

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting, held in the Durham Town Hall at 18:30pm on Wednesday 24th May 2023.

1. Welcome from the Chair of the Parish Council

The Chair took the opportunity to thank all those present for attending the meeting today and particularly thanked all residents who had supported the work of the Parish Council since its inception in 2018. The Chair wished all present good health and wishes.

2. Confirmation of the minutes of the last parish meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 25th May 2022 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

3. Chair's update on the work of the Parish Council

The Chair of the Parish Council provided an update on work carried out by the Parish Council since the last meeting of the parish. The Chair provided the following report to the meeting:

I would like to start by thanking all of my fellow Councillors, our Clerk, external stakeholders, local residents and many more for their work and support for the Parish Council over the last five years. Challenges occur almost daily and our work as a Council can never be fully finished but, through highs such as the Jubilee and Coronation, to lows such as Covid-19, it has been really terrific to see our community come together and it is a privilege to be the Chair of what is now a Quality Award Parish Council.

This year we are pushing ahead with our work with the five key priorities for our area as our guiding light. These priorities have helped us in the ambitious programme of work we have delivered to date for the parish.

Firstly, keeping our community as clean and green as possible is a major priority for this Parish Council. I think it is right to say that keeping the environment around us as pleasant for residents as possible is the key issue for many residents in our parish – whether we look at the regular contact we receive regarding littering and bins or improving our less loved areas in the public realm.

As a Parish Council, we have recently agreed to continue with our Service Level Agreement with Durham County Council to provide an enhanced Neighbourhood Warden Service for an additional 10 hours provision per week. Our Wardens Kirk Thiis and Antony Waterson work tirelessly throughout the week to tackle issues relating to bins, low level anti-social behaviour, enforcing the PSPO around street drinking in the City and much more. They have been proactive in organising litter picks and expanding the City's *Shhh...11pm to 7am* campaign too.

Keeping our area looking its best also involves a lot of work with many partners to make our communities greener. I am delighted that the Parish Council has been

very successful with projects such as tree planting, bulb planting across the parish, providing free bedding plants to our residents for public spaces, greening up the Viaduct Area, supporting Durham in Bloom, providing funding for fruit trees across our schools and much more. All of this could not be possible without the terrific support and involvement of our residents and our partners. A very big thanks to all for their hard work on this.

Working with Boots in the Market Place, we are also delighted to be providing Terracycle boxes to help recycle empty pill and blister buckets – this has been overwhelmingly successful with two large boxes filled almost every month since the scheme was launched. Our work at a local-level continues on this front.

Keeping our local environment enjoyable for all also means facing up to some significant challenges we face as a community. The City is unique to the rest of County Durham in the challenges it faces with an ever-expanding University presence and an expanding night time economy. The Parish Council recognises – and many of us experience ourselves – the very real issue of late-night noise disturbance caused by a minority in our community. The Parish Council may not be a statutory body to deal with this issue in the same way in which the Police and DCC certainly are – but that doesn't mean we can't be proactive where residents voice their concerns to us. I am delighted that the Parish Council continues to push on with our support for the resident-led *Shhh...11pm-7am* campaign in the City.

Most importantly however, the Parish Council has recently entered into a Service Level Agreement with Durham Police to provide an enhanced Neighbourhood Policing service for the City centre on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Delivered by Dave Clarke and facilitated by a newly-appointed Community Engagement Co-ordinator alongside a new Public Protection Officer, this has been a great example of partnership working to deliver on our residents' priorities. You told us that additional policing and additional enforcement were key issues for you earlier this year when we launched a public consultation and I am proud that we have been able to deliver this.

This follows on from the Parish Council's leaflet to all residents advising them "where to turn to and what to do" if they are experiencing an issue in Durham.

Additionally, and as part our multi-agency approach to keep everyone safe in Durham, I am delighted that the Parish Council continues to provide significant funding to ensure the continuation of the recently-established Safety of Women at Night hub in St. Nicholas Church in the Market Place, which celebrated its one-year anniversary earlier this year. This hub is providing an absolutely essential and, at times, life-saving service to residents and visitors and it is essential that this continues into the future. I am delighted to say that all of the key players in the City have committed to providing further funding to keep the service going into the future.

As part of a longer-term strategy, the Parish Council is also leading on a campaign to have a late-night levy on all late-night economy premises introduced to ensure that those licensees who wish to make huge money from our night-time economy also contribute towards its policing.

