
OVERVIEW OF LEISURE PORTFOLIO

Purpose of Report

1. During the last eight-week cycle the following were the main areas of work under my Leisure Portfolio.

Eastbourne Sports Complex

2. The refurbishment of Pulse Suite 3 has now been completed. This has included the provision of state of the art techno gym fitness equipment, plasma screens, Sky TV, creative lighting, new floor coverings and a full redecoration providing a contemporary workout environment.
3. The reception and circulation areas have also been transformed to give the Complex a modern, family friendly atmosphere. Alan Milburn, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Member of Parliament for Darlington conducted the unveiling of a commemorative plaque to reopen the site on 17 December 2004. A charity event was also held on the day and staff from the Complex, Sports Development Team, Primary Care Trust and Young Sports winners all took part in running the equivalent of a marathon on the new treadmills and £1000 was raised and donated to the British Heart Foundation. Public response to the refurbishment has already been very positive and has been reflected in use of Pulse 3.
4. The New Year will also see a brand new junior league introduced at Eastbourne Sports Complex using the all weather surface. More than ten football teams from around Darlington have already committed to the league.

Dolphin Centre

5. The Centre's Christmas party nights were extremely successful with more than 1400 guests attending over three days. Feedback from customers regarding the quality of the catering and overall experience has been excellent.

Stressholme

6. The drainage of the pond area adjacent to the 11th tee has now been successfully completed to prevent this area from flooding in future. This will minimise closure of the holes surrounding this area and improve course presentation.

Sports Development

7. The grand final presentation of Darlington Sports Winners 2004 occurred in December 2004 following nominations throughout the year from Darlington residents. This event was attended by the winners of each monthly ceremony and presentations were made for the Young Sports Achievers Award, Team/Club Award and Service to Sport Award. The Darlington Sports Winners Scheme is run by a voluntary committee and is supported by the Leisure and Arts Sports Development Team.

Pantomime Exceeds Expectations

8. This year's pantomime, Peter Pan, has exceeded box office expectations by £90,000. The pantomime continues until Sunday 23 January 2005. Current figures for sales and reservations are £630,000. The cast and staff at the Civic Theatre are currently planning to stage an extra performance in aid of the Asian Tsunami Disaster.
9. Next year's pantomime sales are also at a high. Beauty and the Beast tickets went on sale in December as Peter Pan opened, the sales currently stand at just under £100,000.

New Year – New Season

10. The new Civic Theatre and Arts Centre programme for Spring has been launched. The season boasts a number of high profile west end shows, including RCs Sheriff's Journeys End, which opens the season on 31 January. The Arts Centre also hosts a number of key shows, including return visits from Mind the Gap Theatre Company and Theatre Sans Frontieres.

Northern Sinfonia

11. Northern Sinfonia continues their popular programme from the Dolphin Centre on 17 February. The new season is for the first time presented and promoted by Darlington Borough Council. This performance is the second in a series of four, which began in November. Over 200 people attended the opening performance. This is a particularly exciting time for Northern Sinfonia, as they have just moved into their new home in the Sage building in Gateshead on the bank of the River Tyne. These concerts are an excellent opportunity for the people of Darlington to see this acclaimed orchestra in their own town.

Youth Participation

12. Two young people, Sarah Bell and Jenna Newman, of Darlington Youth Service, who represent the North East on UK Youth National Member Group have recently been voted on as Secretary & Vice Secretary of the group. Jenna has also been elected by the Members Group to represent them at British Youth Council meetings.

South Park

13. The majority of the work included within Phase 1 is now complete, with the only exception being installation of the east entrance gates which will now be completed as part of Phase 2. Work on Phase 2 is now well under way, with work taking place on the Park Lodge and Café, Bandstand, Terracotta Fountain, Fothergill Drinking Fountain, toilet block and garden areas. The lake has been drained and silt removed and work is now ongoing to excavate the foundations for the perimeter walls.
14. The revised proposals for the Skateboard Area has now been drawn up and presented to the potential skateboard users on 8 December 2004. It was unanimously accepted by them as being significant improvement to that originally proposed. The consultants are now to submit this proposal for formal planning approval, a process that will take 6-8 weeks.
15. The new Friends Group of South Park has developed over the past few months. Three meetings and events have been held as well as a site tour. There are now nearly 90 friends, therefore, a smaller group is meeting to establish a properly Constituted Committee that will act as the body that administers the Friends.

Darlington Railway Centre & Museum

Events

16. During the first three weekends in December the Railway Museum hosted its annual Santa Specials which attracted 1,363 visitors the museum. The Museum has received many supportive comments from families who attended and enjoyed the event.

Renaissance in the Regions – Tees Valley Hub

17. A full-time Documentation Assistant has been recruited on a fixed-term contract, with all costs funded by the Renaissance in the Regions North East initiative. The worker will be involved in retrospective documentation of the collection with the aim of consolidating museum records and producing digital records for the innovative Tees Valley Museums Single Point of Access initiative, which will enable the public to access information about collections on-line.
18. The Museum has continued hosting drama interpretation through actors from the Pluto Theatre Company and Visitation.

Heritage Lottery Fund

19. The final Conservation Plan has been produced, which includes a gazetteer which recommends various works and ways forward for the development of the Museum. This will also assist with the interpretation of the site. Access and Audience Development plans for the Museum have been produced in draft form and are being analysed by museum staff prior to the production of final versions.

Collections

20. The Museum has recently acquired an early eighteenth century settee, which was originally used in the office of George Stephenson and Edward Pease. It is now situated in the exhibition area of the Museum. The object is an extremely significant addition to the collection in relation to the Stockton and Darlington Railway Company. It was kindly donated by the Great Great Great Grandson of Edward Pease, Sir Richard Thorn Pease. A silver plaque to acknowledge the gift will be made.

Education

21. During the autumn term the education department took part in Big Draw, Rocket Science, Time Trackers & Tissue of Lives, a partnership project with Beamish Museum. A grant was successfully applied for which will pay for a new interactive Brass Rubbing 'Newspaper'. This will be available from February 2005 for both school groups and family visitors.

**Councillor Lee Vasey
Cabinet Member with Leisure Portfolio**