
HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT AND DESIGN CHAMPIONS

Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Councillor John Williams, Leader

Responsible Director(s) - Paul Wildsmith, Director of Corporate Services

Purpose of Report

1. To consider the appointment of a Historic Environment and Design Champion for Darlington.

Information and Analysis

2. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published a policy statement on the Historic Environment in 2001 entitled 'A Force for Our Future', in which it was recognised the fundamental role played by local authorities in maintaining and promoting the historic environment, and encouraged local authorities to appoint a Historic Environment Champion at Member level. This approach is also advocated in the report of the Environment Scrutiny Committee Conservation Review Group elsewhere on this agenda.
3. The role of the Champion would be to ensure that the historic environment is at the heart of the Council agenda. The environment can be a catalyst for regeneration, learning, community cohesion and economic development. By acting as the focus for regeneration, the historic environment can help revitalise areas by retaining the features that make places special and by offering attractive and distinctive living and working conditions. It can also actively promote a sense of local and regional distinctiveness.
4. Heritage Accounts 2003, the annual state of the historic environment report highlighted the lack of priority and resources often being given to care of the historic environment at a local level.
5. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport published, on 28th June, 2004, the ministerial decision document 'Review of Heritage Protection : The Way Forward' which sets out a number of measures designed to update the system for heritage protection or make it fit for the purpose in the 21st century. Local authorities will have a key role to play as these measures are taken forward over the next three years, including through a number of pilot projects being set up by the English Heritage.
6. At the same time, One NorthEast, Northern Architecture (the regional architecture centre) and CABE (the Government's Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) have invited officers and members in local authorities across the North East to become a

“Design Champion” for their authority. The role will be to:

- (a) generate enthusiasm for design within their authority;
- (b) promote opportunities for design across the whole community;
- (c) endeavour to secure a corporate commitment to design in all activities which the authority has influence; and
- (d) act as a point of contact for support and information coming from outside the authority.

Design quality is now a key requirement in all One NorthEast’s project appraisals.

- 7. Both the Historic Environment and Design Champion roles fit best, at a Member level, with the role of Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Planning. The two roles are best seen together, so that good conservation is seen within its wider context of good design. At an officer level, Development and Environment Department, is currently seeking to recruit Urban Design and Conservation Officers, which would enable these roles to be supported. It is suggested that nominating officer champions is considered once these appointments have been made.

Outcome of Consultation

- 8. No formal consultation was undertaken in the preparation of this report.

Legal Implications

- 9. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council’s approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

- 10. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

- 11. The issues contained within this report require an amendment to this Council’s constitution and as such will need to be formally reported to Council.

Decision Deadline

- 12. For the purpose of the ‘call-in’ procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.

Recommendation

13. It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Planning be appointed as this Council's Champion for the Historic Environment for Design, and it be recommended to Council that his portfolio be amended accordingly.

Reasons

14. To ensure that this Council's historic environment is preserved and enhanced, and that good urban design is prompted.

Paul Wildsmith
Director of Corporate Services

Background Papers

Letter dated 10th August, 2004 from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
"Renaissance" – One NorthEast e-newsletter
CABE – "Local Authority Design Champions"
CABE – The Councillors Guide to Urban Design

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