

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Business Committee held on Tuesday 21st November 2023 at 13:00pm via Zoom

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

Also present: Mr Adam Shanley (Clerk), Mr Paul Howard (Durham BID) and Mr Graham Soutl (Retail consultant).

1. Welcome and apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors V Ashfield and N Brown.

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 19th September 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th September 2023 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

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

None received.

5. Durham Business Viewpoints

The Chair advised that he would like this item to be a standing item on the Business Committee's Agenda and would be an opportunity for the Committee to hear directly from local businesses on their view of the local economic situation in the City.

The Chair advised that he had invited the owner of Zen restaurant Zak Newton to the meeting for this item, however Zak had unfortunately sent his apologies immediately prior to the meeting and therefore it was agreed to defer this item until a future meeting.

Councillor G Holland welcomed the inclusion of this item on to all Business Committee Agendas moving forward and particularly expressed a desire to hear from a number of high street banks in the City, owing to local concerns about the closure of some Durham City based branches such as Barclays and Virgin Money. It was **agreed** that the Clerk should invite representatives from the banks in the City to the next Committee meeting.

6. Report by retail consultant Graham Soutl on his work in Durham City

The Chair welcomed Graham Soutl to the meeting.

Graham advised that he had carried out ten visits to Durham City since the last meeting of the Business Committee. Graham advised that he engages with a large number of businesses during his visits to the City.

Graham advised that he had recently promoted the Woven Outlet, Fusha, The Nook (Durham Market Place) and Elvet and Bailey as cover stars on social media. Graham highlighted that the, as vacancy reduces, Durham City gains fewer new arrivals which is positive as it showcases that Durham City has a relatively low vacancy rate.

Graham also advised that he had recently met with businesses such as QuirkshopUK, Market Hall Wines, Collected Books and JLHPrint.

Graham also advised that he has been busy promoting events such as Restaurant Week, Lumiere, Independents campaign, Uniformed Services Fun Day and much more on social media.

Graham also highlighted that he had written a column in the RetailWeek magazine in response to the former John Lewis Chief Executive's request for a Royal Commission to be established to help the high street.

Graham highlighted that during and since the Covid-19 pandemic, more than 50 businesses have taken on a unit in Durham City centre – around 80% of which were Independents.

Graham highlighted that the social media presence for IndieDurhamCity continues to expand with thousands of followers and an additional 115 since September.

Graham advised that he had recently met with Councillors Ormerod and Friederichsen and the Clerk to discuss embedding green principles into his work for the Parish Council. Graham highlighted his recent involvement in the Parish Council's Green Business Award as part of this and agreed to include sustainability as part of his work, as suggested in the meeting with Councillors moving forward.

Graham highlighted that recent bank closures had obviously had a negative impact on the City as well as recent news following the public statement from the CEO of Brewdog in relation to the Milburngate development.

The Chair thanked Graham for his work with the Parish Council and for his excellent report.

7. Update on the work of Durham BID

The Chair welcomed Paul Howard, Durham BID manager, to the meeting and thanked him for joining the meeting today.

Paul advised that Durham BID has recently launched its latest Independents campaign in Durham City and highlighted that this would once again result in £2,500 worth of vouchers being given to customers. Paul advised that the campaign grows each time it happens.

Paul highlighted that the BID has recently contracted the services of a social media company to support them with a number of online and social media campaigns

and Paul expressed his hope that anyone who follows Durham BID on social media will have seen an improvement in their content recently.

Paul advised that Restaurant week is set to take place between 26th January and 2nd February in Durham City. Paul advised that Durham BID had received feedback from a number of restaurants that the last Restaurant Week had been a terrific success, with a number of venues booked out for the entire week.

Paul advised that Durham BID would be carrying out a survey of all City businesses on how they found the most recent Lumiere event. Paul highlighted that footfall was significantly up in the City during the festival and that BID is hoping to receive feedback from businesses on how successful they have found this to be in terms of additional cash take during the event.

Paul advised that the BID is working with the Parish Council, Durham Markets Company and others in planning events over the Christmas period in the City. Paul advised that, in addition to various street entertainment, the BID would also be organising the Grinch Grotto again this year in Prince Bishops Place and he thanked the Parish Council for their support in advertising these events.

