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TEES VALLEY TELLS MINISTER 'WE'RE UP FOR THE CHALLENGE'

The Tees Valley is well placed to maintain its vision for growth despite the current economic upheavals—thanks to the commitment of all parts of the community to work together.

That was the message today from the Chairman of Tees Valley Unlimited Hugh Lang as he opened the organisation's inaugural annual conference at Wynyard Hall. Speakers at the conference included the Local Government Minister John Healey.

Tees Valley Unlimited is the partnership of public, private and voluntary interests which co-ordinates activities to improve the economic performance of the sub-region. The conference brought together key figures from the public and private sectors, along with regional and national organisations, to discuss the progress already made in developing initiatives to drive forward the area's economy—and the bid to become a pilot for the new 'City Region' programme.

Mr Lang, who told the Minister that the area was 'up for the challenge' of working with Government on its plan to give local interests greater involvement in economic regeneration, said that the progress made over recent years was the result of a decision taken a decade ago by all key players in the Tees Valley that 'we had to work in partnership to tackle the enormous economic, environmental and social challenges we faced after years of decline.'

He told the conference "That commitment to partnership is what has enabled us to make giant strides in recent years—and which means that, despite the very real short-term difficulties we currently face, I believe we are in a strong position to maintain the drive forward to the vision for the Tees Valley agreed a decade ago...somewhere that people will want to live, work...and do business. It is also what has put us at the forefront of delivering the Government's local regeneration agenda "

Said John Healey "Real issues that affect every day lives, such as getting a job, new skills or somewhere to live or getting from place to place - do not stop at council borders. Nor should efforts to boost the economy.

"That's why areas such as Tees Valley, through Multi Area Agreements, have the potential to achieve more together than alone, whether this is to transform run down areas, boost transport or provide housing, to help regional economies ready for the upturn."

The Tees Valley's track record as a pioneer of the partnership approach was recognised in July last year when it became one of the first areas of the country to sign what's known as a 'Multi Area Agreement' with the Government, giving greater local freedom—and flexibility—over the way in which millions of pounds of public money can be used to move ahead with major regeneration schemes, housing improvements and the development of a Twenty First Century transport system.

Ministers have made clear they want to move even further in giving local areas greater influence and control through the piloting of new 'City Regions' which would create a real opportunity for powers—and funding—to be devolved from Whitehall. The Tees Valley is making a bid to become one of the pilot areas.

Other speakers at today's conference included Ada Burns, Chief Executive of Darlington Borough Council, who explained the role and achievements of Tees Valley Unlimited, with Eamonn Boylan, Corporate Director with the Homes and Communities Agency, speaking on the task of 'delivering regeneration in the midst of a credit crunch.' The day also involved panel debates and workshops—and delegates had the chance to go on a range of tours to see at first hand developments across the Tees Valley.

16-2-09

NOTE FOR EDITORS: Programme for the conference is attached. For further information please contact Peter Dodson, telephone 07753 910536, or Alan Bell, telephone 07812 565132.