

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting, held in the Theatre Room at Durham Sixth Form Centre (DH1 1SG) at 18:00pm on Wednesday 22nd May 2024.

1. Welcome from the Chair of the Parish Council

The Chair of the Parish Council Coun. Alan Doig 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

Residents confirmed the Minutes of the Parish meeting held on Wednesday 22nd May 2024 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 as follows:

Since its formation in 2018, the City of Durham Parish Council has established an ambitious programme of work to help preserve, support and enhance our community for years to come. It has been really wonderful to have such great community support throughout and to see the difference this work is already having across the whole of our parish area. Last year, we became a Quality Award Council for a reason – now one of only 3 across the County and 100 nationwide to have achieved such an accolade – I could not be prouder of the work we deliver.

One major priority for the Parish Council since its formation has been to keep our community as clean and green as possible. I think it is right to say that keeping the environment around us as pleasant for residents as possible is the key issue for lots of our residents – 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 entered into a 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 desperately hard throughout the week with us to tackle issues relating to bins, low level anti-social behaviour, enforcing the PSPO around street drinking in the City, promoting the resident-led *Shhh...11pm to 7am* campaign and so much more. Our thanks to them for all of the tremendous work they do on our behalf. We genuinely don't know where we would be without them.

Last year, we also raised eyebrows, but proved yet again we are a Council here to blaze a trail nonetheless, by seeking a voluntary contribution from local landlords towards cleaning up our parish. The funding this achieved helped to fund additional waste collections and extra Wardens during the Green Move Out operation and we thank our University and County Council colleagues for their work on this excellent initiative.

Alongside groups such as Climate Action Durham, Elvet Residents Association and others, the Parish Council remains very concerned about the issue of air pollution in the City and we will soon be responding to the County Council's draft air quality management plan in due course – this is an incredibly important document for us in the

City with our own Air Quality Management Area and I encourage all residents to get involved in this consultation. Earlier this year, we partnered with local organisation OASES on their *Breathe Clean Air* project and are funding their work with local schools across the parish area to try and cut down on transport emissions and working towards a greener future for the next generation.

Keeping our area looking its best also involves a lot of work with many partners to make our community greener. I am delighted that the Parish Council has been successful with projects such as tree planting, bulb planting across the parish, providing bedding plants for public spaces, supporting Durham in Bloom, providing funding for fruit trees across our schools, supporting the construction of a sedum-roof shelter in our allotments site on North End and carrying out a tremendous amount of work in the Viaduct Area. Particularly at Lawson Terrace and Laburnum Avenue where a once neglected plot of land filled with 30 tonnes of waste and rubble is now a community fruit tree orchard. All of this could not be possible without the terrific support and involvement of our residents, Rushford Court students and our partners. A very big thanks to all for their hard work on this.

The Parish Council is also delighted to have taken the lead on establishing a tremendously popular Terracycle scheme to support residents in recycling empty pill packets in their local pharmacies. Last year, in partnership with Boots, this brilliant facility helped to recycle nearly 300,000 empty pill packets and proved to be the most successful recycling project delivered by a Parish or Town Council across the County. So much so, that other Parish Councils were coming to see how we did this in the City – a terrific project.

As many of you know, Boots ended the scheme earlier this year and, together with our colleagues at Belmont Parish Council, we are now funding these boxes temporarily at Whitfields pharmacy on Sunderland Road. I gather that Boots has now launched its own fully-funded scheme and it is really brilliant to see this enthusiasm for recycling and for the Parish Council to have taken the lead on this. As a Parish Council who has declared a Climate Change emergency, 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 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 we continue with our support for the resident-led Shhh...11pm-7am campaign in the City. This involves the installation of signs across the City on lampposts, thousands of Shhh... beer mats going into licensed premises across the City and in college bars, Shhh...banners being displayed at key entry points of the City, such as the Railway station and much more.

Just as importantly, 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 as part of our joint Operation Lentil initiative. Delivered by Dave Clarke and facilitated by a Community Engagement Co-ordinator alongside a University-funded 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 and I am proud that we have been able to deliver this.

This work 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 and the essential funding we have provided to the excellent ShopWatch initiative which has seen retail crime falling in the last year and the City becoming more resilient to crime and anti-social behaviour as a result.

Moreover, as part of 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 Safety of Women at Night hub in St. Nicholas Church in the Market Place. 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. Having dealt with over 4,000 incidents since it began in February 2022, nobody can be in any doubt about the significant work of this hub and long may that continue.

