

EXECUTIVE MEMBER ANNUAL REPORT – 2008/09

COUNCILLOR ROGER MACE, CABINET MEMBER WITH SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY, FROM 4th FEBRUARY 2009, FOR

- **JOINT ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO – EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND REGENERATION IN THE LANCASTER PART OF LANCASTER AND WYRE CONSTITUENCY, AND COMMUNITY PLANNING.**

Until 4th February, Councillor Mace's responsibilities were:-

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CABINET MEMBER WITH SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR

- **RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER COUNCILS**
- **NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT IN THE DISTRICT**
- **FINANCE**
- **COMMUNITY PLANNING**
- **TRANSPORT – INCLUDING PARKING POLICY**



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 One important milestone in the economic development of the District was the announcement that the Heysham-M6 Link Road has been given programme entry status. Construction is expected to commence in 2010.

1.2 Another significant event during the year was the City's decision to move forward with the creation of Morecambe Parish Council – a decision that was referred back to the City Council by Central Government, following a change in relevant legislation. Elections for the 26 places on the new Council are expected to take place on 4 June 2009.

1.3 I was a guest at a dinner on 7 July to celebrate the opening of The Midland Hotel. The renaissance of the Hotel is a powerful symbol of the regeneration of Morecambe.

1.4 In the current municipal year, I have contributed to:-

- the restructuring of the Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership (LDLSP) which has meant that the Partnership is better able than before to tackle effectively the needs of the District,
- the emergence of the Sustainable Community Strategy for the District, (launched at the Platform in Morecambe on 12th December 2008) which has meant that the needs and aspirations of the District are better articulated than before,

- the work of the LDLSP on the development of a Community Engagement Framework which will improve engagement with our communities by the key partners in the LDLSP. This project is closely linked to the City Council's own priority outcomes in the Corporate Plan for 2008-9, namely [priority outcome 16] to work to maintain a cohesive community where respect for all is valued and celebrated and [priority outcome 17] for local communities to have more influence and involvement in the way services are delivered.
- the publication of the Faber Maunsell Report offering practical ideas for the development of the transport infrastructure in the District, additional to the benefits to be provided by the construction of the Heysham-M6 Link,
- the production of the long awaited revised parking strategy for the district, and
- negotiating a future role for the Lancaster and District Vision Board in the context of the new structure of the LDLSP, and the long term economic development of the District. The Vision Board was a Building Block of the former Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), and is now represented on the Economy Thematic Group of the LDLSP, alongside representatives from the City Council and the County Council. The Vision Board also provides the representatives of the Economy Stakeholder on the LDLSP Board and on the LDLSP Management Group. I will say more about the LDLSP in section 5 below.

2 EXECUTIVE MEMBERSHIP:

- Cabinet (Chairman*)
- Star Chamber (Chairman*)
- Canal Corridor Cabinet Liaison Group (Chairman*)
- Lancaster and District Chamber Liaison Group (Chairman*)
- Morecambe Retail, Commercial and Tourism Cabinet Liaison Group (Chairman*)
- Lancaster and Morecambe Markets Committee (Chairman*)
- Neighbourhood Management Cabinet Liaison Group (Chairman*)
- Transport Cabinet Liaison Group (Chairman*)
- Universities Cabinet Liaison Group

*** Until 4th February 2009**

3 EXECUTIVE APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES etc:

- Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership Board (Chairperson)
- Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership Management Group (Vice Chairperson)
- Lancashire Leaders Meeting *
- Lancaster and District Vision Board (formerly LSP Regeneration Building Block) (Vice Chairman)
- North West Regional Assembly *

*** Until 4th February 2009**

4 OVERVIEW OF PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITIES:

Until 4 th February 2009	From 4 th February 2009
Relationships with other Councils. Neighbourhood Management in the District. Finance Community Planning Transport – including Parking Policy.	Joint Economic Portfolio – Employment Opportunities and Regeneration in the Lancaster part of Lancaster and Wyre Constituency Community Planning

CORPORATE PLAN PRIORITY OUTCOMES:

