

# CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

## **Minutes of a meeting of the Business Committee held on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2023 at 11:00 via Zoom**

**Present:** Councillors R Ormerod (in the Chair), V Ashfield, E Ashby, D Freeman and G Holland.

**Also present:** A Shanley (Clerk), Mr Paul Howard and Ms Emma Wright (Durham BID), Mr Colin Wilkes and Ms Alice Wilkes (Durham Markets Company), Mr Geoffrey Thistlewaite and Mr Trevor Longstaff (Durham Pointers), Mr Graham Soult (Parish Council retail consultant), Councillor Carole Lattin (Parish Council), Belinda Snow and Sarah Billingham (DCC).

### **1. Welcome and apologies**

None received.

### **2. To receive any declarations of interest from members**

None received.

### **3. To receive and approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2023**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st March 2023 were unanimously agreed as a true and accurate record of proceedings, subject to the sentence "*The Chair advised that he is discussing this with the Chair of the Parish Council's Environment Committee and would be looking to progress the Voluntary Contribution request, as discussed at previous meetings of the Council*" being amended to "*The Chair advised that he is meeting with the Chair of the Parish Council's Environment Committee and would be discussing the Voluntary Contribution request, as agreed at previous meetings of the Council*".

In agreeing the minutes, Councillor E Ashby advised that she wished to disassociate herself from the comments made by Councillor G Holland in paragraph 3 of item 7 within the minutes.

### **4. To receive any public participation comments on the following agenda items.**

None received.

### **5. Report by retail consultant Graham Soult on work in Durham City**

Graham provided an update on his work since the last meeting of the Parish Council's Business Committee in March 2023.

Graham advised that he had been working with Oxfam to promote their store since the re-fit of the store had taken place.

Graham also advised that he had helped to promote the expansion of Woven Workshop into the Prince Bishops Place shopping centre.

Graham advised that he had covered Moon Jewellery as this month's Independent Cover Star. Graham highlighted that he had been supporting Moon with the expansion of its online marketing and retailing operations.

Graham also advised that he had recently helped to plan the most recent meeting of the Business Durham organisation in Coarse in Durham City. Graham highlighted that the new Coarse restaurant is doing extremely well and this is great to see as a new Independent in the City.

Graham also advised that he had linked a potential new retailer for the City with the landlord in the former Vodafone site and he hoped that this would soon be filled with an independent business.

Graham advised that he had received feedback from potential new retailers that they would like to see improvements to the Fowler's Yard area in the City.

Graham advised that he continues to engage with new chain retailers as he was aware that people would like to see more retail options in the City as opposed to new Food and Drink businesses.

Graham also advised that he had supported Durham Pointers with its new website.

Graham advised that @IndieDurhamCity now has 4,800 followers and he continued to push a positive message about Durham City on social media.

Graham highlighted that there were very few vacant units in the City and that vacancies are generally only available in Prince Bishops.

Graham advised that he was aware that there plans to re-develop the Prince Bishops Place site and he looked forward to seeing more details about the plans.

Colin highlighted that he was concerned at the growth in hospitality businesses versus the reduction in retail businesses. Graham advised that he was making every effort to ensure that new retail businesses are coming into the City centre. Graham advised that he felt that Durham City needs more smaller units for new Independents.

Councillor E Ashby highlighted that one unit in Riverwalk is currently advertising itself as "short term lets will be considered." Graham advised that his impression is that Riverwalk is very welcoming to small independents and highlighted the example of *Collected* as a new retailer in Riverwalk. Graham advised that his impression is that business rates are a major factor in deterring new business from coming into the City in spite of the reduction in rateable value for most businesses in the City.

Councillor G Holland highlighted that the planning policies for the City favoured retail and this is the direction of travel he would like to see the City go in. Councillor G Holland advised that he very much supported accommodation to the upper floors of premises.

## **6. Update on the work of Durham BID**

Paul Howard advised that there were very few vacancies in the City at present and this is positive news. Paul also advised that a lot of work has been happening in the background at Prince Bishops in order to retain as many of the retailers there in the City.

Paul also advised that Durham BID had been doing some engagement with the Banks in the City, particularly in view of the recent changes to legislation that Banks can now share spaces and the potential impact this may have on Banks retaining their physical presence in the City.

Paul advised that the Indoor Market is key in providing a great retail offer in the City. Paul also advised

Paul thanked the Parish Council and the Clerk for their work in putting on the Spark LED Drummers event.

Paul advised that footfall is increasing in the City and this included daytime shopping, etc.

Paul advised that the independents campaign is set to commence in July and will also run over Christmas too.

Paul also advised that the BID Board has now agreed not to host a Christmas light switch on this year in the City. Paul advised that this cost a significant amount of money and this isn't translating into more money spent in the City, based on feedback from businesses. Paul advised that the BID will be putting more funding into Christmas events in the City instead of this.

Paul advised that the BID is also hoping to host Fire and Ice Festival again in 2024 but he hopes to see the format changed slightly in that the night time show element is withdrawn but that the funding went on more sculpture installations during the day.

Paul advised that Durham BID is working closely with the ShopWatch organisation and it is clear that local businesses do have a concern around ASB in the City. Paul advised that he was aware that the AAP would soon be looking at an application for a coordinator to help tackle some of these issues.

Paul advised that Durham BID has been asked a lot about outdoor seating for pubs and bars and he had discussed this with Durham County Council but this is not going to be possible.

The Clerk suggested that an attraction such as a ferris wheel over the Christmas period might be a great draw for more people. Paul advised that Durham BID is looking into this.