What makes Durham so wonderful is its phenomenal World Heritage Site and our City's Conservation Area. As custodians of this medieval city of ours, it is incumbent on all of us to play our part to ensure that we cherish and preserve all that makes Durham City the great place it is.

Our Parish Council's Planning and Licensing Committee deals with literally hundreds of applications each year, involving the painstaking analysis of thousands of documents, technical drawings and much more. We are delighted to be supported with much expertise on this Committee and to have had a number of successes in preventing inappropriate development in our City. Earlier this year, our Clerk carried out an analysis of appeals over the last year.

Out of the 21 appeals which were refused at Committee and then subsequently refused on appeal, 10 of these had an original recommendation to the Planning Committee to approve the application. Of those 10 appeals, 6 were in the City of Durham Parish Council area and all of the original refusals were due to this Parish Council using its power of call-in and successfully making our case at Committee.

It is easy to look at this in numbers terms only, however the reality on the ground with these decisions is that our precious Durham City greenbelt at Fernhill has been safeguarded, our Conservation Area at St. John's Road and elsewhere has been protected and the further loss of family homes in Neville's Cross has been resisted in a number of cases – this is surely the measure of a good Parish Council that looks into the detail of each application in painstaking detail.

Of course, these successes in planning have come in no small part thanks to the adoption of our Neighbourhood Plan. This again was a huge undertaking led by members of the Neighbourhood Plan Group – volunteers who gave hundreds of hours of their time to ensure that the future of development in our parish is decided by our community.

In addition, as part of its important licensing work, the Parish Council recently responded to the Council's Statement of Licensing Policy review and, in doing so, has made a strong case for a cumulative impact policy and a late-night levy on licensed premises. We feel it is only right that those who create the issues associated with the excesses of the night-time economy should be responsible for funding its policing.

I am pleased that Dave Clarke is with us tonight as we've worked hard with Dave to provide the City's licensed premises with rapid-testing breathalysers and are continuing to fund a drugs dog to carry out sweeps of the City's premises and to help get drugs misuse out of our City.

But our work as a Council is not just about resisting the new and inappropriate but preserving and cherishing what we have already and that mainly includes promoting our rich heritage as a parish. In recent years we have given our support and financial backing to projects such as the Redhills redevelopment, the restoration of the Neville's Cross monument, the restoration of the Ruth First mural, the creation of a Conservation Area Management Plan and World Heritage Site Setting Study and much more.

We are delighted to have supported the creation of 3 significant walking trails to help promote this wonderful heritage of ours – a Heritage trail walk, the seven hills of Durham trail and the Battle of Neville's Cross walk. A huge thank you to our two Davids – David Miller and David Butler on their support with the creation of these walking maps. They have been produced nearly 10,000 times and the Town Hall tells us are the most popular walking leaflets now requested by residents and visitors – simply extraordinary.

You will also know that the Parish Council has also launched its own Blue Plaque scheme – modelled on the England Heritage scheme in London – to help promote people, places and events of significance. Whilst this has predominantly focused on the brilliant women's history we have in our City, I am pleased that we were able to support the creation of two plaques over the last year – a plaque for the former Durham City ice rink unveiled by none other than Torvill and Dean last month and also a plaque to Bow Cottage; once the family home of world-renowned sculptor Dr Fenwick Lawson and the birthplace of the beloved journey and many other esteemed sculptures created by this visionary artist.

Two further blue plaques – one for 12 Church Street as the former home of Professor Dame Rosemary Cramp, renowned Anglo-Saxon specialist and the first female professor of Durham University and 33 Claypath as the former Women's Hostel for St. Mary's College – are presently in the planning.

Of course, the work of this Council is never more on show than through the excellent work of our Council's Business Committee. This Committee takes the lead on planning and delivering a number of major events in our city's calendar. From one of our nation's largest Remembrance Day events to the Platinum Jubilee and Coronation, the Council works hard to take the civic lead on these historic moments.

Locally, we are also major supporters of events such as the Durham Fringe, Durham Pride, Regatta and the Christmas Festival. None of this work is possible without the tremendous partnership working we have developed over the last six years and we are pleased to support events which promote Durham as a destination to visit and enjoy for families.

In addition, 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.

This follows on from work we have done to promote the use of local retailers rather than consumers buying online and so much more. Ultimately our aim is to drive increased footfall to the city, fill our shops with thriving retailers and get money behind the tills of the businesses who are the lifeblood of our city.

This work has never been more important than now. The proposed major redevelopment of Prince Bishops is something we as a Council support in principle but the scheme itself has a number of problems and we have submitted a significant response to this proposal to the Council's planning department.

