

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Business Committee held on Tuesday 18th July 2023 at 11:00am via Zoom

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

Also present: A Shanley (Clerk), Mr Matthew Booth, Mr Paul Howard and Ms Emma Wright (Durham BID), Mr Colin Wilkes and Ms Alice Wilkes (Durham Markets Company), PCSO Michael Ashurst (Durham Police), Mr John Leight (APEX radios), Mr Barry Gower, Mr Roger Cornwell and Mr Richard Hornby (members of the public) and Councillor R Friederichsen.

1. Welcome and apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors E Ashby and N Brown as well as retail consultant Graham Sault.

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 16th May 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th May 2023 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

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

Mr Barry Gower advised that he was attending the meeting to hear the discussion on item 10 of the Agenda.

Mr Roger Cornwell advised that he was attending the meeting to hear the discussion on item 10 of the Agenda.

Mr Richard Hornby advised that he was attending the meeting to hear the discussion on item 10 of the Agenda.

5. Proposal to support the work of the ShopWatch organisation

The Clerk reminded Members that ShopWatch has been operating in Durham City in one form or another for some time now. The scheme has developed further since November 2022 through the work of the PCSO for Durham City Michael Ashurst and both the Police and daytime economy businesses in Durham are keen to continue this work.

ShopWatch is a partnership network of businesses in Durham City, linked by radio to each other and the police. This scheme operates in most major cities, towns and shopping centres across the country, and collaborating with local councils and the police, ShopWatch has a purpose to deter and ultimately assist with the

prevention of antisocial behaviour within public spaces as well as increasing personal safety and confidence amongst many retailers and their customers.

The Clerk advised that, since ShopWatch began developing in November 2022, Durham has noted a reduction in shoplifting crime within the City. This has had a positive impact on local businesses by decreasing losses of stock as well as creating a safer environment for customers. Having a live form of communication between businesses and the police is clearly central to the success of this scheme.

The Clerk highlighted that ShopWatch meets at the end of every month in Durham Town Hall and this is an important network of businesses which is well-attended and where feedback can be provided to the Police by retailers and the Police can also share intelligence to retailers (e.g. recent banning orders for individuals found guilty of an offence, etc.).

PCSO Michael Ashurst advised that the Police are looking to expand the ShopWatch scheme further by providing approximately 14 licensed radio sets (provided by the company Apex who currently operate the scheme) to some of the smaller independent businesses in the City. Michael advised that these businesses have expressed an interest in being part of this scheme and it is hoped that supporting businesses with the hire costs for a radio set for a 12-month period will incentivise them to continue with this scheme into the future. This will also allow businesses to assess the radio link while protecting their business by using the radio.

Michael advised that provision of additional radio sets will also increase the coverage of the scheme across the City, thereby making this safer for businesses and visitors as well as growing the network of small businesses actively engaged in public safety within the City.

John advised that the Durham scheme, through Apex, has a rental fee of £20 per month, however Apex are willing to reduce this cost for the year to £120/ annum if 14 radios are hired, with match funding coming directly from Apex.

Michael asked if the Parish Council would consider providing funding for these 14 radios at a total cost of £1,680.00.

Members unanimously **agreed** to support the expansion of the ShopWatch scheme and fund the hiring of 14 radios.

6. Proposal to launch a campaign promoting independent businesses in the City centre

The Chair highlighted that he felt that the Parish Council should launch a campaign promoting the use of independent businesses in the City, with the suggested angle to this being "Use them or lose them". The Chair highlighted the importance of independents to the future wellbeing of the City and hoped that this campaign could take the form of a leaflet through every door of Durham City and its surrounding residential areas.

The Clerk advised that he could produce such a leaflet and also time this so that it is distributed with the "*What to do if you have a local issue in Durham...*" leaflet so as to reduce the delivery costs for this leaflet.

Members unanimously **agreed** to produce this leaflet and see that this is distributed in around October 2023 time.

7. Update on the work of Durham BID

The Chair took the opportunity to welcome the new Chair of Durham BID Mr Matthew Booth and thanked him for taking the time to meet with the Committee today.

Paul Howard began by highlighting that Durham BID is presently going through a Governance review and is looking at changing the structure in which it works, e.g. putting in place Working Groups to look at events in the City, etc.

Paul highlighted the fantastic work of PCSO Michael Ashurst in promoting the ShopWatch scheme and took the opportunity to thank him for this.

Paul highlighted that footfall in Durham City has been very good, with footfall last week being one of the highest recorded since 2017 which is very welcome indeed.

Paul advised that the public consultation into the proposals for the Prince Bishops shopping centre starts tomorrow. Paul advised that he particularly welcomed this significant investment in Durham City and felt that this was an exciting development.

Paul advised that he took part in the judging of the National Final of the Youth Market Competition alongside the Parish Clerk and Councillor Liz Brown.

Paul also highlighted that the BID's Independents campaign is due to launch soon and advised that this would run for a period of 5 weeks and would involve a £2,500 cash prize giveaway.

Paul advised that Restaurant Week is due to start at the end of September running until the 6th October 2023 and that Durham BID would be working with influencers to help promote a number of restaurants.

