
ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT 2003/04

1. I am delighted to present the Annual Report of Environment Scrutiny Committee to Council on behalf of Members of that Committee. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Members for their contribution to the work of this Committee over the last year and also wish to acknowledge the effort and the help of the several Officers who support the Committee, in particular Terry Collins, from Community Services who is the Lead Officer for Environment Scrutiny and Karen Graves from Democratic Services.
2. Over the year, as seen in the appended work programme, the Committee has handled all the elements of scrutiny, including policy development, Best Value Reviews and inspections, progress, consultation and monitoring functions and studies of particular services. We have gained in experience and confidence using various techniques as appropriate.
3. As a Committee we continue to look at ways in which we can, through the Scrutiny process, contribute to the work of the Council and welcomed the wonderful training session during March with Mel Nixon from Aware UK which enabled all our Members to analyse, contribute and comment on ways of developing the scrutiny process further.
4. An active year on the part of the Committee has been spent in advising on strategies examining particular topics, monitoring Best Value Action Plans and taking part in scoping Best Value Reviews.
5. As part of our role we monitored the four Service Plans Environment Scrutiny were involved in relation to the Development and Environment and Community Services Departments.
6. We have undertaken several Task and Finish Review Groups – One comprising The Mayor, Councillors Hartley, S. Jones and lead by Councillor Ruck which tackled issues in relation to street furniture and signage and our views were welcomed as part of the Street Environment Best Value Review. Since the Review we have undertaken two further inspections of Street Furniture and Signage in the Town Centre and the Denes area, from which Officers welcomed our comments.
7. A further Task and Finish Review Group, which was requested by Councillor Wallis, Cabinet Member with portfolio for Highways and Transport, was undertaken to examine the proposed A167 North Road Corridor of Certainty Scheme, in the light of the feedback from the public consultation exercise undertaken. The Councillors on the Review Group were myself and Councillors Ruck, Hart, Heaney, S. Jones and J. Vasey. Useful points were made and included in the Corridor of Certainty Scheme.
8. The main Review Group of this Committee is on the subject of Conservation. It is our aim to examine and investigate the existence of a Conservation Policy within this Authority, compile an Action Plan arising from our findings and increase public awareness of

Conservation issues. As Conservation is such a vast subject and requires an enormous amount of time and commitment we have allowed ourselves a year to complete the Review and hope to be in a position of near completion around September.

9. On planning issues, we are pleased to note the improvements achieved through the Development Control Action Plan. Although not every target has yet been reached, there has been a step change in the department, and the public has expressed a lot of satisfaction as a result.
10. Still on planning matters we undertook a site visit, along with Members of Planning Applications Committee, to several previously determined planning application developments within the Borough in order for Environment Scrutiny to fulfil its monitoring role of the Development Control Best Value Review.
11. We have invited groups and individuals to join in our Committee where they could make a useful contribution about particular subjects or issues. Examples would be representatives from English Heritage and the North East and Darlington Civic Trusts who each gave a presentation to the Conservation Review Group on their views and aims on Conservation. On a more local note George Flynn, Darlington's well known local historian and Chris Lloyd of the Northern Echo have both attended a meeting of the Group and given a valuable insight into the Conservation of Darlington.
12. I would like to express my thanks to Members of the Committee who have brought so much zest and commitment to the work of the Committee. We are determined to develop the Scrutiny functions using good practice and harnessing the experience and interests of all our Members, to the benefit of the town's population in the drive to improve services and look after our environment for everyone. We have all benefited this year from the excellent training programme, and are working more effectively on behalf of the people of Darlington.

Environment Scrutiny Committee

APPENDIX 1

DATE OF MEETING	SUBJECT	RESPONSIBLE DIRECTOR
19th June, 2003	Service Planning – Development and Environment and Community Services Departments	Director of Development and Environment J. Buxton and Director of Community Services C. Brown
	Tees Valley Vision	Director of Development and Environment J. Buxton
21st August, 2003	Best Value Review – Street Environment	Director of Development and Environment J. Buxton
	Open Space and Recreation Local Needs Assessment	Director of Development & Environment J. Buxton
	Conservation Task and Finish Review Group	Environment Scrutiny Committee Members
	Comprehensive Performance Assessment – Scoring of the Environment Service Block	Director of Development and Environment J. Buxton
16th October, 2003	Consultancy Service Plan 2003/04 Update	Director of Development and Environment J. Buxton
	South Park - Update	Director of Community Services C. Brown
	Annual Joint Site Visit with Planning Committee	Director of Development & Environment J. Buxton
	Darlington Railway Centre and Museum – Update Following Site Visit	Director of Corporate Services P. Wildsmith
	Policy Review – Review of Progress on Policy Items – Conservation Review Group	Director of Corporate Services P. Wildsmith

DATE OF MEETING	SUBJECT	RESPONSIBLE DIRECTOR
	Policy Review – Review of Progress on Policy Items –Street Signage and Furniture Task and Finish Review Group	Director of Corporate Services P. Wildsmith
	Best Value Review – Land Maintenance	Director of Development & Environment J. Buxton
20th November, 2003 (Special)	Policy Review – Review Items Final Report Back – A167 Task and Finish Review Group	Director of Corporate Services P. Wildsmith
	Policy Review – Review Items Final Report Back –Street Signage and Furniture Task and Finish Review Group	Director of Corporate Services P. Wildsmith
11th December, 2004	Commemorative Photograph Album	Director of Development & Environment J. Buxton
	North Road Corridor of Certainty - Update	Councillor Wallis, Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Highways and Transport
	Parks, Open Spaces and Cemeteries Strategy	Director of Community Services C. Brown
	Comprehensive Performance Assessment – Scoring of the Environment Service Block	Director of Development & Environment J. Buxton
	Cultural Strategy - Update	Director of Community Services C. Brown
	Community Strategy Economic Targets – Progress	Director of Development & Environment J. Buxton
	Leisure and Arts Service Plan Progress Report 2002/03	Director of Community Services C. Brown
	Policy Review – Review of Progress on Policy Items – Conservation Review Group	Director of Corporate Services P. Wildsmith

DATE OF MEETING	SUBJECT	RESPONSIBLE DIRECTOR
	Policy Review – Review of Progress on Policy Items – Street Signage and Furniture Task and Finish Review Group	Director of Corporate Services P. Wildsmith
12th December, 2003 (Special)	West Park Development	Director of Development & Environment J. Buxton
5th February, 2004	Development and Regeneration Service Plan 2003/04	Director of Development & Environment J. Buxton
	Street Environment Best Value Review – Results of Stage II Consultation Work	Director of Development & Environment J. Buxton
	Town Centre Street Furniture Inspection	Director of Community Services C. Brown
	Policy Review – Review of Progress on Policy Items – Conservation Review Group	Director of Corporate Services P. Wildsmith
	Best Value – Monitoring of Progress on Best Value Review and Improvement Action Plans - Culture	Director of Community Services C. Brown
2nd March, 2004 (Special)	Best Value Performance Plan	Head of Policy Lorraine O'Donnell
1st April, 2004	Town Centre Street Furniture Inspection	Director of Community Services C. Brown
	Best Value Monitoring of Progress on Best Value Review and Improvement Action Plans – Culture	Director of Community Services C. Brown
	Issues Arising from Darlington Environmental Forum	Director of Development & Environment J. Buxton
	Darlington Economic Regeneration Strategy+	Director of Development & Environment J. Buxton
	Development Control Statistics for July to September 2004	Director of Development & Environment J. Buxton

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	Policy Review – Review of Progress on Policy Items – Conservation Review Group	Director of Corporate Services P. Wildsmith