A good Parish Council is also one which manages your money well. Whilst we have been successful in securing external grant funding to our city, over and above the management costs of the Council, the Parish Council's auditors have also commended the Parish Council for its excellent management and governance over the last financial year.

This formed part of the assessment criteria for our Quality Award and I am thrilled that this was highlighted as one of our Council's key successes. Our Clerk Adam also carries the dual role as the Council's Responsible Financial Officer and is almost Scrooge-like in his approach at ensuring that every penny piece of the Council's money – your money – is spent well.

At the same time, I am pleased that we also commit to providing financial grant support to many local community and voluntary organisations across our parish – from those which provide a hub for parts of our community to those organisations which work with and on behalf of supporting those who are most vulnerable – I am delighted that we have been able to support their work.

The list of work we do on your behalf is endless. Whilst challenges occur daily in our community – from the disgraceful impasse and delays over the Milburngate development to the challenges of retaining and growing the number of family homes in our parish – we have all come together as a parish to face up to these challenges.

This will be my final year as Chair of the Parish Council. I am proud that the Parish Council has proven itself as an organisation which really punches above its weight in working on behalf of our community since it began. I'd like to end by thanking everyone for their support and work in the City over these last years and above all to my fellow Parish Councillors for their voluntary work all year round as well as to our Clerk for all of his work.

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

The Chair welcomed Dave Clarke to the meeting and thanked him for his time in speaking with the Council. Dave began by confirming that the two additional officers as part of the Operation Lentil project in the City began in early April 2023 and that this additional visible presence around the City and its surrounding residential areas had been recognised by local residents.

Dave thanked the Parish Council for its provision of £50,000 of additional policing funding over the last financial years and highlighted the significant impact this has had. Dave advised that these 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 advised that Operation Lentil also included funding from both the Police and Crime Commissioner in the form of a Community Engagement Officer Ashleigh White as well as University in the form of Ken Judd. Dave advised that this additional resource is having a noticeable impact in addressing anti-social behaviour around the City.

Dave also highlighted the efforts of the Police in securing a Public Spaces Protection Order for the City against nuisance begging and anti-social behaviour. Dave thanked colleagues within DCC for their support with this initiative and for securing this – Dave expressed his hope that this would also be an additional tool for the Police to be able to combat anti-social behaviours.

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 attending the meeting 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.

5. Questions from members of the public

A resident asked why the Archimedes Screw next to the Walkergate development is no longer working. The Clerk advised that the Archimedes screw has suffered a main gearbox failure and this has caused the screw to become mis-aligned. The Clerk also advised that the County Council, who own the screw, are currently working with the manufacturer to provide a suitable repair/replacement and then will seek funding for the repair although there is no immediate timeframe for its repair.

The Clerk also advised that it was worth noting that the total power generated by the screw since installation is 2,865,181kwh and the Council has incurred £168,000 repair works on the screw since 2017. The Clerk advised that he would keep the resident updated on how this repair progresses.

Another resident asked why the historic Durham Market Place and Elvet Bridge had suddenly become an overnight car parking area with dozens of cars parked along these areas. The Chair advised that entirely echoed the resident's views on this and felt that the situation has become dreadful. The Chair made clear that absolutely nobody - whether a Deliveroo driver, taxi driver, bouncer, etc - should ever be able to use our historic Market Place or Elvet Bridge as a parking bay from which to run a business free-of-charge.

The Clerk highlighted that there is a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) working its way through the Council system and the latest update the Parish Council has on this is that the Council's Highways team are looking to the beginning of new year to put this through. The Clerk apologised not to be able to move this along any faster but there are statutory timeframes for consultation, etc the County Council must meet. The Clerk advised that the Parish Council fully supports this TRO and particularly the camera enforcement element of this - able to capture number plates of vehicles entering the area. This will make enforcement both safer and more consistent. However, the Clerk also highlighted the issues post-8pm and advised that the Civil Enforcement Team must be accompanied by the police post-6pm for health and safety reasons and the availability of officers for this type of activity - amongst the many other competing issues they are faced with - has proven difficult.

6. City of Durham Good Citizen 2024 awards

The Chair of the Parish Council presented the City of Durham Good Citizen 2024 awards to the Parish Council's chosen recipients as follows:

Jacqui Toase

Jacqui has played an incredible part of the founding of Durham City's Safety of Women and Girls at Night (SWaN) hub since its opening in early 2022. From the original bid to the Government's Safer Streets programme right through to on the ground delivery.

Since the hub began operating in the City, it has proven to be a positive and at times life-saving facility for Durham City on the busiest three nights of the week. Working between the hours of 8pm and 3am (to date), Jacqui and the team have provided necessary support, assistance, and guardianship not only to females in a vulnerable or at-risk state, but also males in a similar situation.