I am also pleased that we have worked proactively with Dave Clarke and his team in order to provide the City's licensed premises with rapid-testing breathalysers, anti-drug surface spray and have also funded more drug dog searches of the City's premises in order to eradicate drugs misuse out of our City.

Of course, we must all play our part to ensure that we cherish and preserve all that makes Durham City the great place it is. That includes promoting our rich heritage as a parish. I was delighted that the Parish Council was successful in a number of external funding bids to help us do just that – from the restoration of the Neville's Cross on the 675th Anniversary of the Battle itself, the restoration of the Ruth First mural on Providence Row to mark the 40th Anniversary of Ruth's tragic death, funding new blue plaques around the City marking buildings and people of significance in our parish and of course launching the 7 Hills trail and the Heritage Trail maps too. Durham is a City steeped in heritage; a fact no better demonstrated by the significant number of listed, non-listed heritage assets in our City, the City's spectacular Conservation Area and World Heritage Site and much more.

We are thrilled that Durham City may yet become the first parish yet to have two World Heritage Sites in our locality – we look forward to seeing the results of the bid from Redhills in due course.

Having a great City for everyone also means having a thriving High Street, in spite of the many challenges of Covid-19. A City simply cannot function as it should if it is to simply become a proliferation of licensed premises such as STACK – we need a thriving retail and daytime visitor economy too.

To support us with this work, the Parish Council has contracted the services of award-winning retail expert Graham Soult who is supporting us with marketing all the amazing independent, family-run businesses in the City. Graham also helps in securing new business tenants for vacant premises in the City as well as providing advice to businesses – entirely free to the business at the point of need.

The Parish Council has also established a Totally Locally website – marketing independent businesses in the City and this is supplemented with a Totally Locally podcast which is proving really popular too.

The Parish Council continues to represent our community on planning matters too. Analysing literally hundreds of applications every year and studying thousands of documents which go with them is a massive undertaking and I am delighted at the successes we have had in protecting our Conservation Area, our World Heritage Site, our precious greenbelt as well as protecting against overdevelopment and the further studentification of our City. A big thank you to everyone involved in this essential work.

Equally, the Parish Council has been working closely with the County Council in progressing the creation of a Conservation Area Management Plan. The principal aim of the Management Plan is to improve the understanding of the conservation area and establish a positive strategy for its preservation and enhancement. This work is now being led by Lee Hall – an outstanding officer at Durham County Council and we continue to play an active part in its production.

A good Parish Council is also one which manages your money well. The Parish Council has been successful in a number of external funding bids and, as a result of this, and good financial management managed to freeze the Parish Council's precept for four years in a row at just over £34. As you are all aware, following the public consultation last year, we agreed to raise our precept in order to deliver on your priorities.

The City of Durham Parish Council still has one of the lowest precept charges across the County and we have managed to deliver a huge programme of work with this funding. At the same time, our auditors have yet again commended the Parish Council for its excellent management and governance over the last financial year.

I am also pleased that we committed to providing financial grant support to many local community and voluntary organisations across our parish – from projects that improve the public realm in Crossgate and St. Oswald's playpark in Elvet to supporting those organisations which work with and on behalf of those who are most vulnerable – I am delighted that we have been able to support their work.

I am pleased that the Parish Council has proven itself as an organisation which really punches above its weight in working on behalf of our community. This is publicly on show no more so than when the Parish Council works on events in the City – major events the Parish Council has taken a lead on since our formation are the annual Remembrance Day event in the City as well as this year's Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III. This latter event involved us establishing a 'Golden Orb Working Group' of all the major City stakeholders, organising events and acquiring external funding from bodies such as the National Lottery, Durham BID, DCC culture team and many more in order to deliver 7-days' worth of back-to-back events at very little cost to the taxpayer. These events are huge undertakings and simply would not be possible without the work of our Councillors and our dedicated Parish Clerk Adam.

I would like to end by highlighting the Parish Council's delight in achieving Quality Parish Council status. To put this into context, the City of Durham Parish Council has been in existence for just under 5 years and is now only one of three local Parish and Town Councils (out of 104 across County Durham) to have received this accolade.

This was a 5-month assessment process and the panel particularly highlighted community leadership, excellent governance, the Parish Council's corporate plan and the Neighbourhood Plan as outstanding in this assessment. We are delighted to receive this recognition from the national body which manages our sector.

I hope I speak for everyone in saying we can all be proud of the work taking place in the City, by the Parish Council and others. Many thanks!

