
LEADER'S AND ECONOMY PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW

1. Since my last report, there have been a number of significant developments for both the Borough and for the Council.

One Darlington Perfectly Placed

2. The Local Strategic Partnership and the Council's partners have been engaged in developing a robust set of indicators that will comprise the Local Area Agreement (LAA) for Darlington. The LAA is a three year agreement and is the delivery plan for the Sustainable Community Strategy, and it will help us to move our vision into reality. The 35 indicators and three year targets for Darlington's LAA have been agreed and submitted to the Government Office for the North East (GONE).

Economy Portfolio

3. The Council has been working with the Tees Valley Authorities, in developing a Multi Area Agreement (MAA), and it is anticipated that this will have been signed by the Secretary of State prior to the Council meeting. The MAA provides a mechanism to help deliver economic growth within the sub region. It should improve the way central government, regional agencies and local government work together, devolving more decision-taking from central government and the region to the Tees Valley, and expedite capital investment in economic regeneration, transport and housing. The development of the MAA for the Tees Valley has raised the profile of the region within Central Government, and being one of the first areas to sign an agreed MAA, is a major coup for the Council and its partners. We shared a platform with the Local Government Minister at the Local Government Conference in Bournemouth, to outline our agreement and the ambition that lies behind it.
4. For Darlington it offers a much greater level of confidence about the resources to be brought forward over the coming five years to support delivery of the "Perfectly Placed" priority within the Community Strategy. Given the Council's track record on delivery, it is possible that there may be opportunities to expedite some major schemes as a result of the Governments' agreement to virement between different funding streams to allow more sensible programme management.
5. The Association of North East Council's held their AGM on the 27th June and agreed a joint response to the Sub National Review. This offers positive proposals for the mechanism to create an integrated regional strategy embracing transport, spatial planning and economic development. The ANEC submission proposes that Local Government play a central role in working alongside One North East to ensure democratic engagement in setting direction and ensuring the reflection of local needs and opportunities.

6. The Students Loan Company held its official opening within Lingfield Point. This marked the culmination of a couple of years work with the company as a central system for managing student loans was first piloted (in Darlington) and then agreed nationally. It has brought substantial investment in Darlington, with 500 new jobs. This investment is excellent news for the town and contributes to the one of the aims contained within the Community Strategy of attracting jobs to the Borough and the region.
7. Positive discussions have continued to secure a new University Centre within Darlington and a report elsewhere on the agenda seeks Council support to a contribution towards the overall financial package required. This development, which is being energetically pursued and attracting the interest of regional bodies such as One North East, will send a powerful statement to our community – and to employers – about the ambition and aspiration that we have for our borough and our residents.
8. At the meeting of the Town Centre Board held in June a presentation was given to the Board on the findings of the research undertaken in respect of Sunday Trading in Darlington. A number of recommendations were put forward and supported by the Board, which were the need to distinguish Darlington from its competitors, including: the creation of a sustainable Sunday market; and the need to build upon, and extend, existing marketing campaigns. Consideration was also given to the Calendars of General and Markets Events, which were proposed on various dates through 2008, including Sundays; the views of Board Members on the current trading situation, which were mixed; and proposals to support the Independent Sector within the Town.
9. It was announced at the Town Centre Board that a new Darlington Town Centre Traders Association is in the process of being created, with the active involvement of many local retailers. The group are keen to work with the Council to continue the good work undertaken in marketing the town centre and its unique offering. This is a very positive development and will undoubtedly bring fresh ideas and energy to our ongoing efforts to support and promote our vibrant town centre.

John Williams
Leader and Economy Portfolio