

# The city that has

**L**OOKING at cuttings from *The Journal* archives showing Sunderland in 1992 feels like a trip rather further down memory lane than just 15 years.

When city status arrived, it was less than four years since the last shipyard closed, ending more than 600 years of tradition, and the shutdown of Wearmouth Colliery was still two years away.

The fabric of the city has since changed beyond recognition in many areas, with the riverside in particular now completely transformed, and images of the old run down City Library and Museum, Sunderland Polytechnic and the Vaux Brewery now looking very dated indeed.

Roker Park is long gone, to be replaced by the sparkling Stadium of Light – on the colliery site – the library and museum have now been split, and the museum has gained the new Winter Gardens, and slicing beneath the city centre and out to the west side of the city runs the £98m Metro extension.

These are just a handful of examples of the extensive regeneration schemes realised in recent times. The landscape, both physically and metaphorically, is fundamentally different today.

But is the change in Sunderland since city status arrived merely skin deep? How much has the place actually changed in its economy and its prospects?

A quick glance at the names of the city's big employers is very revealing in this respect.

Two of few constants are the giant Nissan car plant at Washington and engine maker Rolls Royce providing the backbone of manufacturing – but all around things have changed greatly.

Where once heavy industry was dominant, now the council promotes the tenants of the Doxford International Business Park, on the western fringe of the city, as the heart of its economy. Names like T-Mobile, Lloyds TSB, Barclays and Nike are over the doors at the offices there.

Business people have voted Sunderland as one of the UK's top five places to do business, and the city has now been nominated five times as one of the seven "Most IT Intelligent" cities in the world.

And while the creation of new jobs is most welcome, the immense change of the last decade and a half has not been without troubles – many thousands have lost their positions as industrial companies shut up shop.

Most recently we have seen the final demise of the city's centuries old glass making industry with the closures of the Arc (formerly

It is now 15 years since Sunderland was given city status by the Queen. **Graeme King** examines how it has changed – in appearance, in its economy, and in its outlook.

Newells) and Corning glass factories. There was also the loss of hundreds of jobs with the closure of Stag Furniture and laundry firm County Lunden.

But with Doxford and Sunderland Enterprise Park now home to huge numbers of workers – whatever the vagaries of the call centre industry to which many of those belong – the city's economy is now a million miles from the picture of 1992.

Recent success stories include Northern Rock announcing 2,500 new jobs, Tacle UK bringing 250, Tanfield Group adding 400 and Continental Conveyor bringing 180 more.

During the five-year period 2001-2005, the total number of jobs in the city increased by 14,500 or 13.5%, compared to 8.9% across the North-East, and 3.4% in the UK.

And down by the banks of the River Wear, the £50m St Peter's campus of Sunderland University, standing where ships were once built, is a potent symbol of the city's renaissance.

The university is now home to 14,000 students, and has focused its activities on two main sites, rather than being scattered across the town as in pre-1992 days as a polytechnic.

Its expansion in recent years has made an impression on the mix of the city's population, on its housing, and on the diversity of cultural experiences to be enjoyed.

Tom Macartney, chief executive of urban regeneration company Sunderland Arc, is now preparing to leave the city for a new job in Staffordshire, and is happy to look back on a period of significant change.

He says: "The Arc has been here only five years but beyond that, over the last 10 years, there has been real, dramatic change in the city."

"Unfortunately there was quite a lot of decline in heavy industry, to leave us with a post-industrial city."

"If you're looking for something significant in the last 10 to 15 years, it's that the economic base has become much more solid – and far, far less reliant on heavy industry."

"I would not wish what has happened on anybody, but the city has now come through it. And now Sunderland is right on the cusp of real change – it's steadied itself, which is no mean feat, with the city council and RDA

fighting a lot of fires. It's been complicated, difficult but necessary work."

Mr Macartney cites Doxford International Business Park as a key development in changing the face of Sunderland. The site next to the A19 now hosts more than 8,000 workers in its various constituent companies – providing an employment base on the same kind of scale as the shipyards provided in their later years.

And he speaks of developments such as the Bridges 2 extension to the city's main shopping centre as important in the image of Sunderland changing – and providing the basis for developers to have faith in investing further.

After many years of trying, the Arc is now close to being able to redevelop the former Vaux site in the city centre – and properly link the city to its river.

The formerly industrial riverside is a particular area of renewed faith, after many decades when nobody used the area for anything but making a living.

Mr Macartney says: "With the river, there was something which happened to many European rivers – where a city is said to have 'turned its backs' on the river. But I don't accept that – the reason they were forced to do it, was that the rivers were industrialised."

"When de-industrialisation happens, and in Sunderland – and my home city of Glasgow too – there is an opportunity to redevelop. What have now been laid are the building blocks for the next phase."

One of the key players in the regeneration of Sunderland has obviously been its local authority.

Peter Chapman, assistant chief executive of Sunderland City Council, said much had been achieved to change the city.

He said: "Sunderland has undergone a massive transformation since it achieved city status with more and more people choosing to live, work and study here as regeneration continues while the community retains the characteristics which make Sunderland such a special, distinctive place."

Paul Woolston is managing partner of accountancy and professional services firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in Newcastle. He was born in Hendon in Sunderland and

went to school there. His parents still live in the city and he has retained a passion for its development – and that of its football team.

He is optimistic that the developments of recent years can be built upon, and that Sunderland can develop further – both in its physical infrastructure and through its people.

He says: "Sunderland has always been good at creating things out of adversity. The city always seems to pull a rabbit out of the hat. There's a degree of greater self confidence about the place today. I do think it's to do with the people – stoical and with a great sense of humour."