4. Durham Police update on the City of Durham parish area

The Chair welcomed Inspector Dave Clarke to the parish meeting and thanked Dave for all of his work with the Parish Council to date.

Dave began by confirming that the two additional officers as part of the Operation Lentil project in the City began in early April and they were already a visible presence around the City and its surrounding residential areas.

Dave advised that he was aware that the additional officers had already dealt with a number of incidents since commencing and having the additional resource for the City meant that issues were being dealt with much quicker than they were prior to the Operation.

Dave took the opportunity to thank the Parish Council and local residents for their ongoing support with this Operation and time will tell what difference this makes for the City in addition to the work already being done by the Parish Council and others on the Safety Hub.

The Clerk highlighted the exceptional amount of work which Dave Clarke has put into this Operation and his ongoing work to make the City a safer and more pleasant place for residents.

Residents thanked Dave Clarke and his team for their work and agreed that this additional visible presence was really having a positive impact on the City.

Dave highlighted that the big issue in the City at present is the issue of nuisance begging and Dave Clarke advised that he and his team are currently looking to build up an evidence base to go back to DCC on this to try once more for a PSPO.

Dave ended by reassuring members of the public that his door is always open should anyone wish to raise any issues with him.

5. Questions from members of the public

A member of the public expressed her concerns about the growing number of C3 to C4 applications taking place in the Neville's Cross part of the parish. She highlighted that she was aware of Policy 16 and the 10% rule and this was appreciated, however this seemed to be insufficient in tackling the growth in areas which were just under 10% but didn't take account of the impact in cul-de-sac areas where one house can be surrounded by 3 HMOs but still be below the 10% rule because of the 100m radius. The resident asked what could be done about this. Councillor Liz Brown advised that she was a Member of the Central and East Area County Planning Committee and she had highlighted that there were other policies within the County Durham Plan which carry as equal weight as Policy 16, for instance Policies 29 and 31 which deal with amenity, and Councillor Brown stressed the need to also focus on these policies too.

A member of the public also asked about the state of a section of land at Diamond Terrace and also the poor condition of Durham Market Place, particularly the benches and loose stones underfoot. The Clerk advised that he would look into this with Durham County Council but advised that the Parish Council had recently agreed a fund to improve the Market Place as part of a joint project with Durham County Council.

A member of the public expressed concerns about the amount of Section 106 monies going unspent in the Elvet and Gilesgate division. She expressed grave concerns that residents were having to endure the pain of development on their doorsteps without achieving some benefit through Section 106 for things such as open space enhancement. The resident advised that she had heard talk of the Elvet Park project but she had seen no plans to date on this. The Clerk advised that the County Council had previously hoped to use some of this funding for the now unsuccessful Levelling Up bid and that they were now reviewing the use of this funding.

6. City of Durham Good Citizen 2023 awards

The Chair of the Parish Council presented the City of Durham Good Citizen 2023 awards to the Parish Council's chosen recipients as follows:

Nicola Duckworth

Nicola is a well-known face around Durham City. Having worked professionally in planning and conservation at Durham County Council for many years – even writing the Character Appraisal for the Durham City Conservation Area, Nicola took early retirement and has thrown herself into community volunteering.

Many of you may be aware that Nicola was one of the founding members of the Friends of Flass Vale group – helping to ensure that the City has an important open green space and green lung at a time when less was known about the impacts of climate change and the benefits of being outdoors for mental and physical well-being.

Nicola is currently the Secretary of the North End Allotment Association and her energy in running the site – from daily management, grant submissions, managing the paperwork for the allotment site and more – so successfully. No task is too big or too small for Nicola. For many of us, it isn't just what she does but how she does it which makes Nicola such a lovely and special person. Durham City is so much the better for people like Nicola.

Barry Gower

Barry was very helpful to Pointers in live testing their recommended routes round the city, especially areas suitable for those in wheelchairs or with other mobility concerns particularly about the varying gradients along the riverbank paths and the cobbled and paved footways in the city centre.

He was also very helpful in seeking advice from the Access Group during the public campaign headed by Kirsty Thomas and other local community champions to resist the movement of the Cuthbert sculpture from Millennium Place to Palace Green.

He can always be relied upon to facilitate input from the Access group and other wider contacts when issues arise about the 'access to all' implications of planning applications.

Val Standen

Val Standen wins this award because of her outstanding contribution to the wellbeing of Durham residents.

