

## Sunderland City Council

At an EXTRAORDINARY MEETING of SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL held in the CROWTREE LEISURE CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on WEDNESDAY, 4<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2008 at 5.30 p.m.

**Present:** The Mayor (Councillor M. Smith) in the Chair

Councillors	Anderson	E. Gibson	Rolph	Trueman
	Ball	P. Gibson	Scaplehorn	Wakefield
	Blackburn	Gofton	J. Scott	Walker
	Charlton	Heron	D. Smith	Wares
	I. Cuthbert	Kelly	P. Smith	P. Watson
	M. Dixon	Peter Maddison	Snowdon	S. Watson
	P. Dixon	Mordey	Speding	Whalen
	Ellis	O'Connor	Stephenson	A. Wilson
	Errington	Old	Symonds	D. Wilson
	Fletcher	Oliver	Tate	Wood
	D. Forbes	I.J. Richardson	Timmins	N. Wright

### Also Present:-

Ms. Lillie	Community Spirit
Ms. Lavender	Community Spirit
Ms. Fambely	Community Spirit
Mr. Beck	Community Spirit
Ms. Reay	Community Spirit
Ms. Haswell	Community Spirit
Mr. Normington	Community Spirit
Ms. Leightley	Community Spirit
Mr. Dunn	Community Spirit
Mr. Robson	Community Spirit
Ms. Errington	Community Spirit
Mr. Bate	Community Spirit
Ms. Middleton	Community Spirit
Ms. Maddison	Community Spirit
Ms. O'Halloran	Community Spirit
Mr. Rose	Community Spirit
Mr. Anderson	Community Spirit
Ms. Casson	Community Spirit
Ms. Sullivan	Community Spirit
Mr. Gatrell	Community Spirit
Mr. Rafferty	Community Spirit
Mr. Hands	Community Spirit
Mr. Watt	Community Spirit
Ms. Hutchinson	Community Spirit
Ms. Trueman	Community Spirit
Mr. Vickers	Community Spirit

Ms. Hunt	Community Spirit
Ms. P. Hewitt	Community Spirit
Mr. Smith	Community Spirit
Mr. Dykes	Community Spirit
Ms. Ward	Community Spirit
Mr. Young	Community Spirit
Ms. Blair	Community Spirit
Ms. S. Hewitt	Community Spirit
Ms. Williamson	Community Spirit
Mr. Jack	Community Spirit
Ms. Stiles	Community Spirit
Mr. Calvert	Community Spirit
Mr. Hepplewhite	Community Spirit
Mr. O'Connor	Community Spirit
Ms. Spence	Community Spirit
Mr. Holt	Community Spirit
Ms. Robertson	Community Spirit
Mr. Escott	Community Spirit
Ms. Lawson	Community Spirit
Ms. Hauber	Community Spirit
Ms. P. Walker	Community Spirit
Ms. K. Walker	Community Spirit
Mr. Durrans	Community Spirit
Mr. Bell	Community Spirit
Dr. Abbas	Sunderland City Council
Mr. Amin	Sunderland City Council
Mr. Barrett	Sunderland City Council
Miss Baxter	Sunderland Youth Parliament
Ms. Blacklock	WBI Provider Network
Ms. Bland	City of Sunderland College
Mr. Bowman	Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority
Ms. Carruthers	Sunderland Echo
Ms. Clark	DIAG and Sunderland and South Tyneside ME/CFS Support Group
Mr. Clift	Grand Central Railway Company Limited
Miss Collins	Sunderland Youth Parliament
Ms. Crawford	STPCT
Mr. Dobson	Sunderland City Council
Dr. Fagbemi	University of Sunderland Chaplainry
Mr. Fenwick	Sunderland Youth Parliament
Miss Gordon	Sunderland Youth Parliament
Mr. Hamilton	Grand Central Railway Company Limited
Ms. Hardy	Sunderland City Centre Management
Ms. Harries	City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust
Ms. Healey	Healthy City Partnership
Ms. Hopper	Sunderland Youth Parliament
Miss Horsburgh	Sunderland Voluntary Sector Youth Forum
Mr. Jennings	Audit Commission

Mr. Jones	Sunderland Youth Parliament
Mr. Kilner	Sunderland Youth Parliament
Mr. Lawson	Nexus
Ms. Leung	Chinese Community Representative
Mr. Lowes	Sunderland City Council
Miss Matterson	Sunderland Youth Parliament
Ms. May	Sunderland Partnership
Ms. McDonough	Sunderland Council for Voluntary Service
Mr. McEldon	Tyne and Wear NHS Trust
Mr. Moore	Sunderland City Council
Mr. Murray	Sunderland City Council
Mr. Ord	Sunderland Echo
Mrs. Phillips	Sunderland City Council
Ms. Piddington	Learning and Skills Council
Mr. Porter	Gentoo
Mr. Rayner	Sunderland City Council
Ms. Raine	City of Sunderland College
Mr. Revely	Sunderland City Council
Councillor Richardson	Hetton Town Council
Mr. Robertson	Sunderland Echo
Miss Russell	Sunderland Youth Parliament
Mr. Cheema	Sikh Association
Chief Inspector Sloan	Northumbria Police
Mrs. Smith	Safer City Partnership
Mr. Smyth	Government Office for the North East
Mr. Southern	Sunderland Youth Parliament
Councillor Steele	Hetton Town Council
Professor Swan	University of Sunderland
Mr. Taylor	University of Sunderland
Ms. Taylor	Sunderland ARC
Ms. Truma	Houghton Racecourse Forum
Mr. D. Walker	Sunderland ARC
Mr. J. Walker	Gentoo
Mr. Weshray	Sunderland Youth Parliament
Mr. Bartholomew	Sunderland City Resident
Mrs. Bartholomew	Sunderland City Resident
Mr. Bonellie	Sunderland City Resident
Mr. Burke	Sunderland City Resident
Mrs. Burke	Sunderland City Resident
Mr. Charlton	Sunderland City Resident
Mr. Cook	Sunderland City Resident
Mr. Duncan	Sunderland City Resident
Mr. Grainger	Sunderland City Resident
Mr. Gray	Sunderland City Resident
Mrs. Gray	Sunderland City Resident
Mr. Jelson	Sunderland City Resident
Mrs. Matthews	Sunderland City Resident
Mr. Major	Sunderland City Resident

