
LEADER AND ECONOMY PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW

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

One Darlington Perfectly Placed

2. Following the launch of the Sustainable Community Strategy, ‘One Darlington: Perfectly Placed’ the Darlington Partnership has revised its governance structures to give weight to delivery. I chair the new Partnership Executive and this has met twice. Key objectives for the first meetings have been ensuring that theme group chairs are developing robust delivery plans, and encouraging all partners to identify resources that can support those plans.
3. One of the themes contained within the Strategy demonstrates a strong commitment in its statement of ‘supporting independent traders and pursuing a viable future for Darlington’s historic markets’. In order to support this theme, a number of outdoor markets, additional to the traditional Monday and Saturday general markets have been piloted and approval was given by Cabinet, for those markets to continue. The range and quality of those markets was a principal factor in Darlington being awarded national recognition as the UK ‘Market of the year (Special Attractions) Award 2008’.

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4. Over the summer the Multi Area Agreement (MAA) was signed for the Tees Valley. One of the first in the country and receiving widespread praise for its ambition and focus, the Agreement should help the five authorities to deliver their agreed investment priorities more efficiently than under previous arrangements.
5. This is critical in the light of current significant financial difficulties being felt across the country. Housebuilding has been particularly badly hit and pressures are being felt by households across Darlington. The pressures also impact on the Council – rising energy costs, increased benefits applications and housing advice requests are all being felt. The Council is working with its Tees Valley neighbours to assess the impact in the sub region.
6. The Feethams and Markets Working Group met for the first time on 2nd September, 2008. This was an apt time to thank contributors for their involvement, particularly the Chair, Alasdair MacConachie. A Planning and Development Brief for the two sites to the east and west of Feethams has been developed with extensive consultation, and we have a ambitious vision for a revitalised Covered Market. It is recognised that such ambition is entirely in keeping with One Darlington, but that we will need to be realistic about the timeframe within which the resources will be secured to deliver the vision. Future work on this will be

driven by the Town Centre Board.

7. At the meeting of the Town Centre Board held in September a presentation was given by a representative of the Civic Trust on 'The Night Vision – Purple Flag', which will be the new 'gold standard' for entertainment and hospitality zones at night. The Board were updated on the current work relating to Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change in Darlington, the establishment of the Traders' Association and received feedback on the Summer Programme of Events and the Summer Market Spectacular. The Summer Market Spectacular was held in August and saw the Town Centre filled with more than 300 stalls and proved to be a great success despite the devastating fire at the Kings Head Hotel, which brought disruption to much of the Town Centre, during the event.
8. Work will shortly commence on a series of initiatives to improve Darlington Town Centre, which includes improvements to signage promoting businesses in Buckton's and Clark's Yards, the purchase of additional Christmas lights for Duke Street, the provision of wall mounted cigarette bins and the provision of plaques for the Water Feature, Joseph Pease Place and the Life Pulse.
9. The jute bags initiative is spreading out of the indoor market throughout the retailers of the town centre. Several independents are now selling them but national shops such as House of Fraser and Boots are also offering them for sale to their customers.
10. A new Darlington Business Information Guide is being circulated to businesses in Darlington. This comprehensive source of information for businesses can be easily updated and has been well received. The guide will be available on the Council's website at www.darlington.gov.uk/business

John Williams
Leader and Economy Portfolio