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**LEADER'S OVERVIEW**

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**Cabinet**

1. I have chaired two ordinary and one special meeting of Cabinet since my last report to Council. The special meeting was called to consider the Council's Revenue and Capital Medium Term Financial Plans, Council Tax for 2007/08 and Housing Revenue Account. At the ordinary meetings a number of issues were discussed including the outcome of the first mid-year review of the Local Area Agreement.

**Town Centre**

2. I chaired the meeting of the Town Centre Board, which was held on 13th February, 2007. It was particularly encouraging to learn that trading in the Town Centre over Christmas and January had generally been very successful.
3. The second meeting of the Working Group, established by the Council to consider proposals for the regeneration of the Feethams Site and the Markets, was held on 26th February, 2007. A presentation was given to the meeting by King Sturge, on a potential future 'Vision' for the Markets and useful discussion followed. In addition, discussion took place on the planning issues for the Feethams site and the timing of planned developments in the Town Centre.
4. Works on the town centre's Pedestrian Heart are continuing to make good progress. All the large granite planters have been built, including the curved planter around the new events space at Prebend Row/Prospect Place. Paving works are progressing, with five gangs of paviours, working both from the southern end of West Row and the northern end of High Row, which will gradually open up the area to pedestrians as works complete from each end. Children from many schools have written about 'Life in Darlington' and on 28 February 2007 copies of their work were buried in a time capsule on High Row. Preparations are being made for the statue of Joseph Pease to be returned to the place it was originally designed for, from which it was moved in the 1950s. Work is progressing to complete the paving around the new bus shelters on Northgate, and a further new bus shelter added on Tubwell Row.

**Association of Town Centre Management**

5. I addressed the regional meeting of the Association of Town Centre Management, which was held in Darlington on Friday, 19th January, 2007. At the meeting, Darlington's experiences were shared on a number of proposals and developments for the Town Centre including the Pedestrian Heart Scheme, Darlington Markets and the Tesco Consultation.

6. I also addressed the Association of Town Centre Management North East Conference and Awards Ceremony, sponsored by IGNITE and One NorthEast, which showcased the best of Town Centre Management in the North East of England. The conference, hosted by Darlington, also demonstrated the ability of effective partnerships and management initiatives to deliver town centre polices.

### **Darlington Partnership Board/Darlington Assembly**

7. I attended a special meeting of the Darlington Partnership Board held on 1st February, 2007, to discuss ideas to refresh ambitions for Darlington, building on the success of the Partnership to date. I was pleased to lend my support to an important debate with business and other important partners to take Darlington to the next stage of its development. I also attended the Darlington Assembly held on 7th February, 2007, which considered a strategy for older people in Darlington. The Assembly was organised by the Darlington Partnership, with representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors in attendance, to discuss ideas for the forth-coming Older People's Strategy.

### **Scrutiny Committees**

8. I attended the special meeting of the Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 16th February, 2007, at which I presented Cabinet's proposals for the Council's Revenue and Capital Medium Term Financial Plans, prior to re-consideration by Cabinet and final approval by Council at its special meeting scheduled for 8th March, 2007.

### **Standards Committee**

9. I chaired the meeting of the Independent Members' Panel called to consider the applications received to become an Independent Member of the Council's Standards Committee. A report concerning this process appears elsewhere on the agenda.

### **Meetings**

10. In my capacity as Leader I have attended a number of events including the review of the Chartermark for Democratic Services; the Durham Tees Valley Airport Board Meeting; and the Annual Holocaust Memorial Day Service, which was hosted by the Education Village. I was delighted to present a cheque and certificate to the winner of the 'Contribution to the Community' award, as part of the Best of Darlington Awards Ceremony. The standard of nominations was very high and it was a pleasure to be part of the celebrations of such commitment to Darlington.

**John Williams**  
**Leader**