She and her late husband Michael were instrumental in saving Flass Vale from development in 1973 and lobbying for DCC to buy the land and turn into a Nature Reserve thus providing the city centre with a green lung. This was before anyone saw the value of green spaces for both mental and physical health.

Indeed, the bulldozers had already moved in before they were stopped. She started the Friends of Flass Vale in 2002 and they carry on to this day, improving the area, planting trees and generally keeping the Vale pristine. (In fact, with the help of her volunteers Val has managed to eradicate Himalayan Balsam from the Vale – a not inconsiderable feat!) In this year, the 50th since she galvanised Durham residents into action, I think that it is fitting that Val be awarded the Parish Council Good Citizen of the Year Award.

Alice Wilkes

Alice has worked as Administration and Marketing Manager for the Durham Markets Company for 3.5 years now. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that Alice's role is a usual 9 to 5 job five days a week but Alice has made it so much more than this.

An integral part in running both the indoor and outdoor markets, Alice is a familiar face around Durham because of her constant work in the community and engagement with local partner organisations. Through her tireless efforts, Alice has helped to deliver large scale events such as Chinese New Year, Durham Christmas Festival, Durham Children's Book Festival, and much more. Most recently Alice's work helped to ensure that Durham became, for the first time, the host City for the regional final in 2023 for the National Youth Market competition and Alice's work has often focused especially on providing work opportunities for young people, inspiring an entrepreneurial spirit at a young age and making the city a welcoming place for young and family visitors. She is passionate about the well-being of the city centre and promoting the huge part small independent businesses play in that respect, especially through the profile of the markets.

Alice has helped to ensure that the day time economy visitor experience of the city remains a positive one, with events – even on a shoe string budget or with the challenges of a global health pandemic - that add a different experience at each visit, have driven huge footfall to the city and in so doing having a huge beneficial impact on the City's economy.

Most especially, the huge undertaking of delivering the Platinum Jubilee in 2022 was only possible because of Alice's work. Alice was a total inspiration and an utter joy to work with. Members were absolutely blown away by her organisation and management of the Parish Council's Tea Dance event as well as her professional and endlessly positive engagement with local partners. Alice's exhaustive work helped to deliver a series of back-to-back events starting from 27th May to 6th June and ensured that the city marked this historic moment in our nation's history. Alice richly deserves this recognition and we thank her warmly for what she does for this city.

Alice Severs

Alice Severs has always been one of the pillars of the local community whether she is simply helping her neighbours or shaking a bucket on behalf of one of various charities. She one of those quietly competent people who goes out of her way to help whenever she is able.

Alice works with many organisations and groups, the Durham Pointers, Talking books for the blind, Access for Durham, and the Peoples' Bookshop. Every year she helps to raise money for the Durham Palestine Educational Trust. Alongside her work with City of Sanctuary, she helps with many local refugee activities, and has been a stalwart at funnelling useful items to local Ukrainian families. And Alice does all of this without the aid of a car travelling everywhere by bus.

By being a part of so many community activities, Alice is a community lynch pin who if she cannot help, she will have a folder with the name and address of someone who can. We cannot think of anyone who is more deserving of the Good Citizen of the Year Award.

Dave Clarke

Dave Clarke is the Durham Police Neighbourhood Inspector for the City of Durham. He has been the first police officer to have been in post for a substantial number of years and the first to engage regularly and constructively with the Parish Council. The biggest issue for the Parish Council in terms of surveys of residents' concerns has been anti-social behaviour and noise. With the withdrawal of funding to the police by the University and the University's reliance on a small private security firm and the retrospective powers of DCC, the Parish Council has sought means to ensure the presence of a real-time policing response within the Parish Council area.

Dave developed with the Parish Council – on his own initiative – a series of costed plans, one of which was finally approved by the Parish Council after discussion with the Council's Community and Residents Associations Forum. At the same time, he has also worked with the Parish Council to secure further funding for a coordinator and in-kind funding from the police.

Together the package represents a real, and potentially sustainable, response to the concerns of the majority of residents – and in so doing reflects a real example of joint and joined-up working that benefits our residents. The Award will recognise this and acknowledges that Dave Clarke's work could have a lasting community-wide benefit that the Parish Council could not have achieved alone.

In closing the meeting, the Chair took the opportunity to thank the Clerk for all of his work in supporting the good running of the Parish Council.

There being no further business, the Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Alan Doig', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Signed by Councillor Alan Doig (Chair of the Parish Council)
Wednesday 22nd May 2024