## **7. Discussion with Durham Pointers on their view of the Tourism economy of the City**

The Chair welcomed Geoffrey Thistlewaite and Mr Trevor Longstaff from Durham Pointers to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

Geoffrey thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Business Committee. Geoffrey advised that the general feedback from visitors of the City is a highly positive one in his view. Geoffrey advised that Durham Pointers do have a concern about the potential implications for the re-location of the coach drop-off point moving to the other side of the River Wear and now being located on the Radisson Blu side of the river.

Trevor advised that he had recently been contacted by the Council's tourism team to advise that they had recently installed signage to Freeman's Place to direct passengers to the Cathedral Bus. That being the case, Trevor advised that Durham Pointer do have ongoing concerns about this drop-off location as, whilst it may function better from a highways management perspective, this effectively made the walk to the centre of Town, the Indoor Market, etc. much longer.

Trevor also advised that the signs leading coaches to the city centre were also being updated with the new information about this new coach drop-off location. Trevor advised that Durham Pointers fully expected some teething issues with this arrangement and that drivers will continue to drop visitors off on the original side of the river.

Trevor also highlighted that Durham Pointers had recently lost 10 volunteers and were struggling to recruit new volunteers for the "Meet and Greet" service.

Trevor also highlighted that visitor numbers were slowly increasing but advised that, in 2019 (pre-Covid) Pointers welcomed a total of 236 coaches to the City whereas there were only 96 in 2022. Trevor advised that there is a noticeable increase since 2022 however and he hoped that visitor numbers may continue to increase.

Councillor V Ashfield highlighted the concerns of Market Traders in relation to the moving of the coach park drop-off point to the other side of the river. Councillor V Ashfield highlighted the importance of the coach business to the wider economy of the City.

Councillor V Ashfield advised that she had been lobbying the County Council to consider reinstating the original coach park at the Sands.

Ms Alice Wilkes supported Councillor V Ashfield in her statement about the impact of this move on Market Traders and that she was aware of the concerns of small businesses on this.

Mr Colin Wilkes advised that he was concerned at the lack of signage from the new coach drop-off point. Colin advised that he wanted to see a more joined-up approach to signage in the City.

Councillor E Ashby highlighted that she was concerned about the impact of moving the coach drop-off point on visitors with mobility issues. Councillor E Ashby also asked Durham Pointers for their views on how these proposals were impacting on the visitor experience for visiting Crook Hall. Geoffrey advised that his understanding was that Crook Hall is certainly still the destination of choice for visitors in the afternoon after visitors have seen the Cathedral.

Councillor G Holland advised that he regretted deeply the withdrawal of the tourism centre in Durham City and commended Trevor and his colleagues for filling an enormous gap in the City.

Councillor D Freeman advised that he felt that the Council should be telling coach drivers not to drop off by the passport office if the new coach drop-off point is definitely going to be by the Radisson. Councillor D Freeman advised that having effectively two coach drop-off points would cause issues for organisation such as Durham Pointers who are stretched for resources at present.

Geoffrey thanked the Parish Council for the support they had shown to Durham Pointers over the years.

## **8. Proposal for the Parish Council to undertake a project to improve Fowler's Yard in Durham City**

Councillor E Ashby highlighted the ongoing issues in relation to Fowler's Yard and Back Silver Street, in relation to the bins, fly tipping, signage, etc and drew the Committee's attention to the report she had produced to support this item.

Councillor E Ashby asked that the Council considers establishing a special Working Group to look into these issues and making this a much more attractive space for visitors as well as more of a circular walking route around the City.

Sarah advised that she would be happy to look into the issue of signage for Fowler's Yard. Sarah advised that the current signage strategy for the City is on hold as the costs associated with delivering the strategy are proving to be prohibitive at the moment.

Belinda advised that there had been a lot of work happening in the background with the landowner at Fowler's Yard and she was aware that the owner is currently seeking planning permission from the Council which may have an impact on the visibility of bins in that area.

Councillor V Ashfield seconded Councillor E Ashby's proposal that a Working Group be established to look into the issues at Fowler's Yard. Councillor C Lattin asked that a Member of the Parish Council's Environment Committee could be part of this Working Group. Councillor E Ashby advised that she felt that this should be an initiative led by the Business Committee only.

The Chair advised that he supported a Member of the Parish Council's Environment Committee being part of this Working Group and proposed this to Committee. This was seconded by Councillor G Holland. 2 votes were cast in favour of this and 2 votes were cast against this. The Chair made a casting vote in favour of this proposal.

It was also **agreed** that Durham Markets Company and the Regeneration and Neighbourhood Wardens teams at DCC be part of this Working Group.

## **9. Update on events in Durham City (to include Durham Pride and Coronation).**

The Clerk highlighted that the Durham Pride event is set to take place on the weekend of 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> May 2023 and that he had been engaging with Mel on the planning for this. The Clerk highlighted that the Parish Council is a sponsor organisation of this event and he hoped to see as many Councillors at this event as possible.

The Clerk also took the opportunity to thank all partner organisations for their support in putting together a series of Coronation events in the City, which he felt had been a terrific success. Colin Wilkes took the opportunity to thank the Clerk for his extraordinary role in pulling together so many different organisations in the City for this event.

**10. Update on the request to Durham City landlords to make a voluntary contribution to the Parish Council precept**

The Clerk advised that approximately £1,500 had been received from a number of student landlords/ agents to the Parish Council's appeal and that he and colleagues from the Parish Council's Environment Committee would soon be meeting with representatives from DCC and Durham University to decide on the best use of this funding and a report would be coming to Full Council in June on this matter.

**11. Date of next meetings**

18th July 2023 at 11am  
19th September 2023 at 1pm  
21st November 2023 at 1pm

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

Signed,

*R. Ormerod*

**Chair of the Parish Council's Business Committee  
(18<sup>th</sup> July 2023)**