Mr Woolston sees the city having what he calls "anchors" like the employment provided by Nissan for more than 20 years, but also having important smaller – though important in perception terms – developments like the arrival of department store Debenhams in the city.

He also sees an important structural issue affecting the destiny of the city – that it has largely lost its middle classes in recent times.

He said: "I think we need to recreate something, where we have better quality housing, better quality of living, to have a balanced community."

"I'm not a big fan of the middle class per se, but you do need a balance. We are already seeing the signs of it in some areas. In Washington, house prices are high."

There are good signs in the public sector too, Mr Woolston believes, with the city council being consistently well graded, and the city's main hospital well thought of, while Sunderland Arc is making progress with its projects too.

He says: "The Vaux site is pretty critical – some things have a psychological impact that go beyond the event itself. Having a brewery here was important, and it's only now it's gone that you realise how influential it was."

"Having that going, and the empty site around for such a long time – to have that transformed will be vital. What I would like to see in the city is some heightening of the ambition and aspirations there."

"The city needs to be not just doing better, but doing exceptionally better. It could be the Vaux site – that could be really iconic."

So after 15 years as a city, Sunderland now appears to be settling into its status. After undergoing so much change, a new landscape is appearing, and the feel of the place is improving along with its self confidence. With billions more spending in the pipeline, and structural plans for the economy well advanced, the future looks bright.

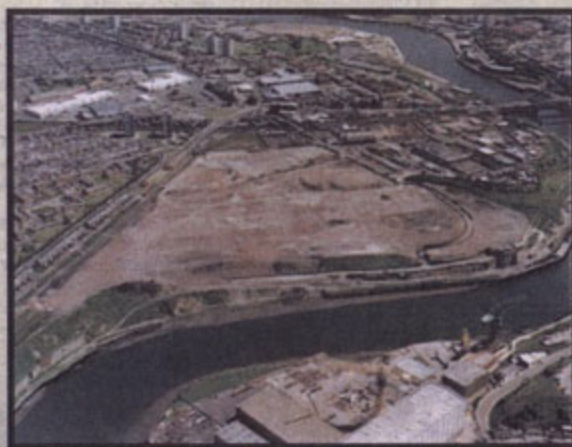


NEW ERA: The fabric of Sund

## BEFORE AND AFTER



NEW STADIUM: Left, Fans at the Stadium of Light; right, the former Wearmouth colliery site before the stadium was built.



FUTURE VISION: Left, an artist's impression of the ambitious £300

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# re-invented itself



has changed beyond recognition since it was made a city 15 years ago. Picture taken by Metro Radio's Marky Mark Robinson from his helicopter

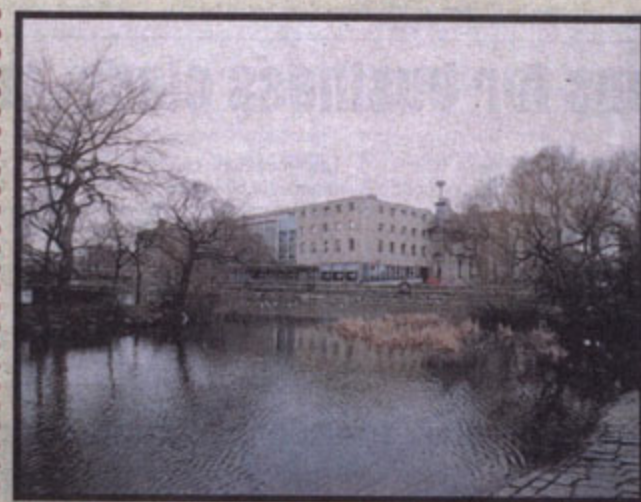
**Major new developments still to come in Sunderland:**

- £17m Aquatic Centre, next to Stadium of Light – the only 50 metre pool between Leeds and Edinburgh – part of Stadium Park development.
- Farringdon Row – the 15-acre site is intended for new homes and offices, with a masterplan being drawn up by Hypostyle Architects.
- Holmeside Triangle – new £120m retail development to be created by Thomfield properties of London.
- Vaux site – £300m project including 1,000 homes, offices, two hotels, leisure facilities, shops, bars and restaurants.



**ROYAL VISIT:** The Queen arrives at Sunderland Civic Centre in 1993, for her first "city" visit.

- Sunderland - city milestones**
- March 1992 - City status officially granted
  - June 1992 - Sunderland Polytechnic wins university status
  - May 1993 - Queen's visit to mark city status
  - Early 1990s - Start of development on Daxford International Business Park and Sunderland Enterprise Park
  - December 1994 - Wearmouth Colliery closes
  - 1995 - First phase of Sunderland Riverside campus opens
  - August 1996 - Nissan celebrates 10 years on Wearside
  - May 1997 - Roker Park football ground closes
  - July 1997 - Stadium of Light opens
  - 1997 - Cowie Group rebrands as Arriva and embarks on an international expansion drive.
  - 1999 - Vaux brewery closes after 160 years in business
  - 2000 - £40m expansion of Bridges Shopping Centre opens.
  - January 2001 - Nissan commits to building the new Micra in Sunderland
  - July 2001 - Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens opens to the public
  - 2002 - Sunderland extension of Tyne & Wear Metro opens
  - December 2004 - Refurbished and enlarged Empire Theatre re-opens.
  - January 2007 - Closure of Newells (ARC) glass factory heralds the end of the industry in Sunderland
  - March 2007 - planning permission granted for Sunderland Arc's re development of Vaux Breweries city centre site



development scheme for the Vaux site; right, the former Vaux Brewery. **WINTER GARDENS BUILT:** Left, the old City Library and Museum; right, the new Winter Gardens.