
OVERVIEW OF PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Place Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

Work Programme 2013/14

2. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2013/14 and possible review topics and in doing so, we have taken into account the reduced resources available within the Authority and ensured that, in recommending our work programme to Monitoring and Co-ordination Group, that any work we undertake will have demonstrable outcomes and contribute to the work of the Council and its strategic aims and objectives. Following discussion Scrutiny Committee agreed to update its Work Programme to reflect the decisions of the Committee. We will seek specific updates on on-going projects particularly the Economic Strategy, the Car Parking Strategy and the Local Plan in this Municipal Year. We also hope to contribute to work on the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Civic Theatre Restoration

3. We received a very informative presentation, from Theatresearch, on the restoration of the Civic Theatre. It was outlined that the challenge facing Darlington Borough Council was to ensure the Civic Theatre was preserved in all its Edwardian splendour, to equip it to receive the best shows on tour and to ensure that audiences have a wonderful experience from the moment they enter the Theatre.
4. We were advised that in order to achieve this goal it was intended to try to extend the footprint of the theatre. This would provide better facilities and access for audiences and also create improved technical facilities back stage, which would allow the Council to bring in bigger shows and make the theatre more successful than ever before
5. We were advised that the Civic Theatre was an important part of Darlington's heritage, there are only around 60 such buildings in use as a Theatre in the UK, and that this point would be very strongly put forward within the Stage 1 Application for Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) bid. HLF funding was being sought to provide facilities to support education and activity space for all ages, provide opportunities to raise heritage awareness throughout the building and deliver an improved customer experience which would encourage repeat visits. Some ideas being considered are radical but it is hoped they embrace the heritage.

6. The building has to work harder and service the public quickly at all times during the show, circulation around the building needs improving, a lift needs to be installed, and better facilities need to be provided backstage for all performers.

Local Plan Consultation - Feedback

7. We received a presentation on the Darlington Local Plan Making and Growing Places Preferred Options Consultation Feedback. The consultation period was from 21 June to 9 August and during that time over 8000 letters and e-mails were sent out, events were advertised in the June and July editions of the Darlington Together magazine, over 15 public consultation events and stakeholder events were held, Officers attended community group meetings and Councillors' views were sought. Consultation events were largely well attended with many views put forward – about 400 e-mail/written responses have been received so far from both local and non-residents, editorials have appeared in the Northern Echo and the Darlington and Stockton Times and Members have recently attended a Workshop Event. Many of the comments received related to the process used, the amount of housing stock needed, the location of future housing developments and the larger sites outlined for such development. Other issues discussed included the Town Centre Fringe, Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation, employment land, playing fields and open spaces and accommodation for older people.
8. Place Scrutiny Committee is to hold a special meeting on 31 October to give consideration to all responses and consider the next steps.

Refuse Collection (Wheeled Bins) Review Group

9. We have concluded our Review established to examine the introduction of wheeled bins in the Borough. Interim findings and recommendations were approved by Cabinet in February and Scrutiny have now approved findings and recommendations to forward to Cabinet. Place Scrutiny Committee hope to monitor recycling rates, fly tipping, replacement wheeled bin costs and general operational costs in 2014.

Cultural Provision Review Group

10. The Review Group held a further meeting during July following the announcement of the end of Project Vane. The Group was advised that consultations with local people and the arts community were being undertaken by the Council working with Darlington for Culture to determine how the money from the sale of the Arts Centre should be spent. A further meeting will be held in October, at which Darlington for Culture is to be invited, to give consideration to the consultations.
11. Since the last meeting of Council, I have attended :-
 - (a) Various meetings with Officers.
 - (b) Joint briefings with Officers and Portfolio Holders.

Councillor Dorothy Long
Chair of Place Scrutiny Committee