Mr. McAllister	Sunderland City Resident
Mr. McQuillan	Sunderland City Resident
Mr. Morris	Sunderland City Resident
Mr. Pardy	Sunderland City Resident
Mr. Price	Sunderland City Resident
Mr. Purvis	Independent Party
Ms. Reed	Sunderland City Resident
Mrs. Thompson	Sunderland City Resident

## **Notice**

The Notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

## **Welcome by the Mayor**

The Mayor, Councillor Mary Smith, welcomed those present to the City Council's seventh Annual State of the City Debate. She welcomed all guests, Council Members, members of the Sunderland Partnership and Ambassadors for the City then briefly outlined the programme for the debate. She advised that there would be some presentations followed by an hour and a half of "question time" debate.

## **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

## **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Allan, Arnott, Bell, Chamberlin, Copeland, A. Cuthbert, Fairs, M. Forbes, Foster, Francis, A. Hall, G. Hall, Howe, Leadbitter, Paul Maddison, L. Martin, T. Martin, Miller, Morrissey, D. Richardson, I.J. Richardson, J.B. Scott, Shattock, P. Smith, Tye, Vardy, Wake, J. Walton, L. Walton, A. Wright and T. Wright.

## **State of the City Debate**

The debate was facilitated by Richard Moss, Political Editor, BBC North East and Cumbria. Richard welcomed those present and advised that the panel for the evening were people who were jointly responsible for many of the things that kept the City and the Region going on a day to day basis – from looking after our health to keeping the streets safe and to running the University. Most importantly, they were responsible for the future of the City – ensuring that the City continues to thrive and grow.

## **Keynote Speech**

### **Councillor P. Watson, Leader of the Council**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Paul Watson, presented a keynote speech at this, his first State of the City event as Leader of the Council. In his address he spoke of the range of activities that had been seen across every area of City life in Sunderland during the previous twelve months.

He proceeded to mention some of the highlights and, most importantly, the results of some of the work done by the City Council and Partners represented on the panel.

He advised that it was traditional at these events to talk about the achievements, such as the opening of Sunderland Aquatic Centre – a twenty million pounds investment in world class swimming, diving and wellness facilities.

The Council had achieved huge successes in school attainment in 2007, with eleven year olds achieving their best ever national test results. Also a record forty five percent of them exceeded the required level in science.

While at A level standard, Sunderland students achieved the eighth best A level results in the country.

He remarked that investment in schools continued, with three groundbreaking Sunderland Model Academies and further, major capital investment into the Building Schools for the Future programme. Oxclose School in Washington was one of the first schools in the programme to be opened in the country, and a contract had recently been signed for a further one hundred million pounds worth of investment in both the refurbishment of existing schools and the building of new ones.

In relation to crime, the Leader stated that the whole City could be extremely proud of its efforts to reduce crime – Sunderland's crime rate had reportedly been below the national average since 2006, and in the past year had reduced even further.

He advised that each community in Sunderland now has its own dedicated Neighbourhood Policing Team, patrolling neighbourhoods to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour, promote public safety and keep a visible, reassuring presence in the area.

In relation to employment, Sunderland continued to uphold its excellent record in delivering job opportunities, despite challenging global economic conditions. For example, Sunderland had supported the creation of six thousand jobs in the City during the past four years, including Nissan's recent announcement of a further eight hundred jobs. Furthermore, Doxford Park continued to flourish and the new business park at Rainton Bridge was also taking shape with the award-winning e.volve building already supporting new and developing businesses.

He reported that a recent Ofcom survey said that Sunderland was the best connected City for broadband in the country with the highest take up of digital technology. Sunderland Council were pleased to have played a part in this – he emphasised that winning the UK's Digital Challenge last year was testament to the work the Council did to enable more people to benefit from new technology.

In addition, with the help of ONE NorthEast Sunderland Council launched a new industry for the City and are now developing plans for Sunderland Software City which exploits its potential as a world leader in manufacturing and exporting computer software.

The Leader explained that people comment upon the use of clean new technology which helps to protect the unique Sunderland environment. He expressed the view that the City's location by the sea, on a river, and covered in acres of green space was one of Sunderland's best assets, which had been ranked fifth greenest city in a UK environmental study that included things like air quality, recycling rates and our overall ecological footprint.

Looking to the future, the Leader acknowledged that whilst things were improving, and Sunderland had much to be proud of, some significant challenges still lay ahead.

For example, almost one in four people in Sunderland lived in wards that were classed as the top ten per cent of the country's most deprived areas, and life expectancy for both men and women in Sunderland was lower than the national average.

The challenge the Council had set itself was to build upon the work done to date, by improving the services members of the partnership provide, all of which really make a difference to people's quality of life – and give them the opportunity of a better future in this City.

He explained that the Sunderland Strategy for 2008 to 2025 was being used as the blueprint for that better future.