Until 4 th February 2009	From 4 th February 2009
<p>Keep the City Council Element of Council Tax increase to acceptable levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Keep annual Council Tax increases to a minimum in 2009/10 and 2010/11</i> <p>Work to maintain a cohesive community where respect for all is valued and celebrated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Develop and implement a Community Cohesion Strategy</i> • <i>Deliver a Civic Programme which celebrates our local heritage and benefits our communities.</i> <p>Local Communities have more influence and involvement in the way services are delivered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Develop neighbourhood management arrangements for the district.</i> <p>An improved quality of life for those who live, work in and visit the Lancaster District:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with members of the LSP on joint initiatives to implement the Sustainable Community Strategy. 	<p>Improve economic prosperity throughout the Lancaster District:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Deliver a district wide sustainable regeneration programme based on the economic vision and strategy.</i> • <i>Launch revised business development grant scheme for 12 months and work with Storey CIC to provide targeted support to creative industries.</i> <p>Work to maintain a cohesive community where respect for all is valued and celebrated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Develop and implement a Community Cohesion Strategy</i> <p>An improved quality of life for those who live, work in and visit the Lancaster District:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Work with members of the LSP on joint initiatives to implement the Sustainable Community Strategy.</i>

5 COMMUNITY PLANNING

The Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership and the Sustainable Community Strategy.

5.1 The Sustainable Community Strategy was based on a district-wide consultation process and sets out the strategic vision for our District. It embodies the aspiration that “Working together will improve the quality of life for everyone in our district”.

Working with members of the LDLSP on joint initiatives to implement the Sustainable Community Strategy has been a major focus for me in the past year.

There are 21 Priorities in the Sustainable Community Strategy, each of which has been allocated to one of the Thematic Groups in the LDLSP. Detailed action plans for achieving these priorities are being developed by the Thematic Groups, and bids for funding these plans are being considered by the Management Group, using criteria established by the LDLSP Board.

5.2 The LDLSP structure for delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy is:-

The LDLSP Board – Ensures the operation, existence and guardianship of the LDLSP.

The LDLSP Management Group – is responsible for delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy (including performance management, resource allocation and community engagement).

The LDLSP Thematic Groups – Seven ‘Themed’ Groups are as follows:-

Children & Young People
Economy
Education, Skills & Opportunities
Environment
Health & Wellbeing
Safety
Valuing People

These Thematic Groups are responsible for delivery of the Priorities allocated to them from within the Sustainable Community Strategy under the umbrella of the LDLSP Management Group. Each Thematic Group is attended by two Cabinet members and this has contributed to raising the profile of the LDLSP within the Council.

The work of the Economic Strategy Board that was set up in 2007-8 and to which I referred in my report last year has been undertaken this year within the Economy Thematic Group of the LDLSP.

Details of all aspects of the LDLSP and the Sustainable Community Strategy are available at www.lancaster.gov.uk/lsp

6 FINANCE PORTFOLIO

6.1 The major aim of the finance portfolio is to deliver the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy. This is to keep Council Tax rises at acceptable levels while

strengthening the Council's financial position and having an affordable capital programme balanced over five years. This year, the aim throughout the year was that the Council Tax in 2009-10 would not exceed the total of Council Tax and Special Expenses in the previous year by more than 4%, but a number of factors arising during the year made it seem increasingly unlikely that the target would be met.

6.2 The budget problems were for the most part not of the Council's making – for example a projected loss of interest income from the City's cash balances arose partly due to income no longer accruing on deposits in Icelandic banks, but was made worse by the decline in interest rates on the remaining cash balances – a decline determined by the interest rate policy of the Government. The Council's problems have also been caused by Government's inadequate funding of the extra activities it has forced District Councils to undertake - most significantly the concessionary travel scheme for the over 60s.

6.3 Locally, there was an increase in the rent of the premises of Lancaster Market - which was backdated to June 2005 - and was greater than had been provided for. In more normal circumstances, eliminating the deficit on Lancaster Market, amounting to about 6% of the City's Council Tax might have been sufficient to keep Council Tax within reasonable bounds, but the recent decline in economic activity meant that opportunities that may once have been available to find a different - and viable - future for the Market Building gradually faded away.

