

## **ECONOMIC CLIMATE UPDATE REPORT**

This report summarises the positive and negative economic changes that have taken place in the Borough during March 2012.

### **EMPLOYMENT AND BUSINESS**

#### **ENGINEERING / MANUFACTURING / CHEMICAL**

##### **Positive**

- **Biomass CHP** green energy company is building a new demonstration plant at Wilton following a £100,000 investment. The wood-chip gasification process produces renewable heat and energy without generating any liquid effluent which would otherwise need to be disposed of and treated.
- The **Nissan** plant at Sunderland has been awarded the contract as part of a multi million pound investment programme to build a new model, 'The Invitation', from mid-2013, creating around 400 direct jobs and a further 1600 in the supply chain. Nissan is one of several businesses in the automotive sector to receive conditional offers from the £2.4 billion Regional Growth Fund.
- THE Institute of Directors (IoD) North East has announced the region's leading Investor Director as Bill Scott, Chief Executive of the **Wilton Group**, for his contribution to the region's economic wellbeing by investing in their organisations, attracting funds, finance and improving the area's infrastructure or creating jobs.
- **Centrica**, the UK's largest supplier of domestic energy, has announced plans to increase its global activity by 50% within the next 5 years. The company is looking for skilled workers from managers to engineers, technicians and chemists as part of an ambitious drive to boost gas production from the East Irish Sea and secure the future activity in the region. The Barrow, Heysham and offshore bases are ideal for the Tees Valley as the distance and shift patterns make them easily commutable.
- **UPDATE: Tata Steel** has invested £3.1 million to create the new facility on the company's Lackenby site, adjacent to its Teesside Beam Mill. The opening of the centre has already created 30 new jobs, which have been filled through redeployment. It is anticipated the new centre could reduce the amount of movement throughout the supply chain by as much as 10,000 miles every month.
- Stockton-based **Pickerings Lifts** is the UK's largest independent lift manufacturer has seen record levels of growth this year following a strong performance in 2011. The company is recruiting additional staff to help meet ambitious plans to double annual turnover by 2016.

##### **Negative**

- The Tees Valley has not been successful in its plans to build a multi million pound wind turbine facility at Hartlepool that would have created hundreds of jobs.

#### **SERVICE SECTOR / RETAIL**

##### **Positive**

- **Sayu Limited**, a web company based on Teesdale South, Thornaby, has been confirmed as the vendor for a Google initiative aimed at helping retailers and publishers go mobile phone friendly. Sayu were chosen for their knowledge of mobile website technology, which they developed through their own dedicated mobile platform 'SayuConnect'. A similar initiative entitled 'GoMo' has already been successfully launched in the US, and Sayu will now help to bring this knowledge to the UK marketplace.
- The Billingham based, **Premier Construction NE**, was launched two years ago and, even though this is a sole-trader, is already investing in the next generation of skilled tradesmen by employing an apprentice.

