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**LEADER AND ECONOMY PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW**

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1. Since my last report, there have been a number of significant developments for both the Borough and for the Council.
2. As part of the nation's first Armed Forces Day, I was very pleased to attend a flag raising ceremony at the Town Hall, on Monday, 22nd June, 2009. The flag was raised over the Town Hall at 10.30 a.m. followed by a prayer, read by the Reverend Canon John Dobson from All Saints Church. The ceremony was welcomed by those veterans in attendance.
3. I chaired the LSP Executive Group on 1 June 2009 which reviewed Darlington's performance against Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement targets. The Comprehensive Area Assessment lead officer for Darlington, Philippa Corner attended the meeting and briefed members on progress with this years assessment. The Executive stressed to Philippa the importance of ensuring full partner involvement in this first report, and noted that inevitably her teams ability to demonstrate a deep understanding of Darlington will be constrained by time and familiarity this year.
4. Work is being undertaken by Officers and the Executive of the Local Strategic Partnership Executive, with the Audit Commission on the first Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) for Darlington, which supercedes the Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA), and focuses on a range of organisations which affect the Borough, not just the Council. The CAA has been made a much harder test by the government than the CPA and it is expected that most Councils will be given a lower score under the CAA than they achieved in the CPA.
5. The Council has been working with Teesside University to help facilitate the development of a new University Centre in Darlington to open in 2011. I am delighted that the University has decided to provide more higher education courses in Darlington sooner than that in order to build up the provision over the next two years. Cabinet considered and agreed the University's request to use the Eastbourne School buildings in the intervening two years, as the University's preferred option for early provision of additional higher education in Darlington. Strict obligations have been placed on the University to maintain the security of the site during their temporary use.
6. The Chief Executive and I visited the site of the new Eastbourne Church of England Academy on 30th June and were very impressed at the quality of build, the design features, equipment and new facilities. It is gratifying to see the scheme proceeding on schedule and to budget.

7. At the beginning of July I chaired the Appointment Panel for the Assistant Chief Executive. I was impressed by the calibre of candidates who applied and it is a good reflection on the Council's reputation that Officers from high performing Councils across the country applied for the post. Christina Sivers who will join the Council from Swindon Borough Council will, I am sure, make an important and valuable contribution to our work.

## **Economy Portfolio**

8. A number of reports on the Darlington Local Development Framework have been considered and endorsed by Cabinet, including the Tees Valley Joint Minerals and Waste Development Plan documents; New Development Supplementary Planning Document and the Local Development Scheme.
9. A project was approved by Cabinet to proceed with the construction of a new public square adjoining the proposed headquarters for the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). This will provide a high quality focus for the regeneration of the west side of Feethams adding value and certainty to the proposed DCSF development, in line with the Feethams Planning and Development Brief.
10. Cabinet also approved the release of Housing Growth Point funding, to assist with the development of the Central Park and former Beaumont Hill school sites, and the Coatham Mundeville Conservation Area Character Appraisal.
11. The Business Engagement Team continue to raise awareness of the services available to support businesses through the business column in the Town Crier. A recent article focussed on raising awareness of 'New Futures', a Tees Valley initiative aimed at assisting unemployed people between 17 and 24 years of age who want to work in construction. The scheme encourages local businesses to take on trainees to ensure that the industry is ready for the economic upturn.
12. In order to make business advice more accessible, the team recently took a market stall, along with colleagues from Business Link and the North East Chamber of Commerce, to engage with people who are already in business, and those who are considering starting up.
13. A new Business Start-Up Guide has also been produced to assist anyone thinking of starting up in business in the Borough. The Guide is an extension of the existing Business Information Guide, which provides an overview of the business support available in Darlington and highlights the main issues to consider when starting up in business.
14. The Council is working in partnership with the Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit to develop an employability project funded through One North East's Single Programme, the aim of which is to provide vocational training and job search activities to improve prospects for unemployed residents.
15. An Employer Skills Survey is being undertaken to ascertain the training needs of companies and their staff, as well as to look at how unemployed people can best prepare themselves to take advantage of job opportunities in the anticipated economic upturn. All employers within the Borough have been encouraged to complete the survey.

16. I thoroughly enjoyed the second Bannatynes Bright Sparks competition held at the Dolphin Centre on 29th June. High standards of presentation, the courage required to present in that setting, and the quality of ideas and preparation were all much in evidence from all of the teams. I look forward to seeing this initiative grow and prosper in future years. Congratulations are due to the Education Village and Eastbourne Church of England Academy for their success in winning the competition and having the best Business Plan.

### **Town Centre**

17. A launch event for Phase II of the 'Art in the Yards' project took place on 18th June 2009 and saw six additional pieces of artwork added to the existing outdoor gallery in Buckton's and Clark's Yards. 'Art in the Yards' is an award-winning joint initiative between this Council and Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College, which began in 2008, when five large pieces of art were installed in the yards. The aim of the project is to create an attraction, in order to encourage people to visit the yards. I was very pleased to launch the event which gave our partners the opportunity to meet the young artists and discuss their work.
18. I am very pleased to announce that Peter Stemmer, the Borough's Town Crier, has recently won a competition for the Best Dressed Town Crier. Peter was up against ten other Town Criars in the competition in Hull.
19. A second edition of 'Unique', the shopping guide promoting the specialist range of retailers in Darlington has been produced, featuring an exclusive Member's card scheme. The guide will be distributed to 26,000 homes in the region and gives town centre shops the opportunity to promote their businesses a wide audience.

**John Williams**  
**Leader and Economy Portfolio**