
FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH

Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Bill Dixon, Leader of the Council

Responsible Director – Ada Burns, Chief Executive

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To consider bestowing the Freedom of the Borough on two individuals who have rendered eminent services to the Borough.

Summary

2. This report sets out proposals for awarding the Freedom of the Borough to two individuals. Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires the Council to pass an appropriate resolution (passed by not less than two thirds of the Members present voting) to confer the Freedom of the Borough at a Special meeting convened for that purpose.

Recommendation

3. Members are asked to :-
 - (a) agree to the request (with not less than two thirds of the Members present at the meeting voting in favour of the resolution) and confer the Freedom of the Borough of Darlington on John Williams and Alasdair MacConachie’.
 - (b) Authorise the Chief Executive to finalise the arrangements and liaise with the two individuals on a mutually convenient date on which to confer the Awards.

Reasons

- (a) To enable the Council to confer Awards
- (b) To comply with Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972.

**Paul Wildsmith
Director of Resources**

Background Papers

No background papers were utilised in the compilation of this report

Linda Todd: Extension 2354

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no issues in relation to Crime and Disorder.
Health and Well Being	There are no issues in relation to Health and Wellbeing.
Carbon Impact	There are no issues in relation to Carbon Impact
Diversity	There are no issues relating to Diversity which this report needs to address
Wards Affected	All Wards are effected equally.
Groups Affected	There is no impact on any particular group.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report requests additional funding as there is no current budget allocation.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	This report does not adversely impact on the Strategy
Efficiency	This report does not have any direct impact on efficiency.

MAIN REPORT

Information

4. The Honorary Freedom of the Borough is the highest distinction a local authority can bestow on an individual. The Local Government Act 1972 allows Councils to admit as Honorary Freeman 'persons of distinction and any persons who have rendered eminent services to the Borough'.
5. It is an honour that is sparingly awarded. Since 1900, Darlington has only admitted 18 Freeman, the last being the late Alderman Jim Skinner who was a former Leader of the Council in 1982.
6. Freeman are honorary positions and do not possess any practical benefits once enjoyed by their predecessors although they would play a part in Civic and Ceremonial events in the Borough.

Freedom of the Borough

7. The proposal is to confer the award on John Williams, former Leader of the Council and Alasdair MacConachie, Chair of Darlington Partnership for the eminent service they have rendered to the Borough of Darlington.

John Williams MBE, DL

8. As Leader of the Council (1991 to 2011) and a Ward Member (1979 to 2011) John Williams has made a significant impact on public life in Darlington.
9. John provided vision and drive for Darlington for more than 20 years, building alliances across the public, private and voluntary sector to secure prosperity for the Town and its residents. During this period, he provided the political leadership to the Council, including proposing the policy framework within which the Council operates and leading the Cabinet to ensure that its work was undertaken in accordance with the Council's Constitution. He successfully worked with three Chief Executives to achieve the long term financial, business and economic stability of the Council.
10. As Leader, with strong ambitions for Darlington, he often had to represent the Council in adverse and sensitive circumstances, including when difficult or unpopular decisions were taken but this was always undertaken in a transparent manner and he demonstrated that he was receptive to challenges and change.
11. John also worked tirelessly leading the Council's campaign to achieve Unitary status in 1997, re-instating Darlington's 'identity' to meet the needs and aspirations of everyone in the Borough. Since that period Darlington has improved significantly. Under the previous regime of inspections for local authorities Darlington had the maximum ranking from 2005 until 2009 when the arrangements changed. During the same period Darlington was consistently given high scores for the value for money it offered to local people.

12. John's lead raised educational achievement in the Borough, ensuring that the highest quality opportunities existed in education, learning and training. Improving school performance and raising aspirations was at the forefront of his agenda as was investment in new schools and improved facilities for all. During his leadership he saw seven new schools built within Darlington.
13. John also held leading positions on all of the main regeneration and economic development bodies in the region and was instrumental in the improvements that took place in the economy and environment of North East England. For example, he was a founder Deputy Chair of the board of One NorthEast, and helped steer the creation of a successful Regional Development Agency; in particular, as Chair of the Regeneration Committee he helped steer the Agency's input into some of the major regeneration schemes which improved the quality of life in North East England.
14. At a sub-regional level, when Darlington became a unitary authority in 1997, John forged new relationships to create Tees Valley structures which resulted in major investment transforming the economy. He was responsible for driving many specific projects, and was widely respected across the region for his experience, and skill.
15. Darlington Borough Council won a significant number of national Awards whilst John was its Leader (Beacon Council, IIP, LGC and other press awards).
16. On a personal basis he was proud to serve as Mayor of the Borough in 1994/95, he was appointed as a Deputy Lieutenant of County Durham and was awarded an M.B.E. in the 2008 Queen's New Year's Honours List for his services to local government.
17. Leading a Council for 20 years is an achievement in itself. John provided the stability, focus and leadership which enabled Darlington Borough Council to continually improve year on year. He commanded respect locally and regionally for his commitment to Darlington, and his strong and inclusive leadership. He was a strong advocate of partnership working and was, alongside Alasdair MacConachie, responsible for driving the development of a local strategic partnership for Darlington.

