

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the Business Committee meeting held via Zoom at 13:00pm on Tuesday 19th March 2024

Present: Cllr R Ormerod (in the Chair), Cllr E Ashby, Cllr V Ashfield, Cllr R Hanson Cllr G Holland and Cllr S Walker.

Also present: Mr A Shanley (Parish Clerk), Cllr J Ashby and Zak Newton (Zen).

1. Welcome and apologies

Apologies were received and accepted from Councillors D Freeman and N Brown. Members **agreed** that Councillors R Hanson and S Walker should substitute for Councillors D Freeman and N Brown.

2. To receive any declarations of interest from members

Councillor G Holland declared an interest in relation to the proposal for the Regatta and therefore took no part in the discussion or vote on this item.

3. To receive and approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 16th January 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th January 2024 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

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

Councillor J Ashby advised that he was attending the meeting with a general interest in all Agenda items.

5. Durham Business Viewpoints

The Chair welcomed Zak Newton to the meeting and thanked him for attending to discuss his view of the city with the Parish Council.

Zak thanked the Committee for the opportunity to come and speak with the Parish Council today.

Zak began by introducing himself as the co-owner of Tango restaurant, which he and his cousin opened 6 years ago in the city, the owner of Whitechurch, the Rabbit Hole and Zen. Across those businesses, Zak advised that he employs over 114 individuals in a variety of catering and hospitality roles.

Zak advised that he feels very passionately about the city and he hopes to engage further with DCC and the Parish Council.

Zak advised that the hospitality sector is under increasing pressure these days, with an average 29% wholesale price rise on products, increasing energy costs and the impact of the pandemic still being felt today. Zak advised that whilst the industry remains a high cash flow industry, it remains a very low margin business.

Zak stressed that he felt that the City needed more quality venues as opposed to higher quantity. Zak advised that he could foresee a number of well-established

food and hospitality venues across the City closing as they struggle to keep up with competition. Zak advised that he felt that the Government should be looking to prevent grandfather rights being automatically permitted to premises when a new operator comes in.

Zak Newton advised that, as a business owner in Durham, he would be particularly interested to look into options for a new Use Class of HMO for hospitality staff who work and would wish to live in Durham. Zak highlighted that he saw this as a big challenge in terms of recruitment of local staff and asked the Parish Council for their support with this. Zak highlighted that Policy 16 does not differentiate between tenants and therefore prevented multiple unrelated staff living together in one property.

Councillor G Holland thanked Zak for his presentation and invited Zak to come and speak at a future Planning and Licensing Committee meeting on the issue of HMOs for professionals.

Councillor V Ashfield advised that she would like to see more affordable housing in the city as staff in the hospitality sector struggle to afford to live in the city. Zak advised that staffing was always a huge problem for his sector.

Councillor E Ashby asked Zak about what the Parish Council do to support his business. Zak advised that he would like to see footfall return to the City and see more of a mix between retail and food and drink venues. Zak asked for the Parish Council to take as much action as possible to bring retail back to the City as this will help everyone.

The Chair thanked Zak for his presentation and Zak left the meeting at this point.

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

The Clerk advised that Graham was currently experiencing technical difficulties in accessing the meeting and therefore would be submitting his apologies for this meeting and providing Members with a written report instead.

In agreeing to continue to provide professional support for local businesses, the Parish Council unanimously **agreed** to continue to fund the Indie Durham City project for a further 2 months' period until the end of May only. Members **agreed** to propose this to the next Full Council meeting accordingly.

7. Update on the work of Durham BID

The Clerk advised that Paul Howard was unable to attend this meeting and had therefore submitted his apologies.

8. Update on works to improve Fowler's Yard in Durham City and proposed follow-up actions.

In highlighting the small step successes of the Business Committee already on the project to improve Fowler's Yard, the Clerk also highlighted that the Committee is continuing its work on two pressing matters which remain top priorities for this project

1. Tackling the proliferation of bins in the service yard area of Fowlers Yard – with a meeting of all businesses and accommodation providers with a bin(s) in this area planned for after Easter.
2. Replacing the windows and repointing the brickwork to the façade of the Victorian section of the Durham City Theatre building – the current windows are seriously impacting on the façade of the building and the wider area and are also proving hazardous to the integrity of the building and repair works are deemed urgent.

On the first matter, the Clerk highlighted that he and Councillor E Ashby had been engaging with businesses and with DCC to try and reduce the level of waste in this area and had recently undertaken a number of site visits on this issue. The Clerk also advised that it was proposed that the Parish Council should facilitate a roundtable discussion with businesses who use Fowler's Yard for their waste storage to try and address some of these issues. The Committee **agreed** to host such a meeting in April.

In relation to the Durham City Theatre, the Clerk advised that the Victorian section attached to the south-end of the Theatre is a large-scale warehouse building constructed from handmade brick and incorporating timber windows painted in red (North elevation) and blue (West elevation). Although this part of the building has been heavily altered over time, with the upper floor rebuilt from modern brick, this section of the building is considered to be of considerable character, appearance and historic interest and in fact was recently listed as a non-designated heritage asset.

The Clerk advised that he has recently submitted a planning application for the like-for-like replacement of the windows to this section of the building (application ref: DM/24/00447/FPA) and is awaiting elevation drawings from the Theatre's chosen architect for this application to go live. Equally, the brick repointing is permitted development and does not form part of the application submitted for the Theatre.

The Clerk advised that, in total, the works are likely to cost between £34-£36,000.

In order to fund these new windows, the Clerk advised that he has reached out to the County Council's community economic development team and has a verbal agreement of £20,000 towards these works (with a possibility of a slight uplift if required), on the condition that this does not exceed 70% of the total costs for these works.

Moreover, the Dramatic Society is able to provide approximately £4,000 of its own funding towards these works.

The Clerk proposed that the £10,000 originally agreed for the improvements to public toilets instead be allocated to these works and the Committee unanimously agreed this. Moreover, in light of development pressure in the City, Councillor E Ashby proposed that the Parish Council condition any contribution towards these works, such that there be a requirement to return the £10,000 should the building be sold to another operator. This was also unanimously **agreed** by the Committee.

The Clerk took the opportunity to thank Councillor E Ashby for her ongoing work and support with this project and stressed that delivery of these improvements to this important independent community facility – whose key aim is to provide cultural/ theatrical entertainment at an affordable cost to the public – will give the area a real uplift.

9. Report on a landscaping scheme along the new Milburngate river frontage coach drop-off location.

Councillor E Ashby highlighted that local resident Colin Jubb had originally raised this issue with her and she was hoping that he would be able to attend this meeting to discuss this in more detail with Members. As Colin was unable to attend this meeting, it was **agreed** to defer this item on today's Agenda. It was also **agreed** to hold another special meeting of the Business Committee in April in order to discuss this in more detail and to work up a proposal for improving this area of the city.

10. Events report

The Committee considered the events plan for 2024/25 and **agreed** to continue its funding for Durham Pride (£3,000), Christmas Festival (£5,000) and **agreed** to also support Durham Regatta this year too at a contribution of £1,000.

The Clerk also highlighted that work is well underway on planning for the upcoming D-Day anniversary in June and he would be circulating details of this in due course.

11. Dates of future meeting(s) of this Committee:

Tuesday 21st May 2024 at 1pm

Tuesday 16th July 2024 at 1pm

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

Signed,

R. Ormerod

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council's Business Committee
(21st May 2024)**