

Housing Market Renewal - Search for Joint Venture Partners

BALTIC, 21 November 2008

Councillor Mick Henry, Leader of Gateshead Council

Good afternoon to you all... and a *BIG* welcome to *BALTIC*, on Gateshead Quays.

For those who've not been here before (surely there can't be), I'm particularly proud to welcome you to *Gateshead* and to *North East England*. It's great to see so many developers and decision makers here, for what is a *BIG* opportunity to drive forward and develop the Council's ambitions and aspirations for Gateshead.

Today you'll hear about the latest phase of our transformation plans for Gateshead. The *focus* of today is the area's housing market but it's not simply about housing stock ... it's about *working in partnership*, to develop a vision that will deliver *modern, thriving communities*, for generations to come.

This is no *ordinary* opportunity... the scale is totally unprecedented outside London. We're seeking joint venture partners, to regenerate and build neighbourhoods... for *now* and for *tomorrow*.

You'll hear more about this exciting opportunity shortly from our Chief Executive, *Roger Kelly*, and *Derek Quinn*, our Director of Development and Enterprise. Proceedings will come to a close with a very personal perspective from international designer, *Wayne Hemingway*, who has a strong association with Gateshead.

But first, I'll begin by telling you a little about the *Gateshead Story*.

This borough, on the south side of the River Tyne, is home to nearly 200,000 people and is a *diverse* area, with an urban centre and open rolling countryside.

I'd like to tell you about the role of Gateshead Council in helping to *shape Gateshead*, to become the place that I hope you'll take the time to see more of during your visit here.

Over the years, Gateshead Council has been at the heart of efforts to improve the image and well-being of our borough... regionally, nationally *and* internationally.

The journey probably started around 30 years ago, when *Gateshead International Stadium* started to put the area on the map.

International exposure, generated by *Brendan Foster's* world record, created huge *civic pride*, inspired a *new generation* of athletes and attracted national *and* international interest in the area. In addition, a number of high profile regeneration projects started in the 1980s and 90s.

Further evidence of our ambition and drive came with the development and opening of the giant MetroCentre, in 1987. Built on the former waterlogged ash dump of a power station, it changed the economic landscape of the area and... as Europe's *largest* out of town shopping complex... currently attracts around *28million* visitors each year.

More recently, change has *accelerated*. In the past decade or so, we've seen massive transformation. We've a growing reputation for *design* here in Gateshead. Obvious examples include the transformation of Gateshead Quays and some unique homes built at Staithes, by designer *Wayne Hemingway*, who you'll hear from later.

In the case of Staithes, we worked with Wayne Hemingway, and house builders, Wimpey to create new homes fit for the 21st century.

Quality urban design is important to us and that's why we've invested so heavily in public spaces and public art *across* the borough.

Many of you will now know and recognise the *Angel of the North*... possibly one of the most talked about pieces of public art in the UK.

What many people *won't* remember, or know, is that it's located on the site of a former colliery pit head baths.

Many will also have forgotten that Antony Gormley's *Angel of the North* was a hugely *contentious* commission at the outset. If the Council hadn't shown *leadership and vision*, the commission would never have happened, and we couldn't now boast a cultural asset that's gained international recognition.

Elsewhere, the iconic *Gateshead Millennium Bridge* won numerous design awards for its graceful curves.

The Council also played a lead role in the development of the award-winning *Sage Gateshead*... a world-class music venue that opened in 2004... combining stunning architecture with one of the most *acoustically-perfect* concert halls in *the World*. It still surprises and delights visitors with its striking glass and metal shell.

And, of course, where you are today... *BALTIC*... an international contemporary art gallery, opened to the public in 2002. This derelict 1940s grain warehouse was converted... by *architect Dominic Williams*... into the amazing space you see today.

Work is already well underway in many areas of Gateshead, *transforming communities into better places to live*. Today we have ongoing developments in the *town centre*, a £300m Baltic Business Quarter and more developments to come, here on the Quayside.

Across the borough, we're undergoing major urban and housing renewal. For example, not far from here, we've already injected £1.5m into 247 homes through Housing Market Renewal, with improvements that include new railings, double-glazing, new gardens and new pavements.

Gateshead has come a long way. According to a poll carried out by Gallup in August 2007, on behalf of the European Commission, NewcastleGateshead is now ranked as one of the *best places to live in Europe*.

Also last year, the magazine *Location, Location, Location* named NewcastleGateshead the North's *hottest* property spot since 2001.

We're not afraid to *take risks and push boundaries*... especially to achieve the best possible outcome for our residents. Gateshead Council has played and... *particularly* in the current economic climate... must *continue to play*, an important role in driving many of the changes that I've described today. This is the way we work and our results speak for themselves.

I'm not ashamed to say I'm passionate about Gateshead, and fully committed to regeneration of the area, which the Chief Executive, Roger Kelly, will talk to you about in more detail.

But, before I hand you over to Roger, let me once again extend to you the very warmest welcome to Gateshead.