Alasdair MacConachie OBE, DL, HonDBA, FRSA

18. Alasdair's contribution to the community of Darlington has and continues to be significant. He has devoted himself to an almost uncountable number of organisations, events and initiatives he is a very well-known and highly thought of individual in both the private and voluntary sectors within Darlington and is identified by many people if asked as a first class role model for the community.
19. Caring and passionate about his work, and equipped with innovation, moral courage, enthusiasm, entrepreneurship, and forward thinking, has enabled him to carry out his duties to a very high standard that cannot be matched by others.
20. As Managing Director of Sherwoods, Alasdair employs over 170 staff and is one of the largest independent retailers in the General Motors franchise with a turnover of £45 million.

21. Some of the key contributions to the community come from his external commitments: He is also Vice Lord Lieutenant for County Durham – and alongside his regular duties in deputising for the Lord Lieutenant is instrumental in securing visits from members of the Royal family to Darlington.
22. Chairman of Darlington College, and in this role oversaw its move to new buildings at Central Park, its ranking as an “outstanding College” and its successful partnerships with Teesside University.
23. Chair of Darlington Local Strategic Partnership, and has brought focus and a strong business ethos that has seen the Partnership enjoy a high reputation nationally.
24. Chairman of St. Teresa’s Hospice, President of the Friends of Darlington Memorial Hospital, an active Rotarian and fund holder and advisor to the County Durham Community Foundation. In these roles Alasdair will have raised many hundreds of thousands of pounds over the years, not to mention all the good causes he lends his name and his active support to. The most recent example was to support a Fundraising Ball for the Darlington Rape and Sexual Abuse Crisis and Counselling Centre.
25. He was High Sheriff for Durham in 2009/10, and brought fresh energy and community spirit to the role.
26. With strong personal and family connections to the Army (and the Gurkhas in particular) Alasdair chairs the Independent Advisory Panel at Catterick and also raises funds for the Gurkhas Benevolent Fund.
27. Alasdair is a passionate supporter and sponsor of Darlington’s cultural life, and has helped to bring many world class musicians to Darlington.
28. The University of Teesside awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Business Administration to Alasdair in 2008 in celebration of the contribution he has made to learning in Darlington. Alasdair has a real passion for education and was a driving force behind the vision for Darlington to have a University.
29. In his Darlington Partnership role he has attracted various funding to the Borough, has an excellent partnership working approach, being able to bring key players around the table to discuss controversial issues making Darlington a better Town. He has also played a key role in the strategic development of the Town by liaising with local businesses to engage them in the initiatives of the Town.
30. He is a real people’s person and a font of knowledge, who is immensely supportive, highly respected by his colleagues and members of the public, in fact, many would say he is a true gentleman with a heart of gold.
31. Alasdair has been a huge support to the Council and the people of Darlington for numerous years. It is appropriate that these two individuals are considered for this Honour at the same time. It has been the quality of relationship between John Williams

and Alasdair MacConachie that drove the Partnership, fostering strong connections between business and Council, and a focus on delivering real benefits to the town.

Council Arrangements

32. Should the Council agree to confer the Freedom of the Borough on John Williams and Alasdair MacConachie, it is suggested that the Chief Executive be given delegated powers to finalise the date for the Ceremony and the arrangements with the two individuals.

Power to Award the Freedom of the Borough

33. The power to award the Freedom of the Borough is contained in the Local Government Act 1972. Section 249 of that requires that an appropriate resolution is passed by not less than two thirds of the Members voting thereon at a meeting of the Council specially convened for that purpose. Those awarded honorary freedom are required to be persons of distinction or persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the Borough.