
OVERVIEW OF LEISURE PORTFOLIO

Purpose of Report

1. During the last eight-week cycle the following were the main areas of work under my Leisure Portfolio.

Sports and Physical Activity Development

2. As part of the schools NOF project, one of the Multi Use Games Areas has been completed at Alderman Leach School. There will be an official opening of the MUGA shortly after the Easter holidays. The remaining nine projects are progressing well, and the tender documents are expected to be released early in March 2005, with substantial completion of all projects expected in August 2005.
3. The Zone Active project, delivered in partnership with Darlington and District Youth and Community Association, is nearing the delivery stage, with interviews for the Project Co-ordinator taking place on the 18 March. Following this appointment, the project will begin to take shape on the ground in the wards of Eastbourne, Lascelles and Park East.
4. A Boccia (an inclusive version of bowls) and New Age Kurling taster day took place on the 9 March at the Dolphin Centre. Boccia and Kurling are both inclusive sports, and participants, both disabled and non-disabled, from across the town attended. The taster day was open to adults and young people and was organised by the Inclusion Co-ordinator, who has developed links with many disability groups. Coaches and leaders linked to the taster day have received training to deliver both activities and local groups and schools will be able to continue to take part in these activities after the taster day. Some young people will have the chance to represent Darlington in both sports at the Tees Valley Youth Games and following interest generated at the taster day, the Sports Development Team are now working with a group of adults who are keen to develop a Boccia and Kurling Club.

Eastbourne Sports Complex

5. On the 4 February 2005, fifteen young students from Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College and Carmel Technology College attended the Tees Valley Sport-Step Into Sport Conference. The conference aimed at getting young people actively involved in volunteering in sports clubs across the town. As a result of involvement in the conference, young people have established placements with local sports clubs and organizations, which will begin after Easter this year. The students have committed to carry out from 50 to 200 hours of voluntary work, after which they will receive a bronze, silver or gold Step Into Sport certificate, linked to the Millennium Volunteers programme.

6. Phase 2 of the refurbishment programme within Eastbourne Sports Complex is underway and will be completed by the 31 March 2005. This will include a full refurbishment of the male changing area coupled with an upgrade of the existing function room facility.

Dolphin Centre

7. Professional snooker returned to the Dolphin Centre after a gap of eight years. Some of the worlds leading players took part in a pro/am event that received widespread local and national media coverage. Further events are provisionally scheduled for later in the year.
8. During the February half term holiday, an extensive programme of activities for young people was provided across several venues including pool float sessions, a swimming development camp and multi activity camp. The Easter vacation will further develop this programme to promote physical activity and engage young people throughout.

Sponsorship News

9. The Sponsorship Team has secured some significant deals with high profile companies. Darlington Building Society has entered into a three-year agreement to support Darlington Civic Theatre and Arts Centre over the next three years.
10. Barker and Stonehouse have agreed to sponsor this year's Summer Repertory Season at the Civic Theatre.
11. Latimer Hinks have entered into a twelve-month agreement to support the Theatre through the Corporate Partners Scheme.
12. Alpha FM has entered into a twelve-month partnership agreement at Stressholme. Stressholme will benefit from six advertising campaigns and six promotional competitions on Alpha FM over the twelve-month period.

Visual Arts – Myles Meehan Gallery

In the Return – Jacob Polley

11 February – 26 March

13. The Arts Centre commissioned poet Jacob Polley to respond to the Darlington Borough Collection. His resulting poetry and selection of 30 paintings and prints are included in this exhibition. An exhibition catalogue supported by New Writing North, accompanies the exhibition. It contains 12 of the selected poems with photography by Ian Fenton.
14. With text being the focus of the award winning public art driven development at West Park, the visual art and public art area is strategically building on this successful connection of art forms.

