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**OVERVIEW OF REGENERATION AND PLANNING PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work that have been undertaken under the Regeneration and Planning Portfolio :-
  - (a) **Darlington Economic Regeneration Strategy** – Cabinet gave consideration to the 2004/05 to 2008/09 economic regeneration strategy provisionally entitled ‘Gateway to Economic Quality’ and referred it to Council for approval. This strategy is to replace Darlington’s five-year economic regeneration strategy ‘For a Brighter Future’ which has guided activity in Darlington since 1999 and enabled a considerable amount of external funding to be levered in. The new proposed strategy will outline the actions required to meet the Economy aim of the Darlington Community Strategy and has been developed through the Darlington Partnership building upon the views of all key partners. It has also been developed in line with other key sub-regional and regional strategies such as the Regional Economic Strategy and the Tees Valley Vision and will reflect the contribution made to them by the Darlington economy.
  - (b) **Single Regeneration Budget 2004/05** – Cabinet approved the release of capital funds secured from the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) for 2004/05, other external contributions and the Council’s contribution to those projects. Capital projects due to be undertaken during this financial year include Traffic Management, Learning Intranet, Town Centre Initiative Phase 2, creation of a ‘Doorstep Green’ for the Firthmoor Community and Environmental Action.
  - (c) **Risk Management Work** - The Council had been shortlisted for an award in the partnership working category at the Association of Local Authority Risk Management (ALARM) Awards. The submission highlighted a good partnership working in the area of risk management between the Council's Building Control Section and the Fire Service. The submission was Highly Commended at the awards held on 28 June 2004 at its annual conference in Manchester.
  - (d) **The Tees Valley Investment Strategy (TVIS)** - The Darlington element of the TVIS has been submitted through the Tees Valley Partnership. The TVIS represents the future funding requirements of the sub-region to enable the delivery of outcomes identified in the Tees Valley Vision. The TVIS will be used primarily as a lobbying document for Government as well as representing the funding priorities for Single Programme and other sub-regional funding programmes. The Darlington element of the TVIS reflected the Darlington Gateway concept and included the key physical developments planned over the next 5 to 15 years.

- (e) **North East Chamber of Commerce - Best for Business Award 2004** - Darlington Borough Council emerged as the winner of the popular award after impressing judges from the NECC with the support it provides to existing businesses and its proactive approach to raising the profile of the town as an attractive location for business investment. The Chamber's annual award recognises the commitment of the region's local authorities to business development with nominees having to undergo a range of checks and tests designed to examine their responses and skills relating to business development and support services. Besides assessing councils' overall approachability and efficiency, the checks also cover methods of communication, special projects for business and funding opportunities. "The standard of entries was particularly high, but Darlington stood out for its dynamic approach towards the development of new business opportunities," said George Cowcher, Chief Executive of the North East Chamber of Commerce.

The award was presented at the Chamber's Annual General Meeting at Ramside Hall on 8 June 2004.

- (f) **TIC Sunday Opening** - Information Darlington, the Council's Tourist Information Centre, is trialling Sunday Opening from 6th June until 17th October, the opening hours are 11.00am until 3.00pm. This extension to the opening hours is as a result of discussions with the Town Centre Manager and the retailers within the town, during which it was agreed that by opening Information Darlington the 'offer' on a Sunday would be enhanced. To date the response has been very positive, if not exceeded expectations, with people visiting to ask for tourist information and to purchase items. At the end of the trial period a decision will be made on whether to continue the Sunday opening based on the footfall and revenue potential.
- (g) **North East Tourism Strategy** - Since the Government devolved strategic responsibility for regional tourism to Regional Development Agencies, ONE have produced a draft North East Tourism Strategy for the region. This strategy is linked to the Regional Image Strategy and the Regional Economic Strategy. It will be supported by an action plan and will cover the period from 2004-2007, outlining the vision and providing a framework for the new structure of tourism within the region. The Strategy is currently out to consultation and the Economic Regeneration and Tourism Section is currently preparing a response to ONE on behalf of the Council.
- (h) **Major Projects Team** - The Principal Strategic Project Development Officer has taken up her position as leader of the newly established Major Projects Team within the Planning Services Section. The Team will provide a corporate/departmental approach to managing major development projects led by or involving the Council, for example Haughton Road, Pedestrian Heart, Faverdale and Commercial Street. The aim is to provide a more coordinated approach across the Council and to build on the excellent work already achieved in attracting and implementing major investment schemes in Darlington.

- (i) **Walking Festival** - Darlington's first walking festival has been organised by the rights of way service of the Council in partnership with local walking groups and is scheduled for the weekend of 21 August 2004. The festival includes short doorstep walks aimed at improving health to longer countryside walks celebrating some of Darlington's best kept natural secrets. To celebrate the weekend there is a family treasure hunt around the Cockerton area starting from Cockerton Methodist Chapel on the Saturday Evening at 7.00 pm.
  
- (j) **Countryside Management Services Annual Report** - The annual report by the North East Community Forest (The Tees Forest parent organisation) Countryside Management Services, has been produced reviewing last years activities. It has been a very impressive first year with large numbers of volunteers and people drawn from the intermediate labour market carrying out practical conservation management on Darlington's nature reserves and rights of way. A total of 746 volunteer days were provided in this way bringing in an equivalent of £44,760 of added value at £60 per day per volunteer.
  
- (k) **Firthmoor Fishing Pond** - Contractors have resumed work on the Firthmoor fishing ponds and local nature reserve. This very exciting project managed jointly by the countryside service and a steering group specially set up by Firthmoor residents is on schedule for completion by the end of this year. It will provide 8 hectares of quality countryside and premier fishing ponds right on people's doorsteps.
  
- (l) **West Park** - The main features that promise to make Darlington West Park a much valued site for visits long into the future are now in place. This new public country park, due for opening in June 2005, now has most of the physical features in place including a central circular enclosure, four stone sculptures and a network of paths that thread their way through the 40,000 newly planted native trees.

**Councillor David Lyonette**  
**Regeneration and Planning Portfolio**