- Two creative companies have recently located to Wynyard Business Park, **Pyramid Media** and **Coastal Productions** (an international award winning television production firm).
- **Towergate Insurance**, based in Thornaby, has teamed up with entrepreneur, Ruth Badger, who became famous for her role in the television show 'The Apprentice', to write a range of articles to help small businesses with sales and marketing, which will be hosted on a dedicated website.
- The **Endeavour Partnership**, based on Teesdale, Thornaby, has been appointed by Five Lamps as its preferred legal advisor. The Sunday Times has named Thornaby based **Five Lamps** in the best 100 not-for-profit organisations to work for. It is the second year running that Five Lamps has secured a place on the list.
- **Tesco** has announced it is to create 20,000 jobs in the UK over the next 2 years through "significant investment" in customer service, refreshing existing stores and opening new ones. It said it expects to focus on giving opportunities to young unemployed people, and will be expanding its apprenticeship programme to provide 10,000 placements.
- A protege of Michelin-starred chef, Raymond Blanc, has been brought in to run **Wynyard Hall Country House Hotel**.
- **Direct Golf UK** is continuing its national expansion by taking over the retail operation at Ingleby Barwick Golf Academy.
- **Stockton Garden Centre** on Yarm Road is offering an apprenticeship scheme to young people aged over 16. All apprentices who complete the programme will receive a work-based Diploma in Horticulture.
- The **Brulines Group**, based at Surtees Business Park, has won a five-year extension with Morrisons supermarket to manage data systems for more than 300 petrol forecourts and 12 distribution centre fuel depots across the UK.
- **Dickinson Dees**, the region's top ranked law firm which has an office in Thornaby, has advised on recently securing a £75 million contract.
- Development group, **Terrace Hill**, which has an office on Teesdale, has recently sold more than 500 residential units in the UK to Swedish private housing company, Akelius for £75.3 million.
- **UPDATE: Durham Tees Valley Airport** has appointed We Do, a business solutions company, to deliver the new marketing activity for the airport.
- **Firstsource** is recruiting for its Barclaycard operations at both Fountain Court in Middlesbrough and the contact centre in Thornaby. The company is recruiting 180 permanent workers, and 400 one-year contract staff for its contact centre at Fountain Court. The full-time vacancies will include customer service, IT and finance.
- Stockton-based, **Cornerstone Business Solutions**, has earmarked Yorkshire as an area of growth and expansion, with new premises planned for Leeds city centre later this year. The firm has achieved sustained growth since its formation just over three years ago, and in the past 12 months has grown by 65% – 15% more than predicted – with a turnover heading towards £1 million. Two new jobs have recently been filled and further recruitment is planned.
- Stockton Council is working with **Fast Track Reclaim**, based on Teesdale, Thornaby, who is creating 20 new business administration apprenticeships. There are good opportunities for progression within the firm and the turnover of staff is very low.
- **Crofton Court Motorcycles Ltd**, Portrack, has recently opened and will initially employ two people to carry out MOT's, servicing, repairs and tyre replacements for motorcycles.
- The Greenery UK (wholesalers of fruit and vegetables to supermarket chains) are now sole shareholders of **John Baarda Ltd**. As well as a smaller plant in Hull, their main plant is located at **Belasis Hall, Billingham**. At this stage no job losses are expected.
- A local furniture company that has been in the area for more than 90 years was bought out of administration, safeguarding 16 jobs. **Race For Furniture** and sister firm, **Home Interiors**, both based on Portrack for 10 years, have been bought by Michael O'Connor Furniture.

### Negative

- **UPDATE:** The video games retailer, the **Game Group**, which employed almost 6,000 staff nationally, has closed almost half its stores, with both Game (located in Wellington Square) and Game Station (located on Stockton High Street) already closed. Other stores affected in the Tees Valley include Middlesbrough, Hartlepool and Redcar, however, the Darlington store will remain open. Game Group has been sold to investment firm **OpCapita**, the firm have also recently bought electrical goods retailer Comet.

## ECONOMIC INDICATORS

An overview will be tabled at Cabinet as the indicators is not due for publication until 18th April 2012.

## SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES

- The main points in the **Budget 2012** in support of business are: -
  - Corporation tax will decrease to 24% from 26% from April 2012 with further decreases taking the rate to 22% by 2014-5
  - New corporation tax reliefs for the video games, animation and high-end television industries which will be implemented from April 2013.
  - Simplified tax system for small firms with a turnover of up to £77,000
  - The Government will pilot enterprise loans to support young people setting up their own business.
  - Consult on simplifying the Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) energy efficiency scheme to reduce administrative burdens on business
  - Support for £150M of tax increment financing to help Councils promote development and an extra £270M for the Growing Places Fund.
- The **North East Home Working Fund** has secured an extension in time so funding for businesses is now available until March 2013. Up to £3,000 is available towards the costs of training and equipment for each new full-time home-worker that the business employs.
- The **Government** has announced it will **increase spending on contracts awarded to SMEs**, from £3bn to £6bn by the end of the year. A report on the progress made shows the amount of business going to SMEs across central government is on track to double from 6.7% to 13.7% by the end of the 11/12 financial year.
- The **Government Taskforce** to investigate alternative financing for SMEs has published its proposals for non-bank lending. Tim Breedon, CEO of Legal & General, lead the independent review which examined a range of alternative and sustainable finance sources. As bank lending is by far the biggest source of external finance currently used by businesses, the taskforce looked into the supply of non-bank lending to match the financial landscape of countries like the US. The Government welcomed the report and agreed with the recommendations set out, and commits to work with businesses and the broader finance community to address the significant points: creation of a new brand for Business Finance Advice by January 2013; Government considering how best to improve awareness of finance available to SMEs (reporting back later this year).
- The newly-formed **North East Skills Alliance for Advanced Manufacturing** is made up of representatives from all 12 Local Authorities, employers, business membership organisations, training providers and the National Apprenticeship Service, with the aim of encouraging SMEs to seek more information about the support available to them, who are often unaware of the training and funding opportunities which are available. Apprenticeship start-ups are already 20% higher against the same period last year and the Alliance hopes a series of events, one-to-one visits, business networks and mentoring, forging closer links with schools, colleges and universities and having one point of contact in each area in the run up to the September apprenticeship intake.
- Small businesses across Stockton and Redcar could benefit from a vital investment boost thanks to a tax incentive scheme to be introduced in April. The **Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme (SEIS)** will apply to shares in companies issued on or after 6th April 2012, in the first two years following their incorporation. Eligible companies must have 25 or less employees and a maximum of £200,000 of assets.
- The ambitions of Tees Valley businesses is being backed by regional fund management firm **NEL (Finance for Business Growth Fund Managers)** after a strong start to 2012. In the three months following the beginning of November, NEL made eight investments worth a total over £1.7m in companies right across the North-east from the **£20m Fund** that it administers, at a time when the investment climate is usually at its quietest. The Growth Fund is aimed at regional businesses at a development and growth stage, and since it was launched in March 2010, NEL has made 34 investments worth a total of more than £5.5 million.

