
LEADER AND EFFICIENCY AND RESOURCES PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW

1. This is my first report as Leader and I want to take this opportunity to take stock of where I see the Council going and reflect on what has been delivered by my predecessor.
2. First of all I want to put on record my thanks and admiration for the work of Bill Dixon, who worked tirelessly as Leader through a most challenging period. His great leadership in making really tough decisions to make the Council financially sustainable means we are in a far better financial position than Bill faced as Leader in 2011.

Looking Back

3. There have been tough decisions taken during the last 3 years. However it is worth reflecting on the many great successes the Council has achieved in that period over and above achieving financial sustainability. Set out below are some highlights:-
 - (a) Improvements made in services for children in Darlington. This was a great Council wide success but the Children's team made it happen on the ground. Children in Darlington will get a better start in life now we have improved our services.
 - (b) Darlington Hippodrome refurbishment – another success story. The addition of a flagship venue for Theatre Hullabaloo, a pioneering organisation that makes, tours & promotes theatre for young audiences, aged 0 – 16 years adds to the facilities on offer in Darlington, where creativity and play are at the heart of the venue.
 - (c) We have built 170 new Council homes over the last 3 years. There is a great need for quality, affordable housing and I am very proud that Darlington Council are building such great new homes for Darlington people. I only wish the government would remove the restrictions on the Housing Revenue Account that limits the amount of homes we can build.
 - (d) We have seen a significant changes in the way we support elderly people using our strength based approach to assessments we are now seeing more people supported at home and fewer in residential care.
 - (e) We have just completed a commercial deal to secure the relocation of the cattle market from the Town Centre facilitating the future regeneration of the Bank Top Station area and the development of an agricultural centre at

Humbleton Farm. Not least this will remove problems faced by residents for many years.

- (f) We have established a number of Joint Venture companies to deliver homes for sale in partnership with Esh Homes. Our first company is on target to deliver a pre-tax profit for the council in the region of £1m. More quality homes and much needed revenue to support Council services.
- (g) Regeneration projects at Central Park, Ingenium Park and Faverdale are progressing well, bringing employment and housing to Darlington.
- (h) Last, but by no means least, we have secured a significant inward investment at Synergy Park, a development that will bring between 2000 and 2500 jobs to the borough, which will help Darlington grow and prosper together with much needed extra business rates to help support Council services in the future.

Looking Forward

- 4. Below are some highlights I hope to see delivered in the future, which are able to happen due to the hard work we have already undertaken:-
 - (a) A new Council built office block in Feethams which will deliver new jobs and footfall to the Town Centre.
 - (b) A new masterplan for the Town Centre to support the changing face of town centres that will enable business to grow and adapt in Darlington. I hope that the House of Fraser will continue to be a significant player in the Town Centre.
 - (c) With the support of the TVCA, see the 2025 Tees Valley City of Culture bid develop with Railway Heritage at its heart. Part of the work includes the production of a business case to develop a major visitor attraction at the site of the Head of Steam, capable of attracting over 250,000 visitors per year.
 - (d) The implementation of the Neighbourhood Renewal strategy to help the most vulnerable in our community.
 - (e) To consulting and developing a new vision for the library service at Crown Street.
 - (f) See the finalisation of the Local Plan which will set out how the Borough will grow its economy to ensure sustainability for the Borough and its residents.
 - (g) See the investment in our new Community Safety team pay off which will help tackle some of our challenges such as ASB and issues in the private rented sector.
 - (h) I will be interested to see how our pilot contract with the private sector for litter enforcement works. I will be looking to hear the views of residents and businesses on how the pilot works before we make a final decision.

- (i) We will, like all Councils in the region, be working hard to understand why the numbers of Looked After Children are increasing at such a rate. We are putting in place new methods to identify Children who need help to avoid them needing to be brought in to care.
- (j) I await with interest the production of the outline business case on the Sports Village being produced by Mowden Park Rugby Club with financial support from TVCA. My aspirations for the village are that it can deliver great sustainability for many of our sports clubs and increase community use and access.
- (k) The planning and delivery of new houses both for sale and rent at the newly acquired Neasham Road site.

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Leader of the Council and Efficiency and Resources Portfolio