6.4 In December, Council decided to change the system of allocating City Council expenditure of Council Tax between Council Tax payers in different parts of the District. The result of this change is that Council Tax charged to most of the rural areas in the District for meeting City Council expenditure in 2009-10 has gone up by 10.5% (ten and a half per cent), while the City's demand for Council Tax from households in parts of the district in which there are no parish councils has gone up by only 1% (one per cent). I considered this change to be unfair in its failure to recognise issues of double taxation and the functional roles of Parish and Town Councils in our District. Residents in Parished areas are paying twice for some services which are provided in their areas by Parish Councils and Town Councils but are provided by the City Council in other areas. I welcome the decision of Council to tackle these problems - albeit belatedly - by undertaking in 2009-10 the Review of the Funding of Parish Councils which was first mooted several years ago.

6.5 Cabinet decided to recommend to Council the planned 4% rise in the City's Council Tax before it knew of the nature of the cuts necessary to achieve it. I was unwilling to propose this recommendation to Council and resigned on 4th February.

7 TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO – PARKING CHARGES

7.1 Cabinet agreed proposals in January that charges for parking for up to two hours in the City Council's Car Parks should be held constant at £1.60. This charge is the same as in 2007-8, and for all except a short period at the start of 2008-9 - and is now being repeated in 2009-10. The decision was designed to support the customers and clients whose patronage is vital to help shops and service providers stay in business in our urban centres in the current difficult economic climate.

7.2 An innovative 24/5 parking permit has been introduced in 2009-10 in addition to the long standing 24/7 permit. Permit fees for the 24/7 permit are rising by 5% in 2009-10, but the new permit has been introduced at a discount of 5% compared with the new fee for the 24/7 permit. This new annual permit is designed for those

commuters who know they will only require parking facilities for 5 days a week and not 7 days a week. Users who elect to buy the 24/5 permit in 2009-10 will pay the same amount as they paid for last year's permit. For employees to have no increase in their commuting cost payable for using the City Council's Car Parks is a clear benefit in the current recession.

7.3 Despite the above features of the charges for 2009-10, total income from parking charges is budgeted to increase by more than the rate of inflation – and off street parking charges continue to contribute to funding the Council's general expenditures.

8 CONCLUSION

8.1 Not every project was as successful as I might have hoped. It was often a matter relating to the availability of resources that caused problems. Difficulties arose in respect of completing the sales of some Council property assets, and delays in the receipt of funding – or the withdrawal of anticipated funding - caused delays in progressing capital projects, not least Chatsworth Gardens, and Luneside East. The proposed Central Park in Morecambe lost its funding: no budget was available to progress the Access to Services Project or to make inroads into the backlog of repairs to the two Town Halls, and the start of work on the Centros Development has also been delayed. The future of Neighbourhood Management also appears bleak due to the loss of ring fenced external grant funding, and the severe budgetary constraints faced by the City Council for at least the next two or three years have made it unlikely that the City Council could “mainstream” more than a token part of the activities previously funded through Neighbourhood Management.

8.2 Excluding days of illness and private holiday, I was available for Council duties on 154 weekdays during my Leadership of the Council from 19 May 2008 to 4 February 2009 inclusive. The number of meetings I have attended may come as a surprise to some. My diary shows I was away from Lancaster for political purposes for 11 full days, and that I attended 97 formal meetings and 115 informal meetings inside the District and 15 meetings outside the District – including a total of 47 evening meetings out of the total of 227. Meetings are supplemented by e-mails and phone calls - and my home computer system shows that other than those for private purposes, I sent over 3300 e-mails, and opened over 4500 incoming e-mail messages during those eight and a half months (262 days). I have no separate record to enable me to account to Council for my telephone conversations or to count the myriad of resolutions I proposed, seconded or amended.

8.3 Last year, I ended my report as Leader of the Council on the optimistic note that the groups had worked well together in Cabinet, despite the doubts held by many that a PR Cabinet containing five political Groups could ever achieve enough harmony to reach decisions. Those doubts that I dismissed last year had more truth in them than I had hoped. I was able to sustain the roles of Chairing the Cabinet, and being Leader of the Council, only for so long as I could justify the decisions being made. By February 4th as tensions rose on a number of matters, and differences between groups became progressively of greater importance than similarities, it had become apparent that to negotiate consensus at that point had become a pipe dream, and that only by resigning could I properly defend the interests of communities in my Ward against decisions made by others which I believe are to the detriment of the District as a whole.

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