than acceptable, I think more than anything. We felt that we were debating the finer detail of what was a necessary reduction in spending basically. In terms of detail of what we would like changed in the proposal, I think there is a consensus among the groups that £45 a head for cycling proficiency isn't just prohibitive to the people with low incomes, which we were saying initially in the group, £45 a head per child is prohibitive for the majority of households. I would be something that you really need to think about, and we were quite concerned about that.

We talked about car parking for a pound on a Sunday. Although we have already discussed this and have given reasons – traders might not like this but we felt that this was acceptable, in our group, and it would bring in significant revenue, so we would ask that that was looked at again. We also thought there should be a minimum short stay car park charge of 20 pence for half an hour. If you are just nipping into town to grab something from the shop you might say, I am not going to pay the all day charge, and go and park illegally. We thought it would be better to have a small charge for a very short stay to stop people parking illegally.

One thing that was a big concern was this constant talk of efficiency measures. Although you can't be against efficiency it sort of worried us that year on year we talk about finding so much money saved from efficiencies – well, why does it have to be budget time to look at efficiency? Surely efficiencies is something that should be done as a matter of course and not when it comes round to the budget. If you can find that money from efficiencies then what were you doing last year basically, was the worry.

We also talked a bit about Eastbourne Sports Centre. Presumably shutting it between the hours of 9.00-3.30 meant it wasn't being used, so you can't disagree with closing it during that time, but the worry in our group was that might be a slippery slope to a full on closure and we felt that maybe, OK, shut it during those times, that is fine, but look at marketing it – really push it to the people in the area. Don't just let it slide down the hill into closure. Really try and have the closure between 9 and half 3 as a base line and

then work up to re-opening it during those hours, because there is a need to re-open it, because you are marketing it.

The Mayor's charity shop, the people in my group were of the view was that it would presumably pay for itself, and also that it was quite a nice thing to have and it might be somewhere we would be willing to spend a bit of money. Hopefully it would create some money in itself, being a shop.

There was a general view that, OK there are these closures, the aviary, the toilets, it feels a little bit like selling off the family silver for a short term gain. Once you close these things, in the budget next year we won't be saying – and we are re-opening the toilets in Milton ... once these things are gone, they have gone. Don't just do it for a short term benefit, think about the long term. There is no reversal for these things.

The cycling proficiency, I know one of the groups said maybe the charge is because the providers bring bikes – we did discuss in our group bringing your own bike but there was a worry that the richer children are going to bring along a £500 racer and the poorer children, who probably need cycling proficiency, are going to arrive with a bike that is buckled and knackered and no good for anything, so we were worried that might be prohibitive if bikes weren't provided by the people providing the training. That might be one to think about”.