
LEADER'S OVERVIEW

Cabinet

1. I have chaired two meetings of Cabinet since my last report to Council at which a number of issues were considered including a revised Corporate Equalities Review and Plan Document.

We also welcomed news of the successful outcome of two bids made to the Department for Education and Skills for Targeted Capital Funding which will see an investment, over three years, of £14.541 m. in Hummersknott School and Language College to allow large areas of the school to be demolished and replaced with the remainder being significantly refurbished; and £10.128 m. in Carmel RC Technology College to redevelop the buildings and create modern learning facilities. This brings the total investment in schools since 2001 to over £76.5m.

South Park

2. The £3.9 m Heritage Lottery grant that the Council has been awarded is helping to update many areas of the South Park while retaining much of its Victorian splendour. A lot of work has already taken place to improve the park for everyone to enjoy including improvements to the tennis, basketball, and five-a-side courts. The bowling greens have also been given a new lease of life; the lake has been drained, improved and refilled; a new boardwalk has been constructed to make it easier for people to feed the ducks; and the park's famous Victorian bandstand has been removed for restoration. A number of new attractions are also planned including a café, education centre, sensory garden and rose garden.

The project has been given support by 'The Friends of South Park' who have helped with the refurbishment and will continue to work on promoting and preserving the area. Regular updates on the work are posted on the Council's website but the best way to see what has been done is to visit the park for yourself.

Car Park Crime

3. Car park crime in Darlington has fallen to a record low with just two incidents in Council-run car parks in the first six months of the year. These figures prove what a difference Closed Circuit Television can make to crime levels.

CCTV cameras were first introduced in Darlington in 1994 at a cost of £750,000. Since then the system has grown providing 24-hour coverage that is relayed to the Council central control room. There are now more than 100 hi-tech cameras in various locations around the town and more than £1.5 m has been invested in the scheme. Partnerships have been formed

with other organisations such as GNER to extend the coverage even further.

Examination Results

4. Students in the Borough achieved the best A-Level performance in the country and pupils who took their GCSE's at Carmel RC Technology College received the best ever results in the town with 91 per cent of students at the school gaining at least five GCSE's at grade A* to C. Most of the other schools in the Borough saw an improvement in their GCSE results with Hummersknott School and Language College seeing a ten per cent rise in achievement since last year. The Borough's overall performance in GCSE's was the best in the Tees Valley and the rate of improvement of the town's young people was above the national average with 56 percent achieving five A* - C grades.

Durham Tees Valley Airport Board Meeting

5. I attended the Board meeting at the Durham Tees Valley Airport on Friday, 30th September, 2005.

'Grot Spot' Initiative

6. I was interviewed by Tyne Tees Television in respect of the 'Grot Spot' Initiative. During the 100 day campaign a total of 500 calls were made to the 'Grot Spot' hot line. As a result of the calls the team cleared 30 tonnes of rubbish from streets, back lanes and open spaces, dealt with more than 100 incidents of fly tipping and carried out 300 litter picks across the Borough. The team also removed graffiti at 25 sites in Darlington and removed litter from becks and rivers at twelve locations in the Borough.

Tees Valley Leaders/Chief Executives Meetings

7. I attended two meetings of the Tees Valley Leaders/Chief Executives meetings held on 5th October and 16th November, 2005.

Harrowgate Hill School

8. I attended the official opening, by Alan Milburn M.P., of the new state-of-the-art £5.5m Harrowgate Hill School on Friday, 7th October, 2005. The school has all the latest educational facilities and is designed to be environmentally-friendly. The school, which has taken just over a year to build, is part of a £35m private finance initiative that includes the country's first Education Village being built in Haughton.

Argos Distribution Depot

9. I attended the official opening, by the Prime Minister, of the new Argos Distribution Depot on Friday, 4th November, 2005.

This development, which has created 700 jobs, was undertaken in record time – just over a year from initial contact with the Council, to the opening for business.

Regional Policing

10. I met, together with the Deputy Leader and the Chief Executive, Chief Constable Garvin of Durham Constabulary and Mrs. A Wright the Chair of the Police Authority to discuss proposed changes to how Police forces are organised. We took the opportunity to stress that any re-organisation should incorporate a police division co-terminus with our boundaries.

Darlington Partnership Board

11. I attended the meeting of the Darlington Partnership Board held on Wednesday, 9th November, 2005 at which update reports were presented on the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy Performance and the Community Strategy Action Plan, a presentation on the Northern Way and reports on the Development of a Children's Trust for Darlington and the proposal for an Academy for Darlington.

John Williams
Leader