



Moving forward ~~Only one cllr at conference~~ Cllrs miss out on discussing development

Local councillors missed out on the opportunity to hear a panel of experts express their views on the challenges facing Dundalk as it strives to become the centre in the north east, according to Chamber of Commerce CEO Bill Tosh.

'We only had one local councillor, Mark Dearey at the conference for ten minutes, and none of the others turned up even though there were councillors there from Castlebar and Cork.'

'These were leading experts who addressed the conference who had very interesting things to say as to how Dundalk should move forward.'

Speakers included Bob Fisher, an expert in retail from Colliers Scotland, who looked at the changing face of retail, both in Ireland and internationally.

Manuel Garrido of Keith Simpson & Associates, spoke of the need to develop a vision for Dundalk which would incorporate its natural assets such as the river.

Jamie Laffen Knowledge Manager, Douglas Wallace, said: 'The world has rapidly changed in the last decade and this presents new challenges for towns and cities across the globe regardless of size, location and history.

'These challenges range from attracting competitive investment to sustaining growth, while achieving a high quality of life for citizens.'

He added: 'Stabilising the balance between the social, physical and economic factors affecting a town creates the future map for urban success or failure.'

'In order to be successful in this endeavour, strong commitment, the right information and creative solutions are required. Vibrant towns need great people, comprehensive planning and strategies for delivery.'

'Getting the mix right creates a powerful place to grow up, learn, work, live and visit.'

Jim Power, chief economist with Friends First said that while there were difficult economic circumstances at the moment, he was confident that the economy would recover by 2010.

However, he drew attention to the challenges facing Dundalk and the border region.

Disposable incomes per person in the border region are 9.4% lower than the national average and 19.8% below Dublin, although Louth was doing well in the Border Region as dispos-

able incomes here are just 1.2% below the national average.

Unemployed figures in Dundalk are higher than the national average, at 6.9% compared with 4.4% nationally.

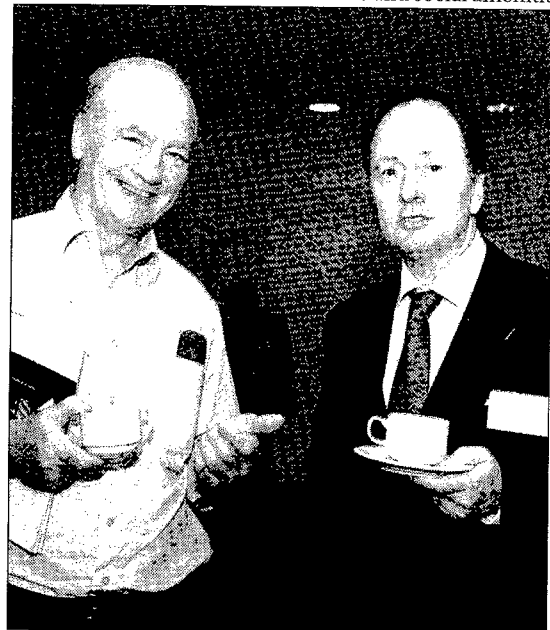
The numbers going on to third level education were also lower than the national average.

There was a heavier reliance on manufacturing for

employment which increased the vulnerability of the workforce.

In order for Dundalk to capitalise on its potential as a Gateway town, there was a need quality environment and a sense of community which in turn would help attract high quality employment.

To create this environment, the town needs high quality retail, restaurants, hotels and social amenities.



Paul Clinton and John Connolly at the conference Planning and developing a centre in the north east.