Paul also advised that Durham BID is promoting "Dog Friendly Durham" campaign and asked any businesses to get involved if they'd like to promote this.

Paul also advised that he and Matthew had been working on a twinning project with North Carolina and looked forward to welcoming representatives of the area to Durham City in the coming days.

The Chair thanked Paul for his report on Durham BID's work.

8. Update on the proposal to improve the Fowler's Yard area of the City

The Clerk reminded Members that improving the public realm and promoting businesses within the Fowler's Yard area of the City has been discussed at previous Committee meetings. At the Business Committee meeting in May, it was agreed that a Working Group of stakeholders should be established in order to assess what actions can be taken to positively promote this hidden gem of our City.

The potential of Fowlers yard to play a key role in the City's business, cultural and visitor economies has long been recognised but never realised.

At the May meeting of the Business Committee, the Committee received and welcomed a report by Councillor E Ashby which set out a number of proposals for working towards Fowler's Yard and Back Silver Street enhancement.

Since this meeting, the Clerk advised that there has been some extensive work by partners to look to see what can be done to improve the overall appearance and user experience of this part of the City.

There were summarised as follows:

Lack of signage

- It has been highlighted that there is a lack of signage within the public realm, particularly from Lower Claypath to the corner of St. Nic's Church to let pedestrians know that Fowler's Yard exists.
- Sarah Billingham (DCC) is arranging for a new fingerpost sign to be installed on the sign at the corner of St. Nic's to say "Fowler's Yard Artisan Crafters".
- In addition, Colin has requested the installation of a further fingerpost sign on the grass verge on the corner of Back Silver Street to include details of the Indoor Market (which includes information about the lift and the toilet facilities). Sarah is investigating this.
- The bin at Silver Street could be moved elsewhere on Silver Street to make the sign for Fowler's Yard more visible.

Bins

- There is a proliferation of bins within Fowler's Yard itself. New yellow painted hatching has been painted on to the road and this has improved the positioning of the bins so as to allow the collection lorry to make a U-turn once the litter is collected. It has also freed up space within the public realm and made the area look marginally tidier with the positioning of the bins more aligned.
- It is clear that a number of businesses do not have enough space capacity within their allotted bins and their bins are regularly overflowing. The Parish Council's Neighbourhood Warden team is liaising with businesses concerned to seek a solution but preferably for more collections to be paid for.
- The Parish Council has met with the owners of Fowler's Yard and, long-term and subject to planning approval, they are hoping to develop the site such that most of the industrial bins can be housed internally. Members will need to consider that there are heritage impact implications for these proposals insofar as the present site allows for a largely unblemished view of the World Heritage Site from the riverside.
- The Parish Council's Environment Committee is hoping to launch a Green Business Award in August and this includes a criteria for waste management as well as recycling and other criteria. It is hoped that this will inspire positive change for improvements to the public realm re: bins etc.

- Although the Neighbourhood Wardens have labelled a number of bins, a small few remain unlabelled and it is essential that these be identified so that action can be taken against anyone allowing their bins to overflow, etc.

Flytipping

- Colin at Durham Markets Company has reported incidents of fly tipping within his designated waste area and this is a continuing problem which must be addressed by identifying those who do this. Colin has received a quotation for a CCTV camera pointing at the bin area and has asked if the Parish Council might be in a position to offer some match funding towards this. The total cost for this camera is £1,341.06 and Colin will pay £500 towards this. It is felt that this will help to make the entrance to Fowler's Yard from St. Nic's a more attractive entrance.

General public realm appearance

- The Parish Council's Environment Committee has sufficient funding available to fund additional planters and this could help improve the public realm if adopted by local businesses in the area.
- The Durham City Theatre windows facing onto Fowler's Yard are in a terrible condition. The Clerk has met with representatives of the Theatre on-site and this is not only causing an issue from a public realm perspective but also causing a serious issue of damp to the upper floors of the Theatre. The Clerk will look to support the group with an application to the Durham AAP and with planning etc. if this is acceptable to the Committee.

Members thanked the Clerk and the Chair for their continued work on these issues. The Committee unanimously **agreed** to support the purchase of a CCTV camera (costs in full) to the rear of the Durham Markets Hall in order to tackle the issue of fly tipping to the rear.

9. Proposal to support the Children's Book Festival event over the Summer holidays

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council has agreed a total budget of £25,000 for this financial year towards hosting events in the City.

The Clerk highlighted that the Parish Council and the Durham Markets Company have established a very close working relationship to deliver events for the City. As such, the Parish Council has received this request for support to once again host the Durham City children's book festival in 2023 from the Markets Company.

The Clerk advised that, in 2021 and 2022, with the support of Parish Council, the Markets Company hosted this children's book festival and this had proved to be a popular family day event.

The Clerk advised that this event was very well received with a mix of authors and illustrators throughout the city centre alongside free children's entertainment.

The Clerk advised that the rationale behind the event is not only to encourage children to engage in reading and illustrations in a safe, non-competitive space,

but to provide an event in these constrained times which is mostly free at the point of delivery and encourage more families back into the city centre with something for them to amuse and occupy their children.