The Leader then emphasised that it was of great importance to him personally, to the City Council and to its partners that they all listen to what people want. As such, hundreds of local people and a wide range of organisations in the City had been asked what they wanted for the City for the future. Their responses are the Sunderland Strategy

The Strategy has five themes. He briefly outlined each of these in turn:-

- **Creating a prosperous City.** To achieve this, objectives included creating twenty thousand new jobs and significantly increasing the number of business start-ups year on year. The City's physical transformation would also continue, with the completion of Sunnyside and other key sites;

- **Healthy City**, where goals included ensuring that life expectancy for Sunderland people is among the best in England. That smoking is significantly reduced; that many more children and adults participate in sport and physical exercise, and that far fewer older people be admitted to residential and nursing care, and instead have the help they need to live independently in their own homes - if that is what they want.
- **Safe and secure.** It is aimed that, by 2025, Sunderland will have its lowest-ever recorded crime rates, people will feel safe in their own neighbourhood and that anti-social behaviour, drug-related offending, and proven re-offending will all be at their lowest-ever levels;
- **Learning** where opportunities will be created for everyone no matter what their age. Children and young people will have their own personalised learning plans and the number of people who go on to higher education will increase. Learning also means ensuring that parents and carers have access to family learning and that the numbers of adults who have literacy and numeracy qualifications increase; and
- Creating an **attractive and inclusive** City, ensuring Sunderland becomes ever cleaner and greener and is known as a welcoming and attractive place to live, work, study or visit.

To achieve this, by 2025, all housing will meet the decent homes standard. There will also be a significant increase in the number of higher value homes, and there will be more common spaces for communities to share and a great range of cultural and leisure opportunities to enjoy.

People will have alternatives to travelling by private car, to ensure there are significant reductions in carbon emissions. In addition fifty per cent of all household waste will be recycled.

The Leader advised that Sunderland's Strategy was to become one of the best places to live in the country, which would be achieved by building on the great strength of working together as one City.

He reinforced the point that in the future it would be the people of Sunderland doing the talking and the Council who would be listening.

### **Stephen Taylor, Canon of the Minster and Chair of Sunderland Partnership**

Stephen Taylor acknowledged the Mayor, Leader, and honoured guests. He stated it was a pleasure to be in attendance as Chair of the Sunderland Partnership and to have the opportunity to talk about the positive changes that were taking place in the City.

He expressed the view that these were exciting times for Sunderland, as it looked towards delivering its new Sunderland Strategy, which sets out the vision for the City, based on what people have said they would like to see by 2025.

Firstly he took the opportunity to look back over the past year, to focus on and celebrate some achievements from across the City as a result of partnership working.

He said that Sunderland had a strong record of working in partnership, which had been recognised by Government Office for the North East, who had awarded the Sunderland Partnership the highest green rating for five consecutive years. The Audit Commission also recently visited the Sunderland Partnership to review how it operated so that others across the country could learn from how it does things. This reinforced the significant difference that partnership working makes in the City, and the progress that had been made in relation to achieving the ambitious targets that are set in relation to the City's priorities.

A few achievements were then outlined:-

- there had been major reductions in overall crime in the City,
- residents and businesses were recycling more of their waste than ever before and state of the art wellness facilities had been developed across the City,
- there had been fewer deaths caused by cancer, circulatory disease, heart disease and stroke,
- there was less unemployment, and
- more pupils had achieved five or more GCSEs grades A\*-C than ever before.

In addition, Sunderland were leading the rest of the country in embracing digital technology. It has the highest percentage of homes connected to Broadband internet and multi-channel digital television across the country.

He reported that these findings reflected the work that partners across Sunderland had done to enable people and communities to take advantage of the use of new technology in their every day lives. Year on year the City had been internationally recognised as one of the world's most IT Intelligent Cities and work was ongoing to build a reputation as a software city, as well as becoming the national leader of the Government's Digital Challenge programme.

Canon Taylor turned to the fact that in the past two State of the City events he had supported the ongoing campaign to promote the benefits of buying Fairtrade products, therefore he was delighted to announce that in October last year, Sunderland was officially awarded Fairtrade status from the Fairtrade Foundation. Sunderland was announced as the 300<sup>th</sup> Fairtrade area, an honour that was shared with the City of London.

He was pleased to see that so many people in Sunderland were showing awareness and concern for people in the developing world which was something for the City to be proud of.



He then went on to say that Sunderland residents and the City as a whole had many other qualities of which it should be rightly proud, and that this had formed the basis of the Partnership's new '**Proud of**' campaign. The campaign was about building on pride in the City's past and heritage, and learning more about its promising future.

He then drew attention to the new lamp post banners, which had been placed in and around Sunderland's City Centre and seafront, as well as the attractive postcards, which featured some of the City's highlights – from its blue flag beaches and fine parks and gardens, to famous landmarks like Penshaw Monument, and the Stadium of Light. Examples of the postcards were displayed at the event and had been included in the event packs.

Canon Taylor announced that as a City, it was recognised that the working age population was declining, and if it were unaddressed it would have a negative impact on some of the City's future aspirations. Partners across the City were working together to promote Sunderland and showcase the transformation the City has undergone, seeking to encourage ever more people to choose Sunderland as somewhere to locate their businesses, stay and start a business, come and work, as well as more general visitors to come and spend more time in Sunderland and benefit from what the City has to offer. The '**Proud of**' campaign was just one aspect of a wider, and longer term approach, involving all partners, to show what a great City Sunderland is.

People could expect a better future – a green, clean, safe city offering a balanced way of life. A city with everything people need. The Sunderland Partnership aim to retain and attract more residents, visitors, students, and more business into the City, which could only have a positive impact on the local economy, and thereby the lives of people in Sunderland.

