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**OVERVIEW OF REGENERATION AND PLANNING PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work that have been undertaken under the Regeneration and Planning Portfolio :-
  - (a) **Financial Incentives to Business Review Group** – Cabinet were pleased to receive the findings of the Financial Incentives to Business Review, undertaken by Environment Scrutiny Committee, which put forward recommendations that would enable service improvements to be introduced in 2007/08, whilst recognising and responding to the conclusion of the ‘Taking Forward the Darlington Gateway’ research leading to a review of the balance between difference economic development activities.
  - (b) **Cockerton Conservation Area Character Appraisal** - We approved the finalised Cockerton Conservation Area Character Appraisal which had undergone a consultation stage from 14th August to 18th September. Cockerton is the second Conservation Areas Character Appraisal in a series of appraisals concerning the 16 conservation areas in the Borough and will provide a document to assist in the protection and management of the Cockerton Conservation Area.
  - (c) **The Source of the Denes Project** –Following successful consultation, we released capital funds of £73,000 for proposals to improve the Cocker Beck and surrounding area for a range of purposes including biodiversity and informal recreation uses. The proposals will address the various environmental problems with a phased project being assembled in co-ordination with the Environment Agency, Durham Wildlife Trust, Northumbrian Water and other interested parties that will bring about some highly beneficial changes to the area for wildlife and local residents alike.
  - (d) **Northgate Conservation Area Character Appraisal** - We approved the finalised Northgate Conservation Area Character Appraisal which had undergone a consultation stage from 3rd to 31st September, 2006. Northgate is the third Conservation Areas Character Appraisal in a series of appraisals concerning the 16 conservation areas in the Borough and will provide a document to assist in the protection and management of the Northgate Conservation Area.
  - (e) **Maidendale Nature and Fishing Reserve Phase 1 Extension** – In order to develop Maidendale Local Nature Reserve for both people and wildlife we released capital funding of £50,000 and revenue funding of £31,000. Although Maidendale Local Nature Reserve already fulfils some key aspects of the Biodiversity Action Plan for Darlington it is a duty on Local Authorities to carry out programmes of work that promote the aims of the plan. The new funding arrangements include £40,000 from County Durham Environmental Trust, £36,000 from Barratts and Haslam Homes, developers adjacent to the Nature Reserve, and finally £5,000 from the Local Area Agreement.

- (f) **Skills for Success Workforce Development Project** – The Skills for Success project is in its final quarter of delivery. Funded through the Single Programme it has run for 3 years assisting SMEs to train their workforce. The project was profiled over the three-year period to assist 425 people into training and it has exceeded its annual profiles year on year and has this month marked its 1,000 trainee to the project. Customer feedback from a recent survey has been extremely positive, highlighting the excellent work carried out by the project team and expressing regret of its closure.
- (g) **Launch of Easter Group Units at Faverdale** – The Easter Group launched their new units at Faverdale East Business Park. They have built 190,000 sq ft of speculative quality units. The Council have been working with the Easter Group on a marketing campaign to promote the site to logistics users and smaller owner-occupiers. There is considerable interest in the site and it is hoped that new occupiers will be attracted to this business park shortly.
- (h) **Resurfacing Works of Nature Reserve Paths** – As a part of the Local Area Agreement a substantial length of paths that are aimed at giving all of Darlington's people high quality access to semi natural green space across the town, are to be improved. The path network that passes through our increasing number of Local Nature Reserves (7 but aiming at a total of 10 before 2009) is highly valued by the public, allowing a whole cross section of the community to use these wild locations for healthy exercise and relaxation. The paths are predominantly of the unsealed variety which suits better the rustic nature of the reserves, and from time to time become worn away through the combined actions of weather and the passage of many feet. The £20,000 that is to be spent will repair over 2 kilometres of path at Drinkfield Marsh, The Whinnies in Middleton St George, at Geneva Woods on Neasham Lane and at Maidendale Nature reserve at Firth Moor. A further £10,000 will go to help with the first stage repair of the unsealed path that goes through the Skerne restoration area.
- (i) Also, as a part of the Local Area Agreement, the Local Nature Reserves of Darlington will be getting over 20 new artistically designed entrance signs will help to attract people increasingly to the sites. With a whole new set of leaflets about to be produced, telling people how to find Darlington's wildspaces, the entrance features will invite local people into the sites by better advertising their locations.
- (j) **Grazing at the Winnies** – a new contract has been drawn up to help manage one of our oldest Local Nature Reserves, the Whinnies at Middleton St George. By using rare breeds, in this case a sheep known as 'white faced woodland', the tendency of the site to be colonised by scrubland and trees, is prevented and the wildflowers that are the main characteristic of the site are allowed to flourish.
- (k) Work is soon to begin as part of the Darlington Eastern Transport Corridor, to establish a new Local Nature Reserve, adjacent to the Redhall Housing estate. The reserve is to combine wildlife and fishing, a combination well tried out at the Maidendale Reserve and at Brinkburn Pond that encourages local people to participate in the management of the countryside on their doorstep. It is also a very good way of helping divert young people away from activities considered antisocial into the much more positive pursuit of angling and an interest in wildlife.

**Councillor David Lyonette**  
**Regeneration and Planning Portfolio**