West Park

15. The artwork has been installed in the new Alderman Leach School and Hospital. Photographer for West Park, David Williams, is documenting events and the artwork as they progress. A series of publications is planned to coincide with the opening of the parkland to the public in June of this year.
16. The play area is in progress and is due for completion for the opening. Sculptor, David Paton has liaised closely with lead poet, Bill Herbert and landscape architect, Arlene McIntosh. There will be creative areas for storytelling, sensitive landscape walks, a maze and a hidden brass rubbing puzzle that when completed, makes West Park Jabberwocky, an amalgam of the three original species that were synonymous with the site (the dingy skipper butterfly, the little ringed plover and the water vole).
17. The Arts Strategy is driving the next village phase. Bill Herbert is working with architect, David Brown. In the plan, text, glass and lighting are to be incorporated into the central village area.
18. After a recent site visit to the hospital, David Eley, the Hospital Manager, is keen to build on the first phase of artwork. Bill Herbert is producing a second phase proposal for the Primary Care Trust to consider for the end of March.

Morton Palms

19. Sculptor, John Atkin, has been commissioned to produce a five-metre steel sculpture for the City and Northern Development at Morton Palms. The sculpture is due to be installed in early summer.

College of Technology

20. The Darlington College of Technology have committed £30,000 towards a public art element for the new building. Artist, Matt Stokes was funded by the Arts Council to work with the project architects, Ellis Williamson, to incorporate a new media system as a platform for creative projects delivered by artists and college students. A second presentation is planned in April for Sarah Farley, when Matt will be revealing his new media art piece and a bid to the Arts Council to support the art element/residency to be ready for installation at the opening launch of the new College of Technology building at Central Park.

Catering Services

21. The Arts Centre Catering Service has been awarded the Heartbeat Award 2005 for the second year running. This acknowledgement comes following the successful introduction of a new menu and table service at the Arts Centre. The Bistro is experiencing increased usage with its opening times being extended to 9.00pm.

22. On Thursday 3 February a party of Councillors from Pendle Council visited sites in Darlington to look at how we had responded to the access requirements of disabled people and to the Disability Discrimination Act. Part of the visit was to the Civic Theatre where the party was very impressed with the access provisions made at the Theatre. Many improvements have been made in the last year, including a much-improved sound system with individual hearing aid loop system, the stage lift, audio description on most week long runs and braille programmes to accompany the description. All theatre staff have received in-house training in disability awareness and future plans include further improvements in access for deaf people in the form of Performance Captioning (an electronic form of subtitling live performances). Gordon Pybus was also very complimentary about the provisions made at the Theatre and the liaison that we have with him and DAD.
23. The Friends of Darlington Civic Theatre and Arts, a self-governing, voluntary organization dedicated to supporting the Civic Theatre and general arts provision within the borough of Darlington have this month, fully funded a major improvement to the Civic Theatre.
24. Thanks to the Friends fundraising efforts, the sum of £7,500 has been raised and this money has fully funded the installation of a complete set of state of the art, fully automated sliding doors at the main Borough Road entrance.
25. These doors will make a considerable difference to the ease of access for all patrons, but they will particularly benefit the elderly and infirm. This project represents once again the very real benefits to the arts in Darlington as a result of the excellent partnerships between Darlington Borough Council and its stakeholders.

South Park

26. The majority of the work included within Phase 1 is now complete, with the only exception being installation of the east entrance gates, which will now be completed at the end of Phase 2. Now that the weather has improved, work on Phase 2 is progressing well. The first elements of the project are due to be completed as follows:-
 - Children's Play area for Easter opening.
 - Bowlers Changing Facilities Mid April
 - Lodge Facilities End of April
 - Teaching Block Mid May

All other works are on programme for completion by September 2005.

27. The proposals for the Skateboard Park have now received planning consent and work is expected to commence within the next few weeks.
28. The new Friends Group of South Park is gathering momentum and has developed over the past few months.