The Sunderland Partnership TV network, which was launched last year had proved a great success in informing local people about the services and initiatives affecting their area, as well as highlighting the positive changes that were taking place in local communities. Canon Taylor hoped that many of those in attendance had got the chance to view the portable screen that had been playing in the exhibition area showcasing some of the messages that were being played directly into communities.

It was felt that demonstrating the changes that were already taking place across the City reinforced the exciting times that lay ahead as partners continued working together to achieve the shared vision to make Sunderland a place where more people will choose to make their home, to come to work, to study or to spend their leisure time.

In closing, Canon Taylor said he looked forward to working with partner organisations and residents across the City to build upon the significant successes that had already been achieved, as work continues to make the vision for the future a reality.

## **Margaret Fay, Chair of ONE NorthEast**

Margaret Fay began by explaining that ONE NorthEast was the body charged with developing the economy of the corner of England that starts in Redcar in Teesside and ends in Berwick at the Scottish border.

A key part of the role of the regional development agency was to examine the region's economic strengths and weaknesses so that something can be done to overcome the obstacles that hinder growth, and also, make the most of the region's assets.

Firstly, she touched on how the Government was reforming its approach to economic development so that places like Sunderland, its people and its businesses could continue to grow and prosper.

She reported that the work role of ONE NorthEast was varied and relied greatly on collaborations with partners such as local councils, strategic partnerships, universities and businesses to identify and agree priority projects and then pool expertise and resources to deliver in the most effective way.

Margaret advised that everything it does is aimed at growing the North East economy in a way that makes it sustainable and competitive over the long-term.

She highlighted that for many decades the North East was reliant on just a few, heavy industries which left a legacy of high unemployment, poor skills levels and the lowest economic output of any region in the UK.

It had taken time to recover from this and so part of ONE NorthEast's approach was to identify and invest in the next generation of businesses which was more 'knowledge intensive' and so less susceptible to global forces. She went on to state that at the same time work was underway to support existing firms and specific sectors where the region had particular strengths such as digital and automotive. This support included access to a greater range of business finance than ever existed before.

Some of these interventions were making a difference now, but others, like the work that was being done with universities to turn academic discoveries into new businesses and jobs, will take many years to bear fruit.

A multi-faceted approach is taken to tackling the region's economic challenges which will make a lasting difference to its growth.

She made reference to the global credit crunch which had cast a shadow over economies world-wide. The impact of this was already being felt in Sunderland with the sad news of job losses at Citigroup. Nevertheless, in recent years the North East economy had been performing well and it was important to note that Sunderland had played a key part in that.

Margaret stated that unemployment rates had also continued to come down and were currently at the lowest rate for a decade. Thus, as employment had risen, so had the number of people actively looking for work, with the amount of economically inactive people and 'workless households' in the region both falling. However, the North East still remained above the UK average for the number of workless households.

She made the point that people in North East England were also becoming healthier and living longer – although there was still a big gap in life expectancy compared to the South. Plus domestic energy consumption per person was the second lowest of all English regions and it also had the smallest ecological footprint. All of which had led to tentative signs of progress in terms of areas of multiple deprivation which had been an unwanted and lasting legacy for the North East.

Margaret advised that the region's business profile was also improving. For example, last year saw a huge leap in exports from North East England - £1bn more than in the previous year. In fact, the region was one of only five in the UK that exported more goods than it imported.

It had also been a strong year for inward investment with ONE NorthEast and its partners, which included Councils such as Sunderland, winning 64 new projects from overseas firms who had located in the region and created 2,000 new jobs.

She advised that in terms of physical regeneration there had been unprecedented levels of investment across all major cities in the region including Sunderland which the Leader had already touched upon. In terms of some of the statistics for the region, Margaret reported that it had better air, river and bathing water quality than most other regions of the UK, which may have had some bearing on the fact that the region was bucking the falling national trend for attracting visitors – with more than 8.6 million tourists coming to the North East last year – up by 7% in the last 5 years. Even attendance levels at cinemas, museums, libraries and archives were all on the increase which was due in part to the fact that it has a greater range and quality of cultural facilities than ever before.

She added that since 2000, Sunderland had experienced the strongest economic growth per head of all the Local Authorities in the region.

15% of jobs in Sunderland were in the manufacturing sector – a higher proportion than the regional or national averages. Much of that employment was in the automotive sector, which was one of the highest exporting industries in the region. Over 90% of Wearside's automotive sector production was exported out of the North East and was largely due to the continued success of Nissan. Plus, Monday's announcement that Nissan is to build another model at Sunderland is yet another vote of confidence in the Wearside plant and its fantastic workforce. ONE NorthEast has worked closely with both Nissan and the Government to help secure the investment which will continue the Sunderland factory's export success and cement the City's reputation as a leading location for high value, global manufacturing.

Furthermore, she reported that Sunderland was also the only district in the region that became more “self-contained” in terms of travel-to-work patterns between 1991 and 2001, which meant that people were more likely to live and work in Sunderland whereas in other districts they were travelling further to work than previously. This was a real positive, as the Sunderland workforce overall has lower travel-to-work times, which could result in lower fuel consumption and also carbon production.

Margaret raised the point that people living in Sunderland also buy in Sunderland and that research from the Bridges shows that 81% of shoppers are from the City and they are frequent and very loyal to Sunderland in every aspect. And with important new housing developments at Sunnyside, Stadium Village and Farringdon Row boosting local population numbers, the trend was likely to continue.