Jacqui is the lead officer at DCC on this facility and thanks to her work, the hub has dealt with nearly 4,000 incidents since launching and these can range from the most serious life-threatening issues to the everyday care and wellbeing facility.

Jacqui has been an essential part of the hub's success. Together with Owen, she has engaged heavily with partner organisations to put the funding for the hub on a more sustainable footing over the next 3 years.

After the Council Council unceremoniously made Carol Feenan redundant as the City centre manager, leaving in their wake a huge void of delivery in our city centre, Jacqui has been constantly working with the nighttime economy licensees on vital areas such as women's safety, health and safety and delivering training. She has gone well above and beyond the call of duty on so many occasions and it is thanks to her efforts and those with whom she works so positively that a family has not had to receive a call they never should about the safety of a loved-one. Long may Jacqui's excellent work continue in this area.

Dave Cuthbertson

Dave Cuthbertson has been involved in the organisation and execution of the Durham City Remembrance parade since 2015 and his contribution has directly led to this important civic event becoming a great nationally and internationally acknowledged occasion. He puts in literally hundreds of hours every year as a volunteer on this exceptionally important event.

Prior to his retirement from Durham Constabulary Dave was involved in the planning and implementation of a great many Royal and other high profile security sensitive events, particularly in respect of close quarter, tactical and strategic protective measures both within Durham County and further afield. Dave has brought this invaluable professional experience to the organizational process of the Durham City Remembrance parade, and facilitated a strong degree of logistical support from Durham Constabulary and of financial support from the Police Federation, and other funding sources. His work also involved him liaising closely with a great many organisations including Royal Protection, Central government and the Lieutenancy. All of which has brought substance to the Durham event is even now fuelling its potential being realized to the best advantage of all stake-holders.

It is no exaggeration to say that without the input, enthusiasm and commitment of Dave that the Durham City Remembrance would not have developed in the positive manner it has.

I firmly believe that Dave is worthy of some degree of recognition for his outstanding community work in this respect, and I have no hesitation in recommending him for this award.

John Lowe

John is the most tremendous advocate for our city. Since his retirement John has rolled up his sleeves and got on with delivery. His knowledge of planning has been particularly beneficial to the City, through John's tireless work to see through to adoption our Durham City Neighbourhood Plan to painstakingly analysing thousands of documents each year as part of hundreds of planning applications in the City and its surrounding areas.

John's particular expertise lie in the continued protection and wellbeing of our World Heritage Site as part of his role on the WHS steering group. As Chair of the City of Durham Trust, John has always been a tremendous ambassador for the heritage of our City and his advice and expertise have been most appreciated when big planning documents such as the County Durham Plan, Conservation Area Management Plan, WHS strategy documents and so much more are consulted on.

John's latest efforts saw him sit through 3 weeks' worth of a public inquiry into the major development at Sniperley, providing evidence to the Inspectorate, always with a desire to ensure that the City gets the right development it needs.

With nothing but his principles guiding him, John stood up to a developer in the Sidegate part of our parish and, breaking away from the agreed Sidegate Residents Association position, objected strongly to an inappropriate development on our precious greenbelt which would have turned the area into a huge car park.

John is a tremendous individual and we are very lucky indeed to have him in our parish.

David Miller

Although spending his well-earned retirement in Sweden for part of the year, David has been a passionate advocate for the wellbeing of our City since leaving his post and a distinguished career at Durham County Council as Head of Environment Resources.

David was part of the team who helped to deliver the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan and its accompanying Looking Forwards document, setting out a vision for how our community develops over the coming years.

As an environmentalist, David has particularly worked with the Parish Council on promoting Durham City and its many green walks. Most notably through the production of the 7 Hills trail and the Durham City heritage trail maps – both of which have proven exceptionally popular with visitors and residents alike. The 7 Hills trail is now on its second run of production with over 10,000 copies given out to promote the City's exceptional heritage and environment.

When the County Council conducted its consultation on Public Rights of Way, we particularly noted a gap in the document being a condition report of the existing network. David dived into action and supported the Parish Council with a volunteer

action day which culminated in the production of a masterfully-crafted and professional report which has been accepted by the County Council and which sets out both a condition survey of the existing network but also a guide on how the footpaths could be improved.

Our Clerk has even used this document to inform our response to at least one planning application since its production.

I cannot think of anyone more deserving for this award than David. We all owe him a great deal in our City.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. A. Walker', written in a cursive style.

Signed by Councillor Susan Walker
Wednesday 21st May 2025