- The **National Loan Guarantee Scheme (NLGS)** has been launched, helping smaller businesses across the UK (with an annual group turnover of up to £50 million) access cheaper finance. The Government is using the UK's budget credibility in financial markets to provide up to £20 billion of government guarantees on unsecured borrowing by banks, enabling them to borrow at a cheaper rate. Around £5 billion in guarantees will be made available in the first tranche. The banks currently participating in the scheme are Barclays, Santander, Lloyds and RBS.
- The search is on to find the best entrepreneurial talent in the North East, as **The Entrepreneurs' Forum** is gearing up towards its annual awards in May. Regional businesses will be recognised for excellence in entrepreneurial achievement at the **Who Dares Wins Annual Business Conference awards ceremony** on 17th May.
- The shortlist in the search to find the latest most promising entrepreneur in the Tees Valley has been announced. The final five candidates in the Evening Gazette's 'If We Can You Can Challenge 2012', run by The Entrepreneurs' Forum, have been selected from scores of entrants. Stockton Businesses shortlisted are: **Billingham-based BCT Aspire CIC, and Premier Construction NE; and Stockton Town Centre-based Hobbies R Us**. The judges' two selected finalists will go head-to-head in a public ballot giving people across the region the chance to vote online. The winner, based on a 50/50 split of judges' scores and the thousands of online votes cast, will be announced at an awards dinner following The Entrepreneurs' Forum Who Dares Wins business conference at the Hilton Hotel, Gateshead, on Thursday, May 17
- Four Stockton Borough businesses were declared winners at the **Gazette Media's Teesside Business Awards** – with Nifco UK being named Teesside's Company of the Year for the second year running. Nifco UK were shortlisted alongside Stockton company, Darchem Engineering, and Five Lamps in the Company of the Year category. Nifco UK also clinched the Low Carbon award while Marshall's of Eaglescliffe won the Heart of the Community category and were shortlisted for the Manufacturing Award, Odyssey Systems in Stockton was the winner of the Services category and Tadea in Billingham won the Innovation award. Three other businesses from across the Borough were also shortlisted in various categories including Turbo Connect, P.R.A. Business Solutions and Cornerstone Business Solutions.
- DEFRA has announced a **£60 million Rural Economy Grant (REG)** scheme as part of the Rural Development Programme for England. The scheme is open for applications with the first round running until end of April 2012. REG can provide support for eligible projects requesting between £25,000 and £1 million under the following priorities: Farm Competitiveness, Tourism, Forestry, Agri-Food and Micro Enterprise Support. A second round of applications is expected in Autumn 2012.
- Small and micro companies are being encouraged to bid for a share of **£1.8m government funding to carry out R&D feasibility projects** that address the converged nature of the **digital landscape**. The programme is being delivered by the **Technology Strategy Board**, and will come in three parts over the course of 2012. The first challenge opens on 23rd April, with a registration deadline of 16th May. Funding will be spread equally over the three component challenges within the programme. Those successful in the first challenge will have the opportunity to meet with, and potentially collaborate with NESTA-funded projects that focus on the content and service aspects of hyper-local media. Projects must be led by small or micro businesses, working individually or in collaboration, and should last no more than 12 months, with total project costs must not exceed £75,000 and up to 75% grant funding.
- A trio of North East business support agencies have joined forces to deliver a **£3.6 million UK Trade and Investment contract**, aimed to help more exporters in the region. The consortium comprises of the North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC), RTC North and the North East Process Industry Cluster (NEPIC), who will take over the contract as of April and hope to make exports a key driver of the North East economy. The group will use close industry links and other regional business networks to increase the visibility of the region's expert team of International Trade Advisors, with the aim of encouraging more small and medium businesses to engage with the global marketplace. Through the services, companies looking to explore overseas markets will be given access to accurate and impartial advice and overseas market intelligence. New exporters will have access to a number of core services including 'Passport to Export', the 'Overseas Market Introduction Service' and the 'Export Markets Research Scheme'.

