
LEADER'S AND ECONOMY PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW

Cabinet

1. I have chaired two ordinary meetings of Cabinet since my last report to Council at which a number of issues were considered, including a report setting out the consultation arrangements and timetable for the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and Corporate Plan, following Council's endorsement of a range of detailed proposals made by Cabinet to encourage community engagement. Approval was given to the request to dispose of part of the Beaumont Street West site to CTC Marine Projects to allow them to facilitate the development of a new headquarters office building. The company is a world leader in its field and the proposals fit in well with Darlington's future economic aspirations and will create a number of higher wage level jobs. In addition, reports were considered on the Annual Letter from the Local Government Ombudsman and the Council's half-year service and financial performance for April to September 2007.

Town Centre

2. I chaired the meeting of the Town Centre Board, which was held on 6th November, 2007. A report reviewing the Board's membership was considered at the meeting and it was agreed that Jonothan Hutchinson, Manager, Marks and Spencers; Liz Esnouf, Commercial Director, Arriva Bus Company; and Chris Moore, Head of Advertising, Newsquest be invited to become Members of the Board. I am delighted to say that all three have accepted. A number of options for the relocation of the Outside Market were also considered, and it was agreed that the issue be referred to the Feethams and Markets Working Group for their consideration before Cabinet is asked to make a decision.
3. A number of other reports were considered including feedback from the private sector Board members on current trading; updates from the two meetings of the independent sector group; and the 2007 Winter Programme of events. The Independent Sector Board Members reported at the meeting that, in general, trade had improved in October.
4. The Working Group, established by the Town Centre Board to look at options for the Feethams/Beaumont Street sites and at proposals to strengthen the Markets, visited Leeds and Doncaster Markets. The visit allowed Members of the group to view other markets and discuss a number of issues, which would assist them in bringing proposals forward for the Indoor Market.

Improvements to the Yards

5. It has been suggested that in order to increase footfall and make this unique area of Darlington more attractive that we investigate having hanging baskets and murals/paintings on the walls of the buildings. The Town Centre Manager is looking at costs and also the permissions needed by planning/conservation and the owners of the buildings to take this forward.

Media Campaign for Independents

6. The TV and Radio adverts campaign starts on Wednesday 5 December. This is a campaign to help the 200+ Independents in the town. It is facilitated by the Council but is directed by the Independent Steering Group. The aim of the advert is to increase the awareness of the public as to the quality, variety and uniqueness of these shops in a town that has everything they need, i.e. a good range of multiples and a wide range of independents.

The New Town Centre Christmas Lights

7. The new lights have been purchased out of the Pedestrian Heart fund and have gone up around the town. Other funds were found to purchase sets for Skinnergate and Grange Road. The lights switch-on by Zoe Birkett took place on Sunday 18 November at 4.30 pm. and was a great success despite the poor weather.

Darlington Partnership Board

8. I attended the meeting of the Darlington Partnership Board held on 7th November, 2007, at which a presentation was given to update Members of the Board on the progress towards producing a Sustainable Community Strategy. In addition, presentations were given on the performance management of the Community Strategy Action Plan for 2007/08 and School Achievements. The Annual Report 2006/07 of the Director of Public Health which set out what had been done and what needed to be done in Darlington, to make progress in reducing inequalities in health, was also considered.
9. A special meeting of the Board was also held on 29th November, 2007 to enable the Board to give further consideration to the Sustainable Community Strategy and new priorities for Darlington. The process has enabled us to capture the views of a huge number of people, public and professionals alike.

Northern Growth Point Initiative

10. In September, the Department of Communities and Local Government launched the second round of the 'New Growth Point' initiative designed to support local communities who wish to pursue sustainable growth. The focus will be on extra funding to overcome local infrastructure problems and unlock sites for new housing. An expression of interest has been submitted on behalf of the five Tees Valley authorities to help raise the profile of the area and the City Region Development Plan and to secure additional funding to support the economic regeneration of the area. The expression of interest was submitted in October and the Council expects to find out if it will be asked to progress to the next stage in December or

January.