Paul advised that the next Shopwatch meeting is set to take place on Monday 27th November 2023 and invited Members to this meeting so that they could hear about issues in the daytime economy from traders.

The Chair thanked Paul for his report.

8. To review the business committee's strategic aims for 2024/25

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council has agreed to formulate its strategy for 2024/25 ahead of the budget setting process in January 2024. As part of this, all Parish Council Committees have been asked to agree their priorities for the forthcoming financial year so that this can feed into the Parish Council's budget agreement.

Members unanimously **agreed** the following priorities for 2024/25 for the Business Committee:

Business Committee

Council priorities 2024/25	Business priorities 2024/25	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
1. Being an ambitious voice for the city	Engaging with local businesses	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
2. Enhancing physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish	Promoting responsible businesses	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy

3. Upholding the neighbourhood plan and representing the parish on planning matters.	Supporting new businesses in empty units across the city	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish	Marketing Durham as a place to visit	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy Theme 5: A City with a modern and sustainable transport infrastructure
	Contracting professional support for local businesses in the city	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
	Promoting businesses in the city centre and encouraging a variety of businesses to ensure wide range of choice for visitors	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.	Reducing food miles by encouraging the use of local suppliers	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy Theme 6: A City with an enriched community life

9. To consider the business committee's budget for 2024/25

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council is required to agree its budget and precept request for the forthcoming financial year in January 2024.

In order to assist the Council in agreeing both the budget and precept for 2024/25, the Clerk advised that each Committee of the Council is being asked to propose a budget against their individual identified priorities for next year.

Committee Members agreed to maintain the expenditure for the Cathedral bus service in principle but expressed the view that more information was needed about how this would operate and the likely success of this scheme.

Councillor D Freeman expressed concerns at the level of expenditure proposed for this priority and advised that he would be more inclined to support this if the bus also took in sites such as the DLI Museum, The Story and other sites around the City.

The Clerk advised that he would ask the relevant Councillor and Officer involved in this project to provide a presentation to Members about this proposal.

Members provisionally **agreed** the following draft budget for 2024/25. The Clerk reminded Members that the Finance Committee would be meeting in early January to discuss this, with a proposed budget going to the Full Council meeting in January:

Business Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Supporting Independent businesses	
Professional support for independent businesses in Durham	£10,800.00
PRIORITY 2: Increasing footfall through events	
Hosting events in Durham City (Remembrance Sunday, Christmas events, D-Day Anniversary, miscellaneous).	£25,000.00
PRIORITY 3: Filling empty units with new retailers	
Welcome to Durham Fund (match funded through UKSPF)	£5,000.00
PRIORITY 4: Promoting accessibility and the tourism offer of the City	
Part-funding a Cathedral bus service on a Sunday	£10,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2024-25 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£50,800.00

10. Events update

The Clerk reported that the Remembrance Sunday event earlier this month had been a terrific success and the Committee warmly welcomed the kind letter of thanks to the Parish Council from His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant Mrs Sue Snowdon, thanking the Parish Council for its work on this project.

The Clerk also reminded Members that the Parish Council has agreed a total budget of £25,000 towards events for this financial year. As part of this, Christmas has been identified as a key season for events in the City and the Parish Council has previously supported Christmas events as a way of promoting footfall to the City during the festive season.

The Clerk advised that, this year, the Parish Council has earmarked a total of £7,000 towards Christmas events over December 2023.

The Clerk highlighted that planning for Christmas events started earlier this month and representatives of the Parish Council have met with key stakeholder representatives of the business community in Durham to arrange events in the lead up to Christmas. These meetings have included Durham Markets Company, Durham University and Durham BID (with the board having individual business representatives).

The Clerk advised that partners were looking for financial support for Christmas events, as follows:

- Support for the Christmas Festival - £3,000
- Funding towards the Children's arts and crafts festival - £1,500
- Support towards street entertainment in December (the Grinch) - £2,000
- Advertising of Winter events in Durham City - £500

The Clerk also advised that the latest meeting of the Parish Council's Business Committee had considered these proposals and had unanimously agreed to support these initiatives.

Members unanimously **agreed** to working in partnership with key stakeholders on the hosting of Christmas events. Members also unanimously **agreed** to recommend to Full Council that the funding for the Christmas events be provided, as set out in the report.

11. Date of next meetings

16th January 2024 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
(16th January 2024)**