- On 1st April the **Youth Contract** was launched and is a package of support worth almost £1 billion to help young unemployed people to prepare for work and find a job. Over 3 years it will provide:
  - 160,000 wage incentives worth up to £2,275 each for employers who recruit an 18 to 24 year old through the Work Programme for at least 26 weeks. The wage incentive is only available when the young person is employed for 16 hours or more per week. There is a part-time rate (£1,137.50) between 16 and 29 hours and a full-time rate (£2,275) for 30 hours or more.
  - An extra 250,000 voluntary work experience (available across Great Britain) or sector-based work academy places (available in England and Scotland).
  - A further 20,000 Apprenticeship Grants for employers, to encourage small and medium employers to recruit their first 16 to 24 year old apprentice, taking the total number to 40,000 (in England only).
  - Additional support through Jobcentre Plus by way of more adviser time and weekly contact.
  - An opportunity to have a careers interview with the National Careers Service (in England).
  - Around £120m to help the most vulnerable 16/17 year old NEETs in England back in to education, training or a job.
- The Government is changing the **employment support that prisoners receive** when they leave prison: everyone leaving prison and claiming JSA will be immediately referred on day one to the Work Programme. It is hoped that this will help to get them back into work as quickly as possible and therefore stop them from re-offending.
- A competition to encourage **undergraduates and recent graduates** to establish world leading, market defining companies and brands has been launched. RBS, LinkedIn and Find Invest Grow (FIG), have launched **EnterprisingU**, an initiative open to any student or graduate of the past five years with the drive to start and succeed in business. Examples of student founded companies include Innocent Smoothies, Last.fm and Moneysupermarket.com. The competition follows on from Chancellor George Osborne's '**Enterprise Loan**' for students, announced in the Budget, and includes a first place prize of £25,000. The application process in itself goes beyond mere form filling, helping to cultivate business planning skills, crucial to young entrepreneurs. Those interested in applying need to submit their proposals by 15th June via the FIG online tool.
- **Flexible Support Fund** is a Tees Valley collaborative approach with 400 jobs across Tees Valley of which 320 will be for 18-24 year olds. Stockton's allocation is 80 jobs with 65 jobs for 18-24 year olds with the target area being the poorest performing wards. The Tees Valley bid has been approved by Jobcentre Plus with further work on the delivery model has been undertaken at a meeting on 4th April.
- The new **National Careers Service** website has been launched, with information on the job market by sector including: workforce statistics; jobs in the industry; entry and progression routes; skills shortages; and future prospects. Customers can also explore the career tools which includes a 'Learning Record' and 'My funding information'.

