

DARLINGTON ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

25th September, 2006

PRESENT – Councillor Harker (in the Chair); The Mayor; Councillors Hartley, Lawton, Newall and S. Robson. (6)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor F.S. Robson.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Lewis, D. Lyonette and Ruck. (3)

Officers Attending – The Assistant Director Public Protection, The Countryside Rights of Way Officer; and the Service Development Manager within the Development and Environment Department; and the Head of Communications within the Chief Executive's Department.

Representing Outside Organisations –

Alzheimers Disease Society –
Mr. J. Rodwell

Darlington and Teesdale Naturalists Field Club –
Mr. B. Denham

Darlington Senior Citizens Association –
Mrs. P. Eastwood

Durham Wildlife Trust –
Mr. C. Evans

Friends of the Earth –
Mrs. L. McGee

Groundwork West Durham and Darlington –
Mr. N. Potter

Soroptimist International Darlington -
Mrs. D. Thomson

Whinbush Residents Group –
Mr. K. Fridd

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – Councillors Lewis and S. Robson declared a personal interest in Minute 15 below, as Members of the Rights of Way Access Steering Group and took no part in the discussion thereon.

12. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Forum held on 19th June, 2006.

IT WAS AGREED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

13. MATTERS ARISING – With regard to Minute 5/Jun/06, a Member informed the Forum that Groundwork were presently working with the Friends of North Park and work was progressing well.

14. THE GREEN FESTIVAL – Pursuant to Minute 6/Jun/06, the Vice-Chair, Mr. Cliff Evans, Durham Wildlife Trust gave a verbal report on the Green Festival which had been held on Sunday, 16th July, 2006 in the South Park. It was generally felt that the event had been a success in helping to publicise the Local Nature Reserves, public footpaths and involving other organisations to show Darlington as a ‘Green’ Town. However, as this had been the first event of this kind, there were some lessons to be learnt for next time, particularly with regard to better advance notice of the event and whether this had been the best time of year to hold an event of this kind.

IT WAS AGREED – That a Green Festival be held in 2007 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Officer take this forward.

15. UPDATE ON THE COUNTRYSIDE STRATEGY – ‘PEOPLE AND NATURE IN DARLINGTON’ – Pursuant to Minute 8/Jun/06, the Director of Development and Environment submitted a report to inform Members of the need to begin a process of reviewing the Council’s existing Countryside Strategy ‘People and Nature in Darlington’ with the purpose of bringing the strategy up to date and making it more relevant for current needs. The review process will involve extensive consultation and will form a key element of the Council’s strategic documents for Darlington’s outdoor environment.

The submitted report also highlighted the aim of the Countryside Strategy taking into consideration the National and International Context; national policy including issues affecting climate change and sustainability; related issues that derive from Darlington’s Community Strategy; legal changes including legislation on protected species and countryside access; and the public’s own changes in lifestyles, their expectations and desires. It is anticipated that the new Countryside Strategy will be ready for full Council approval in the autumn of 2007 and this forum will receive a further report and presentation at the meeting scheduled for 11th December, 2006.

IT WAS AGREED – That Members approve the review of the Council’s Countryside Strategy and note further reports will be brought to the Forum at key stages of the review.

16. FEETHAMS DEVELOPMENT – TESCO PROPOSAL – The Chair introduced Michelle Lindsay and Lucy Raines, Karol Marketing and the Assistant Director of Public Protection, the Service Development Manager and the Head of Communications who were all present to present the proposal from Tesco’s to develop the Feethams site of the town centre.

Michelle Lindsay of Karol Marketing introduced herself to the Forum Members and outlined her role as the independent facilitator for the Council’s consultation programme on the development proposal and the need for a thorough consultation process. Members were advised that this was the beginning of the process and that the initial consultation process was to determine whether the community of Darlington felt that the proposals should be taken forward to the planning stage, when impact assessments would be undertaken as part of the planning application process.

Members of the Forum were advised on the 'Vision' for the Town Centre and the need to decide whether this proposal will add to, strengthen or detract from that vision; the key elements to developing a Town Centre; and the wide range of projects within the Town Centre Business Plan currently being undertaken including the Commercial Street development, the Pedestrian Heart Project and support for independent retailers and market traders. Members were also shown a conceptual view of the Town Centre to show the distinct functional zones linked together by the Pedestrian Heart and a view of the development by Tesco's which includes a 10,500 m² Supermarket, 750 space car park, 130 apartments on 3 sides of the development, a 380 space roof car park for Council staff and residents and a petrol filling station at the west end of Beaumont Street car park. Members were advised that the Town Centre Development Strategy had identified the Feethams area as a site for a mixed development of housing, office accommodation and leisure. The presentation also highlighted the potential benefits of the development and the potential risks.

Following the presentation, the representatives from the outside organisations organised themselves into small groups to discuss various questions put to them by the facilitators relating to the proposal and then feedback was given to the Forum, followed by a question and answers session.

The Chair expressed his thanks to the Panel of Officers, Karol Marketing and the Members of this Forum for their participation in the consultation process.

IT WAS AGREED – That the views of the Forum be noted.

17. QUESTIONS – There were no questions raised.