
OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Environment Scrutiny Committee has undertaken :-
 - (a) **Work Programme 2006/07** – We have given consideration to the Work Programme of this Committee for the Municipal Year 2006/07 and in doing so examined Cabinet’s Forward Plan for particular areas of interest and concern. We continually add to our Work Programme and monitor ongoing items.
 - (b) **Annual Tour of Countryside Wild Spaces** - During the month of August the Committee undertook a tour of Countryside Wild Spaces as part of this Committee’s remit. We found the visits informative and interesting with a wide range of varying aspects to each site. The sites visited were Faverdale Industrial Park, West Park, Drinkfield Marsh, Red Hall, Maidendale (Firthmoor) and Geneva Wood which allowed us to see a selection of countryside projects that are on-going at present and which highlighted the main issues that these initiative were attempting to address.
 - (c) **Countryside Strategy – ‘People and Nature in Darlington’ – Update and Amendment** – We received a report on the renewal of the Council’s existing Countryside Strategy ‘People and Nature in Darlington’ in order to bring it up to date and make it more relevant of current needs. The strategy will identify areas where the Council could take responsibility with changes in Planning policy Guidance, changes in wildlife law and changes in policies towards the rural fringe all act to put greater emphasis on the role of local authorities to play an active part in improving the three main themes of the strategy; biodiversity, access to quality countryside and the inter dependence of the rural and urban economies.
 - (d) **Darlington Town Centre – Review of Pedestrian Guard Railing on the Ring Road** – We listened to the findings of an independent safety audit, undertaken by Capita Symonds, in relation to removal of pedestrian guardrails around the Town Centre which highlighted the need to retain most of the guardrail on safety grounds. We have requested further information on this subject.
 - (e) **Policy Review – Grass Verges** – One of Environment Scrutiny’s Reviews for the Municipal Year 2006/07 is to focus on Grass Verges, we have had several meetings, set our Terms of Reference and are making good progress.

- (f) **Policy Review - Financial Incentives to Business** – A further of this year’s reviews is examining the financial assistance provided to businesses by the Council. We are mid-way through this review and are pleased with our findings to date.
- (g) **Policy Review - Planning Applications – Methods of Consultations** – At our last meeting we also agreed to establish a Task and Finish Review to investigate the consultation methods and the processes involved when consulting residents on both new and re-submitted planning applications. The first meeting of this Group will be held on 21st September, 2006.
- (h) **Responses of the Executive to Reports of the Scrutiny Committee** – We were extremely pleased to note the comments of the Executive in relation to our recently completed Neglected Land Review Group and will monitor the Action Plan throughout the Municipal Year.

Councillor Stella Robson
Chair of Environment Scrutiny Committee