## OTHER ECONOMIC NEWS

- Top level Teesside business people have met with Skills Minister, John Hayes, to plead the case for the extension of a hugely successful apprenticeship scheme. Funding for the **Tees Valley Apprenticeship Programme (TVAP)** finishes at the end of March, however the scheme has created almost 300 apprenticeships in less than two years. 134 Tees Valley employers have taken on apprentices through the scheme which cost £1.8 million and is employer-led but managed through the National Skills Academy for the Process Industries. The delegation of business people communicated to Mr Hayes that with a further injection of a similar amount of public money, the scheme has the potential to become self sustaining within two years, and benefit the wider North East. The delegation was told it should hear by mid April whether their bid has been successful.
- The head of **Enterprise and Innovation at the CBI** is encouraged by news that increasing numbers of SMEs are successfully applying for finance. The **SME Finance Monitor report** for Q4 2011 showed that almost 80% of applicants for new or renewed overdraft facilities were successful, while 63% of all loan applications were positively received. The past 12 months also saw a rise of 'happy non-seekers' - SMEs who have neither wanted nor needed to apply for finance. 78% of SMEs fell into this category, up from 68% in Q1-2 2011. However, the proportions of those who wanted finance but felt unable to apply remained stable at 12%. Research also showed that 14% of all

SMEs plan to apply for finance in the next 3 months, while a fifth of those with employees are likely to seek external funding.

- **Export/Imports - Update from UKTI & NECC** - The North East exports industry grew by a record amount during the last quarter, bringing the 12-monthly total up to a record £13.5 billion. Between October and December 2011, the North East witnessed exports from the region reaching £3.62 billion, one of only eight English regions to do so. This is an increase of 9% from quarter 3 2011. Nationally, exports rose 5% quarter 3-4 2011. The exports for 2011 total £13.502 billion. This is an increase of 13% from the total for 2010. The total number of exporters for 2011 remained constant from 2010 but nationally numbers declined 2010 – 2011. Figures also revealed that the fastest growing single market for the region during the quarter was South Africa, with exports to that country increasing by £88.5 million, or 99% to give a total of £178 million in the past 12 months. Overall, the volume of exports has increased at a higher rate than imports, which demonstrates progress towards achieving economic re-balancing. Given these hugely positive figures for the North East, the region has huge potential to continue to bolster national exports. Advice suggests that support needs to be given to ensure that the UK leads the way in trading with new markets to narrow the overall deficit and the North East and Tees Valley are well placed to make the most of any support given its track record of positive trade balance and potential for export.
- Latest construction figures indicate that **construction output** in January fell by 12% on the previous month. **The Construction Products Association** was unsurprised by the statistics from ONS, which also showed that output was down by 11% on the previous three months. While public sector construction activity has fallen 12 per cent in the three months to January compared to the previous three months, private sector construction has fared almost as badly, falling 10 per cent over the same period.
- The **BBC** has reported that the internet contributes to 8.3% of the UK economy. This means that the **internet economy** is bigger than the construction, healthcare and education sectors. The report also concludes that the UK also carries out more retail online 13.5 % than any other major economy.

## HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT

### Monthly Benefit Service Workload

March 2011	12,048
December 2011	8,293
January 2012	12,452
February 2012	16,170
March 2012	9,675

**Monthly Benefit Service Workload** - After a significant increase in workload in January and February following the introduction of the new system of direct notification of changes to Department for Work and Pensions benefits, March has seen the figures reduce for the first time. It is too early to establish whether this is to become the norm and workload will be closely monitored.

**The Housing Register & Homelessness Data** - The trend in the number of applications on the Councils Housing Register continues to increase. This is anticipated to continue due to a combination of factors including; the current economic climate, increasing issues of affordability, welfare reform implications, a reduction in available housing stock and increased demand for the private rented sector.

### Number of approaches to the Housing Options service

February 2011	326
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November 2011	176
December 2011	110
January 2012	291
February 2012	217

### Number of households accepted as homeless by the Housing Options Service

February 2011	1
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November 2011	11
December 2011	2
January 2012	2
February 2012	7

### Applications on the Council's Housing Register (including transfers)

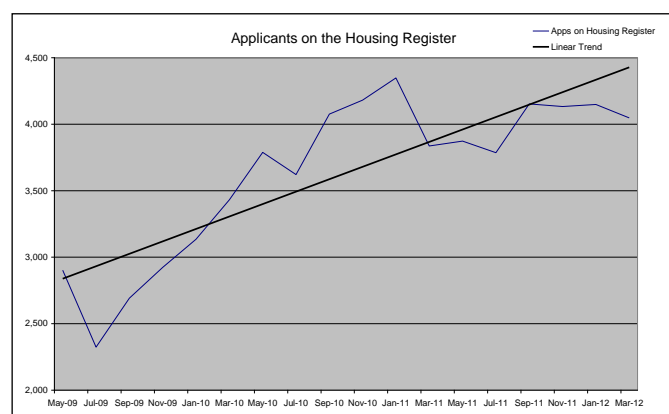
March 2011	4,349
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December 2011	4,152
January 2012	4,148
February 2012	3,993
March 2012	4,047