She advised that Sunderland’s population was also ageing. A third of the population was over 50 and in 20 years it would be a half. But rather than viewing this as a negative, Sunderland hoped to harness this and had ambitions to be recognised as an ‘age-friendly’ City by the World Health Organisation by providing housing, transport, and a City Centre layout that addresses the needs of an older population.

In relation to house prices, Margaret announced that in Sunderland they may have doubled in the past six years, which indicates an economy that has been on the up. Nevertheless, she stated that there were strong signs that the market was cooling and prices had just started to decline – which was the same picture across the region as it experienced a slowdown.

However in places with a higher proportion of manufacturing firms, like Sunderland, where manufacturers are benefiting from a relatively weak pound, the picture is less gloomy.

She advised that the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration which the Government published last summer, recommended reforms that would see more devolution from the Whitehall Centre to regions and localities. It recognised the need for economic interventions to be made at the right administrative level for that particular region in order to address its unique challenges.

Margaret then explained that how this worked in practice was being consulted upon, but essentially the review proposed that RDAs such as One NorthEast would have an enhanced strategic role in economic development and that local authorities would have an increased role in working across boundaries with neighbouring councils to deliver economic growth on the ground.

That would mean a greater alignment of a range of budgets, a clearer idea of who was responsible for delivery and a focus on achieving shared priorities. This would be greatly influenced by the development of a new single integrated regional strategy – which was a key reform outlined in the Sub-National Review.

ONE NorthEast would lead the production of the strategy which would set out the region’s economic, social and environmental objectives on areas such as housing, planning, economic development and transport.

It was Margaret's opinion that the Sub-National Review presented a real opportunity for the region, which must be seized. Particularly in Sunderland where such strong partnerships already exist and there is much to be gained.

Finally, she added that it was both a challenging and an exciting time for the North East and for cities like Sunderland.

Richard thanked the speakers for their presentations and invited them and other Panel members onto the stage to discuss any issues that were raised during the open debate. The Panel Members were:-

- Councillor Paul Watson, Leader, Sunderland City Council
- Margaret Fay, Chair, ONE NorthEast
- Canon Stephen Taylor, Chair, Sunderland Partnership
- Dave Smith, Chief Executive (Acting), Sunderland City Council
- Professor Peter Fidler, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, University of Sunderland
- Chief Superintendent Dave Pryer, Northumbria Police
- Dr. Hambledon, Director of Commissioning and Reform, Teaching Primary Care Trust

## **Questions**

Richard advised the meeting that, in total, 12 questions had been received regarding the seafront, but Community Spirit member, Mr. John Calvert had asked a general question that would hopefully cover everyone's concerns.

**Mr. John Calvert asked "What activities or enhancements were planned for the seafront?"**

Dave Smith responded that it was important that the people of Sunderland acknowledge and celebrate many activities already taking place at the seafront. He added that the Seafront Regeneration Project Group established in Autumn 2007 was looking at development and regeneration opportunities for the seafront over the next several years. Key objectives included improving the seafront's physical environment, increasing accessibility, identifying and promoting high quality development, improving the range and quality of facilities and attractions, and protection of the natural environment and historic character of Seaburn and Roker.

It was the intention of the Group to bring forward a series of options for wider discussion, with a view to informing the preparation of a masterplan to guide the sustainable development of the seafront over the long term.

Findings from the Community Spirit Summer Survey 2007 in addition to information gathered from a number of sources were integral to developing the options for the seafront. Ultimately an adopted masterplan would allow the Council to have greater control over developments at the seafront, would support applications for funding and help bring private sector investment contributions where appropriate.

Dave Smith advised that work was currently in the early stages and that the Council would endeavour to communicate any progress as realistic proposals are identified.

Councillor Paul Watson then stated that the Council and its partners recognised the value added and the potential offered by the seafront to making Sunderland a more attractive and inclusive City. The natural attractiveness of the seafront was an asset to the whole City and that whatever proposals come forward should be of a high quality and be sustainable long into the future.

**Ms. Jacky Owen asked “When would the Council actually enforce the byelaws at Seaburn concerning parking, drinking, alcohol, dog walking, poop scooping?” The byelaws are continually flouted by people thus encouraging others to do the same.**

Dave Smith responded advising that the majority of the public visiting the seafront behaved in a very responsible manner and actively supported the byelaws. He stated that the enforcement of byelaws at the seafront was taken very seriously. Resorts seasonal staff, for example, were very proactive in controlling the dog ban areas on the beaches. In addition, support was received from Environmental Services Neighbourhood Patrol Officers in enforcing the Dog Fouling of Land Act when necessary.

Overall, every effort was made to ensure that byelaws were adhered to, and in the case of the alcohol byelaws, support was often received from the community police.

Councillor Paul Watson then advised the meeting that the new number for the Neighbourhood Helpline was 0300 1000 101. This included Sunderland and Newcastle working together to launch a service that was available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week for problems that require a Council and not a police response, such as litter, noise nuisances, broken street lighting, graffiti or vandalism.

Margaret Fay added that Sunderland attracted many visitors and that ONE NorthEast were currently working with Sunderland Area Tourism Partnership and putting money into promoting Seaburn.

**Miss Diana Hauber asked “With the ‘Building Schools for the Future’ programme and the opening of the new Academies, would pupils in the remaining schools receive a standard of education equal to these, or will they be left behind? Would they have the same opportunities that these new places offer?”**

In response Dave Smith advised that Sunderland's Building Schools for the Future programme had always been planned as a partnership. He explained it was a transformational teaching and learning programme supported by buildings and state of the art ICT. Clearly, not all schools could be refurbished/rebuilt at the same time, but the educational transformation could take place across all schools.

