

Prosperity and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee

At the start of the year – when the Committee was considering which issues to include in its work programme – we had pretty much unanimous support to focus on the development of a low carbon economy in Sunderland. For this reason, and in view of the breadth of the issues involved, the Committee chose to make this the subject of its policy review for the year.

The development of the low carbon economy is a central component of the Sunderland Economic Masterplan – the document that sets out the blueprint for the future economic development of the city.

The Economic Masterplan identifies a number of important challenges that the City must overcome, in particular that Sunderland's economy remains too reliant on a narrow range of industries. The city has successfully moved from ships and coal to cars and contact centres, but does not have the variety of industries and career opportunities, nor the volume of well-paid jobs necessary to retain more of the younger population and to ensure a resilient economy.

The Committee chose to divide its study into two main themes:-

the low economy place - which encompasses the physical infrastructure and local projects aimed at reducing the city's carbon footprint and:

low carbon business - comprising ultra low carbon vehicles, offshore wind/energy generation and software city.

The study has involved the Committee taking evidence from and visiting some of the key players in the field – including Nissan, the University of Sunderland, the Chamber of Commerce, a number of the local IT firms based at the Council's new Evolve Centre and the Managing Director of the Port of Sunderland. We have also visited NAREC based at Blyth which is the national centre for the development and deployment of low carbon technology.

Our study has shown us that there are new opportunities for Sunderland in the low carbon economy, particularly given the identification of Sunderland as the focus for the North East Low Carbon Economic Area for Ultra Low Carbon Vehicles. This provides Sunderland with potential economic opportunities for the development and manufacture of new local carbon technologies (including electric vehicles) and low carbon building design and construction, sustainable transport choices and the development of new low carbon energy sources, particularly in terms of the national drive to develop offshore wind energy.

However, much still needs to be done and it is important that the impetus is maintained into the future in order that Sunderland can take full advantage of the potential benefits for the city.

Last year, the Committee was regularly consulted on the progress being made on the Council's Economic Masterplan. The Economic Masterplan was formally approved by the Council in July 2010 and once again the Committee had the opportunity to be consulted on its contents prior to its final approval.

A unique selling point for Sunderland is being a City by the Sea. The Committee was therefore consulted on and endorsed the draft Seaburn Masterplan. The Masterplan sets out key principles and parameters to guide the future redevelopment of Seaburn as a family focused resort offering high quality indoor and outdoor facilities for both residents and visitors.

The Committee has also monitored the progress being made in establishing the North Eastern Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). This body will bring together businesses and local authorities in order to set the strategy and vision of economic growth in an area. The North Eastern LEP proposal sets out a vision for the LEP area to become Europe's premier location for low carbon, sustainable, knowledge-based private sector growth and jobs. Again, we intend to closely monitor the development of the LEP in the year ahead.

All in all, another very busy and productive year for the Committee. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking my colleagues for all their hard work and enthusiasm and I feel sure that the progress we have made can be built upon in the year ahead.

Councillor Michael Mordey
Chair of the Prosperity and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee

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