The Clerk highlighted that, with the event running over 2 days, the cost of putting on such an event has significantly increased and the Markets Company has requested financial support from the Parish Council in the region of £4,300.

The Chair advised that he really supported this event and had previously done so through his local Members fund. The Chair thanked Colin and Alice for their work on this terrific event.

Members unanimously **agreed** to support the Children's Book Festival with the proposed funding of £4,300.

10. LNER consultation on the proposed closure of the Ticket Office at the Durham Station

The Clerk reminded Members that LNER is currently proposing to close Ticket Offices across the country and this includes the Ticket Office at Durham Railway Station. In order to assess the public view of these proposals, LNER has launched a consultation and is seeking views by no later than 26th July 2023.

Last week, the Clerk wrote to all Members advising that the Business Committee is proposed to respond to this consultation on behalf of Full Council as the deadline for responses is prior to the next available Full Council meeting. The Clerk confirmed that Members were content with this arrangement.

Since announcing these proposals, Members advised that they were aware of a strong reaction online in Durham with members of the public exceptionally keen to see the Ticket Office retained. Local Members of Parliament have also objected to these proposals.

The Clerk advised that independent passenger watchdog Transport Focus is facilitating the consultation.

Particular concern was expressed by members of the public regarding the impact of these proposals on more elderly and/or disabled users of train services. Roger Cornwell advised that Durham has the highest number of ticket purchases at the Ticket Office of any LNER station proposed to be closed and he felt that there was a strong case to argue for the service to be retained.

Mr Barry Gower advised that he was appalled by the proposals and highlighted that the Durham Access for All Group would be lodging a strong objection to the plans.

The Committee unanimously **agreed** to submit a formal objection to these proposals and to also take any and all action necessary to publicise the consultation to the public as it was felt that the deadline and online details of the consultation had not been shared widely enough.

11. To consider recent correspondence from local businesses regarding a PSPO on nuisance begging in the City

The Clerk reminded Members that approximately 80 independent market traders had collectively written to the County Council to request that they reconsider introducing a PSPO against begging in Durham City.

Colin advised that he had submitted this letter directly to the County Council but also copied this to a number of partner organisations, including Durham Police and Crime Commissioner, Durham Police and the Parish Council.

Colin highlighted the issues with begging and its associated anti-social behaviour in the City and called for swift and meaningful action on the issue by partner organisations.

The Chair advised that he fully supported the call by the businesses to see a PSPO against this activity in the City. This was echoed by Councillors D Freeman and V Ashfield.

The Committee **agreed** to propose to the Full Council in July that the Parish Council writes formally to the Chief Executive of DCC to ask that the issue be re-visited, perhaps with a different set of wording as the previous proposal of "aggressive begging" was not seen as appropriate.

12. National Association of Local Council's Power to Change report

The Clerk highlighted this report by the National Association of Local Councils in the recent Chief Executive bulletin and thanked Councillor E Ashby for highlighting this work and championing this. The Committee welcomed this positive report by NALC and discussed what local action this report could help develop. It was highlighted that the up-front costs of developing a unit in the City is one of the key barriers – as well as business rates, etc. – to people taking on their own business unit.

Albeit it was highlighted that Durham City has a relatively low vacancy rate compared to national average figures, it was agreed that there is still some further work to be done to ensure that all the units in the City were filled with a successful and thriving business.

The Committee **agreed** to explore the possibility of a "Welcome to Durham" grant fund from the Parish Council, which could go to a new (specifically retail) business which is hoping to take on an empty unit of the City. The Clerk advised that he would like to explore this in more detail with Councillor E Ashby who originally proposed the NALC report for the Agenda.

13. Report by retail consultant Graham Soult on work in Durham City

The Clerk advised that Graham had submitted his apologies for today's meeting. The Clerk advised that Graham had recently circulated a written report of his work over the last few months in the City. The Committee welcomed this positive report.

Councillor R Friederichsen took the opportunity to highlight the agreement by Full Council in January regarding climate action. In particular, Councillor R Friederichsen advised that the minutes from that meeting state that the Council *"invites the Business Committee to review and amend, if necessary, the*

contractual arrangements for the retail consultancy support to businesses to ensure they align with the relevant CSE's change targets. This means that future contracts must include as priorities one or several of the overall aims and actions to a) Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, b) support local adaptation to climate change, and c) restore biodiversity and natural carbon sinks."

Councillor R Friederichsen asked if this could be considered. The Chair advised that he would be happy with this on the basis that this would be an ancillary request for Graham's work and did not detract from Graham's primary role of promoting independent businesses and supporting the City to attract new business and footfall.

The Clerk highlighted that the Council will review Graham's contract in November and he would be happy to discuss adding this as an ancillary part of Graham's work with him and see to it that he helps the Council share best practice on climate change with businesses, etc. In the meantime, the Committee also **agreed** to ask Graham to help the Parish Council promote the Environment Committee's Green Business Award with local businesses.

14. Date of next meetings

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
(19th September 2023)**