The Sunderland Academy Model was specifically a partnership model. Academy partners had signed up to common ways of working with secondary schools to ensure that no group of young people had an unfair advantage over others.

Furthermore he stated that all schools would have the opportunity to adopt aspects of the managed ICT service early. This would give all schools access to the MIS (Management Information Service) and the PLE (Personalised Learning Environment) which would greatly enhance school management systems, and access to materials for students from any computer, anywhere.

The Council were constantly learning from local, national and international programmes about what worked best in terms of education design. It was hoped all secondary schools in Sunderland were in the BSF programme by 2011.

Professor Peter Fidler then added that a common 14-19 programme was in place across all secondary schools which allocated students access to all 10 new diploma lines (the most of any area of the North East), and a further range of courses at Sunderland's vocational skills centres at Harraton and Pallion. This greatly increased the choice of curriculum for all young people in the City, including young people from Sunderland schools who attend the centres.

Work was also underway with the City of Sunderland College, and work-based learning providers, to increase the curriculum offer. All secondary schools were encouraged to offer courses to students from other schools which was working very well, again encouraging a diverse and personalised approach.

Common professional development programmes had been organised across the City. The Head Teachers of all secondary schools had agreed a framework for the transformation of their own curriculum sharing common principles based on the latest national research.

A bespoke Masters Degree qualification was also being developed with Sunderland University, which would be offered to all Sunderland teachers. Its focus was on "excellence in teaching and learning".

**Mrs. Linda Middleton asked "What strategies the Council had devised and implemented to address the increasing problems with alcohol and drug use, particularly amongst the teenage and young adult population and the 'knock on' effects of this in terms of crime and health problems?"**

In response, Dave Pryer advised that Sunderland City Council was one of five responsible Authorities of the Safer Sunderland Partnership (SSP), others included Northumbria Police Authority, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority and Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust. The outcome of the Safer Sunderland Strategy was that everyone in Sunderland would be and feel safe and secure.

There were a variety of approaches that the SSP utilises to achieve its outcomes and they included the Drug Interventions Programme (DIP) which was a key part of the Government's strategy for tackling drug related crime.

In Sunderland an intensive programme was offered to ensure that individuals who commit acquisitive or drug related crime are assessed and referred into a range of drug treatment options in both a community and prison setting.

He went on to state that there was now a single point of contact for all treatment referrals for drugs and alcohol through the Engaging and Motivating Service accessible through the freephone number 0800 234 6798 and treatment was available for both drugs and alcohol users across the whole of the City at a range of venues including treatment services, G.P. surgeries, community centres, etc. The PCT have recently agreed additional funding to further expand the provision of alcohol services across mainstream services.

The Council worked closely with Supported Accommodation (North East Council for Addictions) and was the lead agency for the assessment and provision of Residential Rehabilitation in the City.

Dr. David Hambleton added that improving health was one of the Teaching Primary Care Trust's top six priorities. There was a strong focus on helping people make healthier choices around food, alcohol and drugs. He acknowledged that poor choices require treatment and although specialist teams exist, the NHS would be commissioning new services for people who misuse drugs and alcohol.

Mrs. Middleton responded that she was pleased the NHS were focusing more on alcohol than they did previously, and not only drug misuse. It was also pleasing to learn that services would be commissioned in, which she hoped would solve the problem of long waiting lists.

**Sunderland Youth Parliament member Misba Islam submitted a question asking "whether anything was going to be done about the improvement of parks and grassy areas around the City? There were many places which had a lot of potential and more sporting areas could be built on them".**

Councillor Paul Watson responded, advising that the City recently reviewed its Play and Urban Games Strategy, Moving Forward 2007-2012. The review involved the views and opinions of all residents, including DVD of evidence from children and young people City-wide.

The Council appreciate it has a long way to go to improve the quality and quantity of places to 'play and chill out'. That could be simply green spaces or equipped play areas or multi use games area. It was also acknowledged that young people want to 'feel safe', and that such sites need to benefit from informal oversight or improved lighting as appropriate, to enable access and safety all year round. Good walking and cycle routes were also required. However, the Strategy sets a standard that aims to provide every child and young person with a high quality play environment 1km from their door.



He added that over the last three years, 26 new or improved play provisions had been developed. The City specifically ensured that it involved children and young people in the location, design and development of the sites. 6 new play facilities totalling just short of £1m investment were currently being built, including multi use areas and environmental play areas.

Furthermore, Sunderland were one of just 20 Authorities to have recently been awarded £2.5m Play Pathfinder funds to further improve and develop informal play spaces for young people to enjoy and be active within.

A full consultation programme was planned to ensure children and young people have the opportunity to review plans and it was confirmed that the Youth Parliament would be invited to participate in this consultation process.

Councillor Watson promised that the Council would continue to ensure that there is full dialogue and involvement of children and young people throughout this process.

**Mr. Ronald Smith asked “What steps the City Council was taking towards urban regeneration?”**

Richard Moss suggested that, in answering this general question, the panel consider similar topics on which questions were also received, such as the future of the Vaux site, the land at Stadium Park and whether the City would be seeing any new hotels or bridges across the river?

Mrs. Pat Hewitt, Mr. Malcolm Vickers, Mr. Ronald McQuillan and Ms. Elaina Thompson all submitted questions about the Vaux site.

Dave Smith empathised with residents’ frustrations and advised that the Council and its partners were equally disappointed with the lack of progress on the Vaux site, which currently remains in the ownership of Tesco and was to a large extent tied up in that company’s legal challenges in the courts against the Secretary of State’s decision to grant planning permission for the arc proposals for the site. In addition Tesco had also challenged the Planning Inspector’s decision which did not allocate the site for major retail development. These challenges were not likely to be heard in the courts until towards the end of this year, at the earliest.

