
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) **Community Strategy and the Corporate Plan – Role of Scrutiny** We received an overview of the next stage of the organisation’s development ‘Leading Edge’ and are now looking at what impact we, as Scrutiny Members, have had on the delivery of the Corporate Strategy. We will also be looking at the performance indicators that we have taken particular interest in and how we have scrutinised and had an input into the relevant Service Plans relating to our Scrutiny. With this in mind, a small group of Members have agreed to work separately with Policy Unit to undertake a ‘self audit’.
 - (c) **Proposed Car Club** – As part of the Local Motion sustainable travel demonstration town project it is proposed to establish a car club in Darlington and Environment Scrutiny were invited to comments on the details of its implementation prior to tender invitations. A car club member will pay an annual membership fee and an hourly or mileage rate for use of a car, this allows flexibility of car usage with having to pay costs associated with car ownership.
 - (d) **Climate Change** - We gave consideration to a report on the current status of the Darlington Climate Change Strategy and the response to climate change with emphasis on the wider action being taken within the Tees Valley to develop a Tees Valley Climate Change Strategy to which this Council and the Darlington Partnership are giving their full support..
 - (e) **Increasing Community Capacity through Street Scene** – We were advised of the work to be undertaken As part of the Local Area Agreement ‘Increasing Community Capacity Through Street Scene’ and learnt of the four key products of Pride and Street Champions, Young Caretakers, Areas Based Community Engagement and Parks for All. There are several opportunities to deliver physical improvements to the Borough’s parks and open spaces, as well as deliver a number of pro-active engagement programmes with the local community. The main focus for Increasing Community Capacity Through Street Scene will be around the neighbourhood.
 - (f) **Conservation Area Appraisals** – We were delighted to receive this report as, Members may recall, Environment Scrutiny undertook a review of Conservation Areas

within the Borough. Our review highlighted the need to produce Conservation Area Appraisals to provide an evidence base for planning policies and to meet recently introduced Best Value Performance Indicators, which measured the percentage of conservation areas with up to date appraisals. Piercebridge Conservation Area appraisal is the first of a series of 16 appraisals programmed for production over the next few years and we look forward to receiving the remainder of the Appraisals in the future.

- (g) **Planning Excellence – Service Delivery Improvement Plan** – We were advised of the Action Plan for improving service delivery across a range of planning related matters as part of Environment Scrutiny’s monitoring role of the Development Control Best Value Review. Officers have recognised the need to assess the quality of service provision within the Planning Section and identified a range of Actions aimed at improvements across key work areas. Early progress has been made and the findings and recommendations of external consultants will contribute to improvements in procedures and processes, as well as the Services interaction with the local community.
- (h) **Railings in the Town Centre** – One of the Council’s Framework Partners, Capita, were commissioned to undertake a study of the guardrails in the Town Centre to include a safety audit, guard rail removal and proposed action plan and as the findings of the study are still being researched we are to receive a detailed report during our December meeting which we look forward to.
- (i) **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. It is hoped to give consideration to the Final Report at our next meeting of Scrutiny in December.
- (j) **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 have completed our Final Report and hope to submit it to Cabinet in the near future.
- (k) **Policy Review - Planning Applications – Methods of Consultations** –The first meeting of this Group was held on 21st September, 2006 where we learnt of the appointment of consultants to give consideration to various aspects of Planning Services to include consultation methods. We have therefore decided to discontinue this review.
- (l) **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