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**LEADER'S OVERVIEW**

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**Cabinet**

1. I have chaired one ordinary meeting of Cabinet since my last report to Council at which a number of issues were discussed including reports on the review of Community Safety Services in the Council, the Children's Services capital programme of investment in our schools and the Calendar of Council and Committee Meetings for the 2007/08 Municipal Year.

**Town Centre**

2. I chaired the meeting of the Town Centre Board, which was held on 27th March, 2007. A presentation was given to the Board by the Northern Echo on a potential marketing campaign which would integrate with the Board's Marketing Strategy for the town centre to promote Darlington as a shopping destination. Other reports that were considered included the Independent Retail Therapy project, the legislation and changes around Smoke Free Darlington, the relocation and planned expansion of Markets and a new accredited scheme for businesses entitled Climate Control Champions.
3. Works on the town centre's Pedestrian Heart are continuing with the whole of the scheme nearing completion. The past few months have seen large areas of the town unveiled, this has been perhaps most obvious on High Row where large sections of the newly laid steps, planters and street furniture have now been installed. This has been further enhanced by the completion of the events space and unveiling of the statue of Joseph Pease, an event that was well attended by many members of the public. Elsewhere the area around upper Northgate is now complete and progress is being made to finish the area linking West Row and Blackwellgate. Major events and marketing initiatives are being planned to attract shoppers into the town centre following completion of the works.
4. Our first 'Drop in Surgery' for Town Centre Businesses was held on 15th March, 2007, at which Ada Burns and myself met with businesses in order to listen to any concerns, problems or comments that they had. The surgery was well attended and proved to be a success. It is hoped that similar surgeries will be held in the future. In addition to the surgery, Ada and myself also visited a number of businesses in the Town Centre to listen first hand to the views of retailers.

**Darlington Partnership Board**

5. I attended the Darlington Partnership Board held on 8th March, 2007, which considered the way forward in setting new priorities for the Borough for the next five years. In addition, a presentation was given on Taking Forward the Darlington Gateway together with an update on the Community Strategy Action Plan. The Darlington Gateway presentation research

provided strong evidence of the progress already made in building a stronger and more sustainable local economy together with a clear ambition and plan to take the project into the future.

### **Stockton/Darlington Partnership**

6. The Stockton/Darlington Partnership Statement of Intent, was signed by the Leader of Stockton Borough Council, Councillor Bob Gibson, and myself, on Wednesday, 14th March, 2007. The signing of the statement confirms both of the Council's continued commitment to working together, with the final decision on the partnership to be made in the autumn. The partnership is believed to be the first of its kind in the country and it should offer significant benefits to both councils in terms of savings and improved services to the residents of both Boroughs.

### **National No Smoking Day**

7. The Council has linked up with the Darlington Primary Care Trust, the Northern Echo, Darlington Partnership, the voluntary and public sectors and the FRESH campaign for a Smoke Free North East. As part of this campaign, I was delighted to help launch the 'Make a Fresh Start' initiative on Wednesday, 14th March, National No Smoking Day.

### **Human Resources Appointments Panel**

8. I chaired the meeting of the Human Resources Appointments Panel held on 20th March, 2007, which appointed Jennifer Cooke to the Assistant Director post in the Children's Services Department. Jennifer will take up her post in Children's Services in June 2007.

### **Great North Walk Launch**

9. Following our success in hosting the Great North Walk last year, it is pleasing to note that the organisers of the event, have again asked this Council to host the Walk this year. I attended and spoke at the launch on 22nd March, 2007, to which key stakeholders were invited to attend. Further details for the day, including the route and new innovations to encourage young people's involvement, were made available at the launch.

### **Meetings**

10. In my capacity as Leader I have attended a number of events including the Durham Tees Valley Airport Board Meeting, the Further Education and Tees Valley Further Education Awards Gala Dinner and the official opening of Redbox Design Group at Morton Palms.

I was delighted to attend the official re-opening of the Dolphin Centre, at which Dame Tanni Grey Thompson D.B.E. was Guest of Honour. The £5M refurbishment of the Dolphin Centre has transformed the centre into a first class high quality sporting and leisure facility for the town.

**John Williams**  
**Leader**