### Number of housing options customers seeking assistance with mortgage/rent arrears

February 2011	53
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November 2011	53
December 2011	38
January 2012	72
February 2012	54



The number of monthly approaches to the **Housing Options Service** decreased in November and December of 2011 (likely due to seasonal variations, i.e. less people approach the service near to Christmas and the change in the location of the service) however increased in January, which is traditionally the busiest month for the service. The same is true for customers seeking assistance with mortgage/rent arrears. The number of households accepted as homeless by the Housing Options service has increased in

2011/12. In 2010/11 it was 45 and this already stands at 63 up to February this year.

### Number of House Sales in the borough (source: land registry)

Dec 2010	187
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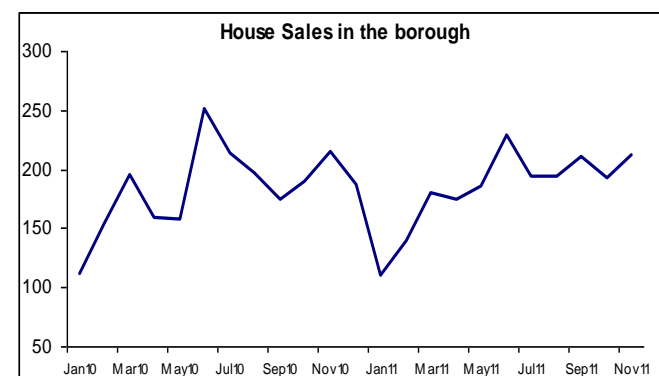
Aug 2011	194
Sept 2011	210
Oct 2011	193
Nov 2011	212
Dec 2011	242

### Average monthly House Prices in the borough (source: land registry)

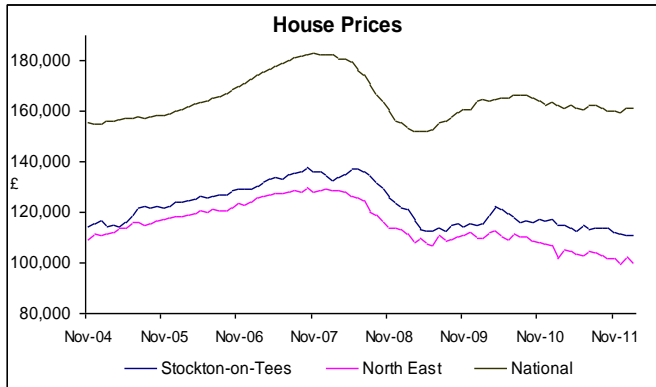
Feb 2011	£114,572
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Oct 2011	£113,613
Nov 2011	£112,203
Dec 2011	£111,756
Jan 2012	£110,890
Feb 2012	£111,005

A positive and proactive approach is taken to **homelessness**; this includes services and initiatives developed to address other factors that have a detrimental effect on maintaining independence and sustaining accommodation. This can also include accrediting private landlords and tackling poor housing conditions in the private rented sector which can in some situations prevent homelessness.



**House Prices and Sales** - Average house prices continue to be lower than the national average. The number of house sales in the borough only increased by 3% in 2011 from 2202 (in 2010) to 2264. Economic conditions have affected the potential for securing a mortgage and impacted on households entering into owner occupation.



**Future planning** - The Council is currently updating its information on housing need and aspiration in the borough through the update of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment. The results will show the required demand for housing in the borough, and estimate the number of affordable homes required in future years. It will also assess the need for specialist/supported housing for specific groups, including older people, and will be used as evidence to inform housing and planning policies.