Darlington Railway Centre & Museum

Visitors to the Museum

29. Up to February 2005, 25,279 people have visited the museum.
30. **Events** - four days of fun and activity for families are planned for the Railway Museum over this Easter period including drama, arts and crafts, giant games and a ride on a steam train.
31. The events calendar for the new season has been finalised and includes some new and exciting family orientated weekend activities to encourage repeat visits to the Museum. These range from Bollywood Extravanzas to Railway Children fun, plus the extremely popular regulars such as Santa Weekends and Thomas the Tank Engine.
32. **Renaissance in the Regions – Tees Valley Hub** - the Museum has continued hosting drama interpretation through actors from Pluto Theatre Company and Visitation.
33. **Collections** - the new Documentation Assistant started work on the 7th February. Madi Grout joined us from the HR department and gained some practical voluntary experience with working with museum collections at the Bowes Museum. Madi is very keen to pursue a career within museums and is currently working on our ICT Renaissance Hub project. This project aims to get our records on the MODES database up to the recognised museum standard and ready to be uploaded onto a portal website. This will make our collections, along with those from other museums in the Tees Valley, accessible via the Internet.
34. Sir Richard Pease (Great Great Grandson of Edward Pease) has recently donated a very fine sofa, which was used by Edward Pease and George Stephenson when planning the Stockton & Darlington Railway. This is now on display within the Museum.
35. Another significant addition to the Museum is a collection of drawings/plans transferred from York Archives. These plans do need some work before they can be made available to the public but we hope to have these re-packaged, catalogued and available for researchers in the next two or three months.
36. **Education** - the new interactive Brass Rubbing Newspaper is now available for both school groups and family visitors and is proving to be very popular with visitors young and old.
37. 3 new projects have been identified and work has begun to progress them:
 - Adult Basic Skills and family learning taster weekend is being researched .It is hoped that around £4000 will be secured from grant giving bodies to progress this project
 - A partnership project with the Library Service on WWII reminiscences as part of the BBC Peoples War project is in its planning stage.
 - A new Access and Learning Plan incorporating ILFA (Inspiring Learning for All) has been drafted and forwarded to NEMLAC for professional critique. It will replace the existing Education Plan in April 2005.

38. School visitor figures to date stand at 6,076.
39. **Future education projects** - Time Trackers will occur again at the start of March.
40. Funding of about £70,000 is being sought for an Audience Development Project for the South Asian Community.

Events Strategy

41. As a town, Darlington currently holds numerous excellent events that are co-ordinated and promoted independently of each other via various departments and community groups. These events currently attract considerable numbers of people, predominantly local residents, and are considered local events for local people.
42. Due to there being a number of Departments co-ordinating and running events a meeting was called to enable the events that were being planned this calendar year to be discussed and an events matrix compiled. In addition to the compilation of one overall list, which would in itself give a comprehensive view of the forthcoming activities, it was intended that the meeting be used to:
 - identify any opportunities that arose such as clustering together similar events into themes
 - identify any clashes or obvious problems and seek to identify solutions
 - identify the development issues in relation to the Pedestrian Heart project and how this may impact on the planned activities
 - discuss promotional activity.
43. The importance of events acting as an economic driver for towns via attracting increasing numbers of both residents and visitors to a town grows every year. With this growth in importance there is a need to be more strategic in the approach to planning, co-ordinating and promoting events to enable the full economic benefit to be achieved.
44. To maximise this potential it has been agreed that there needs to be an Events Strategy for Darlington, a strategy that will enhance what we are already doing and one that will increase the awareness and profile of Darlington as a place to visit all year round, ultimately increasing the visitors to Darlington and the events.
45. Two officers, Roy Broadbent – Arts Facilities Manager and Claire Boston Smithson – Tourism and Heritage Officer, will be co-ordinating the development of the Events Strategy, the intention is to produce an Events Strategy that is suitable and appropriate for Darlington by July 2005.

Councillor Lee Vasey
Cabinet Member with Leisure Portfolio