Single Programme Delivery Plan

11. In work being done with Tees Valley partners for submission to One NorthEast, Darlington has been provisionally identified for £40m single programme funding for the period 2008-2013. Three key projects have been identified, with the flagship project being the Town Centre Fringe. The figures have been incorporated into the draft Tees Valley Single Programme Delivery Plan prepared by Tees Valley Unlimited.

Tees Valley Unlimited and the development of a Multi-Area Agreement

12. The draft Multi-Area Agreement has been submitted to the Department of Communities and Local Government to seek approval for Tees Valley to be one of the first areas to implement a Multi Area Agreement. The Tees Valley Multi Area agreement focuses on the "Place Agenda" bringing together three key capital programmes - Single Programme , Housing Market Renewal and Transport Funding provided by the Department of Transport (should the housing growth point bid be successful, this too would come under Tees Valley Living and the MAA). Tourism and Skills will also be covered by the Multi-Area Agreement. A report will be submitted to January Cabinet.

Arriva Bus Depot

13. Subject to agreement of terms with Arriva, a business case is being prepared for external funding. A scheme is being developed to clear the site and (temporarily) replace with a car park. The ultimate use of the site will be dependent on a masterplanning / consultation exercise covering the Town Centre Fringe and Feethams /Beaumont Street areas.

Town Twinning Visit

14. As part of the Town Twinning Visit from Amiens, I attended a number of events arranged for our guests including the official reception, held in the Town Hall on 12th October, 2007, and the Civic dinner on 13th October, 2007.

Honorary Alderman Ceremony

15. I attended the special Council meeting held on 9th October, 2007, arranged to honour and bestow the title of Honorary Alderman on ex-councillors Clifford Hutchinson and Sheila Brown. Both Cliff and Sheila retired as Councillors in May 2007, after 44 years and 41 years service respectively, with both this Council and the former County Council. The evening was a great success and hugely enjoyed by both Aldermen, their family, friends and guests.

Corporate Governance Group

16. The work of the Corporate Governance Group, established to review this Council's Governance Arrangements is continuing. As part of this Review, a meeting was held with Planning Committee Members on proposals to make the planning process more engaging,

transparent and less daunting for the public. The proposals were well received and it was agreed that the options be forwarded to Council in January 2008 for consideration.

Local Democracy Week

17. As part of Local Democracy Week, a number of events were arranged and I attended the Special Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 15th October, 2007, at which two representatives from thirteen schools within the Borough were represented. It was a hugely successful event enjoyed by young and old alike. I also attended a presentation given by the young peoples 'Hear by Rights' Group.

Chief Executive's Appraisal

18. I Chaired the meeting of the Appraisal Sub-Group held on 17th October, 2007 in respect of the Chief Executive's Performance Appraisal. A report detailing the recommendation from the Sub-Group can be seen elsewhere on the summons.

Community Engagement

19. At the Council meeting held on 19th July, 2007, a number of proposals were agreed in order to foster closer working relations with residents and the Local Strategic Partnership, modernise communications and allow opportunities for the public to interact with the Council. As part of those proposals, I attended a 'Talking Together' roadshow held on Saturday, 10th November, 2007 at Dodmire Junior School. The event was judged a success, due in no small part to its informality and openness.

Meetings

20. In my capacity as Leader I have attended a number of meetings and events including the Darlington Assembly; the celebration of the Foundation of Eastbourne Church of England Academy; Remembrance Sunday; Darlington College Annual Awards; the Council's 4 Star Awards Ceremony; and the IDeA Judging Team for Beacon Status 'Better Public Places'. I was also interviewed by the Audit Commission on the 'Direction of Travel' as part of their inspection.

John Williams
Leader and Economy Portfolio