He added that Tesco had received an offer from English Partnerships who wished to buy the site to enable the arc scheme to go ahead and that negotiations in that respect were ongoing.

Furthermore the Council was in dialogue with agents regarding a possible proposal to redevelop the Sunderland Retail Park at Roker for a superstore as an alternative to the Vaux site.

Overall, he confirmed that to date discussions had been constructive and could therefore hold some promise that a positive outcome could help break the deadlock around the Vaux site.

He went on to state that whilst the circumstances around the Vaux site were unfortunate and needed to be resolved as soon as possible, they did not represent the regeneration picture for Sunderland as a whole. For example the progress to date in regenerating Sunnyside had been a tremendous success.

For example, Sunnyside Gardens recently won a prestigious regional regeneration award. Construction work on the former University property the Benedict Building, was ongoing and planning permission had been granted for Farrington Row Phase One to deliver offices, hotel and residential accommodation.

Major new employment projects continued to come forward at Doxford International, Rainton Bridge South and Turbine Park next to Nissan.

In addition, the Building Schools for the Future project, Sunderland Colleges development strategy and the University's master plan for both Chester Road and St. Peter's were all committed and ongoing.

Plus, work has recently completed on the Southern Radial Route and work was underway to secure funding for both the Central Route in the Coalfields Area and a New Wear Road Bridge.

In total these represent hundreds of millions of pounds worth of investment in Sunderland and developer interest continued to come forward, not only in the City Centre but across the whole of the City.

**Mrs. Gillian Hunt and Miss Rachel Harding wanted to know about Crowtree's future in the light of the new Aquatic Centre.**

Dave Smith advised that for those who were not aware, Crowtree Leisure Centre Pool and Wellness facility closed when the new Aquatic Centre and Wellness Centre were provided on Stadium Park. However he confirmed that all other facilities within Crowtree were to remain open for the foreseeable future. The Council had taken the decision to consider the best option available to provide all activities currently provided in Crowtree Leisure Centre. At this stage he was able to confirm that there were certainly no plans to close any other facilities and certainly not without providing replacement facilities.

He could, therefore, confirm that all other facilities such as the Sports Hall, Squash Courts and Bowls Hall would remain open to the public.

Councillor Paul Watson added that the Sunderland Aquatic Centre provided a ten lane 50m pool, a 25m training pool/diving tank, a Wellness Centre and supported a City-wide aquatic development plan that met modern day standards. The swimming programme offered not only performance related training facilities, but traditional swimming for the local community as well as a wide variety of fun and leisure sessions. The Council was also building two new area pools in Silksworth and Hetton.

He was of the opinion that the people of Sunderland would be happy to see more shops. He then went on to explain that the Council was keen to see the retail and leisure offer in the City Centre expand and diversify – providing more and better shops will help to retain existing customers and attract new shoppers into Sunderland.

He added that whilst there were current plans for a retail-led redevelopment of Holmeside the Council also needed to investigate what could be done to further its ambitions at Crowtree, in the longer term. Land Securities, the owners and managers of the Bridges had appointed a team to explore the potential for a mixed use development of shopping, leisure and residential, should the site become available to them.

**Mr. John Anderson enquired about a new hotel for the City and both Mrs. Anne Giles and Mr. Ronald McQuillan enquired about a new bridge.**

Councillor Paul Watson responded advising that the emerging master plan for Stadium Village made provision for at least one hotel to be developed. However the Council would look to the private sector to deliver this type of development and would promote and encourage the right quality of development.

In relation to a new bridge he advised that major infrastructure schemes of this nature took many years to bring to fruition and schemes such as this inevitably affect many interests, which need to be taken into consideration. Such schemes are also very dependent upon the availability of funds to pay for them and building a new bridge across the River Wear would be an expensive transportation project and the Council, like all others in the country, would rely upon Central Government to provide most of the money.

Margaret Fay added that in relation to a new hotel that the private sector must be involved and a commercial decision would need to be made. Nevertheless, she agreed there was a need for a new hotel.

**Mrs. Pauline Moore asked whether the large amount of apartments being built in Sunderland City Centre were suitable or affordable for many people i.e the Echo Office, Water Board, Post Office.**

Richard advised that similar questions had been received on this topic regarding affordable housing from Ms. Caroline McAllister and housing for older people from Ms. Aileen Sullivan.

Councillor Paul Watson advised that stabilising the City's population was a key regeneration issue for Sunderland. The City had lost 11,000 of its population between the 1991 and 2002 censuses and the trend continued downwards. He confirmed that the provision of the required number, quality choice of new housing stock would play an important part in helping to stabilise the population by reducing out-migration from Sunderland to other parts of the North East. To this end some 15,000 additional dwellings were planned for, up to 2021, in sustainable locations with 80% to be built on brownfield sites.

He went on to state that the Council's strategic housing objectives were to create a mixed and balanced housing market in the City and that having good quality affordable housing, whether for sale or rent, was paramount in achieving this objective.

Work was underway with Gentoo on their new developments and the ratio of housing for sale and rent was continually under review.

Furthermore, the Council were working closely with Gentoo on how people access their housing and confirmed that this would be the subject of policy changes in the near future.

It was envisaged a new residential population of around 10,000 people would be living in and around the City Centre by 2021. There were also aspirations to provide family housing in central Sunderland and sites for this type of accommodation were proposed in the next phases of the Farringdon Row development, on the Groves site and in the Tavistock area of Sunnyside.

