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**LEADER'S OVERVIEW**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work that I have undertaken as Leader :-
  - (a) **Corporate Assessment** – This Council's on-site Corporate Assessment, which was undertaken during the week commencing Monday, 11th October 2004. The initial judgement was that we were 'good'. The Council have been in contact with the Audit Commission who have now agreed that we are able to appeal. The Appeal Team have been appointed and will be on site on 31st January 2005.
  - (b) **Eastbourne Comprehensive School** – It is pleasing to report that the fortunes of Eastbourne School have undergone a remarkable turnaround. The success has been achieved through teamwork and hardwork. A collaborative link was established with Hurworth Comprehensive School and this has proved to be valuable. Eastbourne Comprehensive School has now been taken out of special measures and this has been achieved much earlier than had been anticipated.
  - (c) **Darlington Town Centre 'Pedestrian Heart'** – Following the extensive consultation exercise undertaken for the Darlington Town Centre 'Pedestrian Heart' scheme, we agreed the design. This will be submitted for Conservation Area Consent, Listed Building Consent and Planning Applications – the public will of course be consulted again during the process of these applications. It was proposed that the transport issues resulting from the scheme would be considered by Cabinet at a later date in the light of any objections to the Traffic Regulation Orders. The funding from One NorthEast of £3.25 million has also been secured which should allow the scheme to commence during 2005. However, this is not just about pedestrianisation it is part of the overall Town Centre redevelopment which has the overwhelming support of our partners. This will provide Darlington with a Town Centre fit for the 21st Century.
  - (d) **Citizens' Priorities – Results from the 2004 Community Survey** – We considered the results from the 2004 Community Survey at the meeting of Cabinet held on 14th December, 2004. These results are already being used to inform the work of the Council in business and service planning, the review of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan, and the work with our partners through the Darlington Partnership. The survey is, therefore, key to determining the future of Darlington.

I am pleased to say that the results from the survey show that more people than ever are satisfied with the way the Council is running the Borough. Residents are particularly impressed with street lighting, refuse collection, upkeep of the Town Centre, the Civic Theatre and town centre security, including CCTV. The Council's kerbside collection

service achieved the biggest rate of improvement with 80 per cent of residents saying they were satisfied and only ten per cent not satisfied. However, we are by no means complacent about these results and we will continue to work hard to improve.

- (e) **Commercial Street** – The proposed shopping complex for the Commercial Street area of the town centre is now ‘back on track’. There has been a great deal of interest in the site and four companies have now been shortlisted for the next stage of the process. This means that they now have two months to put together their proposals. The development will be good for the town centre and will help re-affirm the town as a major retail centre in the region.
- (f) **Darlington Partnership Board** – I attended the meeting of the Darlington Partnership Board held on 12th January, 2005, at which a presentation on the Northumbrian Water ‘Investing in People’ initiative was given. Reports were also presented on the Connexions Tees Valley and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Audit.
- (g) **Town Centre Board** – I chaired the meeting of the Town Centre Board held on 20th January, 2005, at which presentations were given on tourism and the Feethams site. Reports were also received on the ‘Pedestrian Heart’ scheme, Business Improvement Districts, Commercial Street, the Disability Discrimination Act and evaluation reports on the Christmas Events/Campaign and the French Market.
- (h) **Dodmire Nursery School** – I attended the official opening of the new Dodmire Nursery School on Monday, 29th November, 2004.
- (i) **Tees Valley Partnership** – I attended the meeting of the Tees Valley Partnership on Monday, 29th November, 2004.
- (j) **Director of Children’s Services** – The interviews for the new post of Director of Children’s Services were held on Tuesday, 30th November, 2004, and I was on the interview panel. Margaret Asquith, who is currently Director of Social Services was appointed to the post and I am sure that the Council would join with me in congratulating her and wishing her all the best in her new role.
- (k) **Resources Scrutiny Committee** – I attended a Special meeting of the Resource Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 6th December, 2004. The meeting had been called to consider the call-in of the Town Centre ‘Pedestrian Heart’ scheme.
- (l) **West Park Hospital** – Together with the Chief Executive, I toured the new Hospital on the West Park site, which provides superb new facilities for mental health care in Darlington and beyond. Members will recall that this was part of a very successful development partnership between the private sector, the Priority Trust, the Rugby Club and the Council.
- (m) **Budget Briefing** – I attended a briefing meeting on the review of the Medium Term Financial Plan, given by the Director of Corporate Services.

- (n) **Darlington Assembly** – The Darlington Assembly was held on Friday, 14th January, 2005, which I attended. The theme of the meeting was Health and, yet again, it proved to be a very successful meeting with full attendance. The findings of the meeting will feed into the Community Strategy and Health delivery here in Darlington.

**Councillor John Williams, Leader**