

Tory consultation claim sparks clash

By The Journal

Shadow minister Alan Duncan yesterday savaged a multi-million pound regeneration plan in the North-East as he stepped up efforts to secure a long-awaited Conservative revival in the region.

The party's trade and industry spokesman lashed out at a £60m plan to revive Whitley Bay, and said a "lack of consultation" with the town's traders was a disgrace.

Proposals include 200 houses, a quality hotel, new leisure pool and a redeveloped playhouse theatre. But Mr Duncan said: "I want to see this area revived, but it's got to be a quality revival, not just a sell-off of land."

He was in North Tyneside during a tour of the North-East ahead of next week's council polls, in his role as shadow minister for Tyneside.

The borough is the Conservatives' strongest urban area in the region, but it elected Labour mayor John Harrison.

Mr Duncan said: "I sense that there's a lot of party manoeuvring on the part of the Labour mayor here. I sense the mayor wants to champion areas that will benefit the Labour Party and not benefit the whole region."

Critics say the Whitley Bay plan would damage businesses and not do enough to attract families to the area.

But Mr Harrison last night accused the Conservatives of putting out misinformation. He said: "We've carried out 28 consultation exercises involving businesses, local residents, young people - I've engaged with people, come up with these plans and now I'm going to carry them out.

"I don't take Mr Duncan's comments seriously.

"If I was really pandering to Labour areas, I would hardly be spending £60m on Whitley Bay. He is clearly trying to capture votes, but I'm trying to make North Tyneside better."

The limits to the Conservatives' expectations in the North-East next week were illustrated when Mr Duncan claimed that merely fielding candidates in every ward in Newcastle and Gateshead represents a "great step forward".

"Locally, we've got no great expectations of winning wards, but we see this as the beginning of a serious, long-term effort which will underpin our revival in due course", he said.

Alan Campbell, Labour MP for Tynemouth, said of the Conservatives: "In the 20 years that they were in government they never lifted a finger to help this town.