Margaret Fay then stated that it was the developers who decided what they wanted to build and to them it must appear to be a viable business model. Research into demographic trends shows that household size is getting smaller and the proportion of elderly people in the population is increasing. City Centre apartments reflect these demographic changes as well as providing lifestyle choice for other parts of the population including younger professionals.

Dave Smith advised that the Council understood there was a high visibility of flats in Sunderland but stated that a substantial amount of other housing development was taking place across the City. He added that the Council would assist with this to be able to bring affordability issues forward. An ageing population meant the people of Sunderland had different needs and wants.

**Mr. Craig O'Connor wanted to know how the redevelopment plans were progressing in relation to the Castletown area.**

Dave Smith stated that development plans were progressing for Castletown and this week saw the demolition of yet another row of colliery terraces at Park Street South. A recent drop-in event had taken place for the community which was attended by well over 100 people and served to update people on progress with the master plan for the area.

He added a detailed Development Brief was being drafted setting out the type of housing that would replace the cleared collier houses and also the Aviary Estate. This was a joint venture taking place between all three partners (the Council, English Partnerships and Gentoo) to redevelop the area. The Council was continuing to acquire Colliery Terrace properties in the area and funding was in place to do this. Any construction of new housing would be subject to the land first being cleared and Planning Permission being granted. Therefore this would involve full consultation with the local community.

**Mr. Rod Hepplewhite asked “When would recycling collection be extended to include cardboard and plastics (e.g. bottles) being collected from home addresses”.**

Councillor Paul Watson advised that the collection of cardboard and plastics would not be accommodated within the current Kerb-It arrangements. The Joint Waste Management Strategy which was drawn up by Sunderland, Gateshead and South Tyneside Councils sets out the objectives for waste which included a commitment to improve recycling and composting levels to 30% by 2010 and 45% by 2015 and to extend the range of materials collected for recycling. He said that the Kerb-It collection arrangements had been introduced with a view to looking at possible future options and that work was underway with partnering Councils on the procurement of recycling arrangements, in particular to ensure outlets and markets become available for recovered materials.

It was anticipated that Sunderland would have revised arrangements for the collection of recyclable materials in place by 2010.

Stephen Taylor then added that he appreciated recycling was very important to the environment and that one of the priorities within the Sunderland Strategy 2008-2025 was to create an “Attractive and Inclusive City” which in part focused on improving recycling. The percentage of household waste sent for recycling in Sunderland was 23.72% during 2006/2007.

**Mrs. Edna O’Halloran had wanted to know when the Council was going to get to grips with people who leave bins and rubbish out all the time.**

Dave Smith advised that some residents handled waste more responsibly than others and that much had been done by way of the provision of information, including leafleting, door-knocking and warning letters in some areas but transient and disinterested elements of the community would always present a challenge.

This would be one of the priority issues for the extended team of Enforcement Officers which Sunderland were about to recruit as part of the Council’s Special Initiatives Programme. Nonetheless legislation covering the matter was more complex than simply issuing fixed penalty notices; and changing attitudes and behaviours and instilling a sense of pride in a neighbourhood was expected to take some time.

**Mrs. Margaret Joseph wanted to know “Who made the rules of only three collections a year of rubbish?” This was rubbish”.**

Councillor Paul Watson responded that limits were introduced in 2003, and had, therefore been in place for nearly 5 years. In response to a huge increase in the number of requests for the service, it became apparent that the system was being abused. Regular demands on the service showed that not only householders but builders were using the service to avoid hiring skips for property renovations causing additional unbudgeted costs of meeting the demand.

**Mr. Bob Price stated over the past 11 years Sunderland had seen great improvements in terms of job opportunities across the City and jobs were based in the service and financial industry at the likes of Doxford International Business Park. He asked “With the credit crunch hitting hard, was the City well positioned to ride out the slow down in demand and could the City attract new alternative businesses to retain the overall level of employment for its people?”**

Councillor Paul Watson responded advising that, notwithstanding the hopefully short-lived gloomy predictions about the credit crunch, there remained a strong investment interest in Sunderland as demonstrated in the recent announcement by Nissan and the recent decision by Nike to consolidate its operations at Doxford International and the plans to build at Turbine Park.

He went on to state that it was important to recognise and give credit to those involved at national and local government levels in supporting the business community to help transform Sunderland’s economy over the past 20 years and more.

Sunderland remain above the national average in terms of its manufacturing base, and despite the long period of closures in the old industries a strong growth in the professional, managerial, technical and skilled non-manual groups has been seen.

In fact the number of jobs in Sunderland had been increasing pretty well continuously since the lowest point some 20 years ago, and today there were 28,000 more jobs in the City than there were then.

Nevertheless, these were turbulent times and job losses as well as gains would occur. He made particular reference to the threat to local jobs brought about by the Northern Rock crisis, however stated that Sunderland was relatively well placed in terms of office and contact centre work.

Finally, he added that the plan is to grow Sunderland’s growing software industry over the longer term to add an extra string to its bow and provide a fresh source of jobs.

Margaret Fay added that one of Sunderland’s strengths was in manufacturing and went on further to say that this needed to be taken notice of. She also acknowledged that Sunderland has a good financial service sector and that success would be achieved by adopting and evolving. She would recommend that people remain positive and more importantly, celebrate the successes already achieved.

The Mayor then closed the debate and thanked the delegates for the healthy level of debate. She then moved, and it was agreed, that the content of the debate would be circulated to partner agencies and would be taken into account by the Leader of the Council in proposing the budget and policy framework to Council for the coming year.

(Signed) M. SMITH,  
Mayor.