## STOCKTON BOROUGH COUNCIL RESPONSES

- Stockton Council and private sector partners submitted a bid on 30th March 2012 to become a Stockton Town Team.
- The Government has published its response to the **Portas Review** (England only), which provides the official position on each of the recommendations in the Review; and the immediate actions the Government has committed itself to as a direct consequence of the Review:
  - **The Expansion of the Town Team Pilots** - in response to overwhelming interest and demand, the Government will fund a further 12 pilots, as well as workshops and toolkits so other towns can learn from their experiences;
  - A £500,000 investment - to help **Business Improvement Districts** access loans for their set-up costs;
  - A **High Street Innovation Fund** - £10 million to Councils in areas blighted by empty shops and recovering from the riots to help bring entrepreneurs back to their communities. This will give £100,000 to the top 100 locations in England with the highest No Domestic vacancy rates; and
  - A £1m **Future High Street X-Fund** – this will reward the areas delivering the most effective and innovative plans to bring their town centres back to life.

Furthermore, the Government has announced **other actions** it is taking which compliment the recommendations of the Portas Review. These include:

- Support for the **Love your Local Market campaign**;
- Doubling the level of **small business rate relief** in England for two and a half years;
- Consulting on proposals to abolish the **centrally-set minimum parking penalty charge**, giving Councils the flexibility to levy parking penalty notices at a lower rate if they choose;
- Putting in place a streamlined process to **revoke out-of-date, unnecessary byelaws** that hinder efforts to get new markets and businesses up and running;
- Allowing the conversion of **space above shops** into two flats, without the need for planning permission, rather than the current limit of one – encouraging more people to live in their town centres and maintain them as vibrant places to be; and
- Providing up to £306,000 match funding for an **Enterprise Business Connectors mentoring scheme**, run by Business in the Community, to support those looking to run their own business

These actions are being taken in consultation with the new **National Town Team**, which was formed recently by around 10 national bodies, and is chaired by Martin Blackwell.

- More than 100 students from Stockton Riverside College aged between 16 and 19 years have been working with **Stockton Council's Enterprise Culture Project and Enterprise Made Simple** to develop environmentally friendly products and services. The eleven teams of young people competed against each other to be crowned "Best Business." Stockton Council provided each team with a start-up fund of £100, business support and expertise and advice in event planning. On the day, total income from all stalls was £828.03. However, a further £245 of sales were received following the event. Stockton Council continues to work with the College to combine enterprise into study programmes.



- **UPDATE: Enterprise Zone** - The Tees Valley Enterprise Zone is now live, with the status effective from 1 April 2012. Within Stockton the Government funded **business rate discount** is available at **Belasis Business Park**. This enables growing companies within the eligible sectors locating on the site up to £55,000 discount on their business rates for up to 5 years as long as they locate there before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015. The existing units at **Belasis** that are empty (as listed in the Implementation Plan) also qualify for the same business rate discount. **The New Energy & Technology Business Park in Billingham** will be able to offer occupiers **enhanced capital allowances** against the cost of qualifying plant and machinery. **Northshore** is one of four local sites in the Tees Valley where eligible businesses that locate on the site can benefit from the same **business rate discount**. Three of these sites including Northshore are for digital businesses. These sites are being locally funded by the **retained business rate uplift** from the Government funded sites. The Tees Valley was the first area to have its simplified planning regimes approved by Government. All Tees Valley Enterprise Zone sites have either **Local Development Orders (LDOs) or Pre Planning Agreements (PPAs)** in place - all the Stockton sites are covered by PPAs. Discussions are taking place with several businesses keen to move onto Enterprise Zone sites or premises throughout the Tees Valley including Belasis and the New Energy & Technology Business Park. Tees Valley Unlimited has employed Fergus Mitchell as the **Tees Valley Enterprise Zone Project Manager**.
- **Tees Valley Unlimited** is calling on private sector businesses in the area to take part in a survey to help determine the **health of the local economy**. The online survey hopes to collate the views, ideas and ambitions of firms in the area, and the **Local Enterprise Partnership** hopes that business of all sizes and from all sectors will take part. Data received during the project will help to inform future Tees Valley Unlimited and local authority partners of the best ways to aid the business community. In addition, the findings will also be passed on to Central Government and key decision makers.
- The occupancy of Stockton Business Centre at the end of March 2012 is 83%. **Squegg Branding Consultants** and **Schoolhouse Recruitment** have moved into larger units, whilst **Dawn to Dusk Solar Solutions** has taken on an additional unit. **Orion Data Systems** has moved in, previously having had an accommodation address at the Centre. **Fire Pwny Digital** a music promoter is moving into unit 305 on 20th March 2012.