

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the Business Committee meeting held via Zoom at 13:00pm on Tuesday 21st May 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), Mr Graham Soult (retail consultant), Mr Stephen Cronin and Ms Sally Dixon (Durham Fringe), Mr Matthew Booth (Northern Stores and Deli), Mr Paul Howard (Durham BID) and Mr Colin Jubb (member of the public).

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 held on 19th March 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th March 2024 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

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

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

5. Proposal from Durham Fringe for the 2024 Festival

The Chair welcomed both Stephen Cronin and Sally Dixon to the meeting and thanked them for joining the Business Committee today.

Stephen thanked the Parish Council for the opportunity to speak with the Committee today and for their previous support for the Fringe Festival.

Stephen began by highlighting that the Fringe has been running for a number of years now and the team were excited to be back in Durham for this year's Festival. Stephen advised that the Festival had mainly started as a kitchen table idea from his partner Suzanne and himself and has now grown into one of the biggest Fringe Festivals in North England in a very short space of time.

Stephen particularly highlighted the growth in ticket sales, shows and attendees from 2023 compared with the 2022 event. The Durham Fringe Festival 2023 was a huge success with an 82% increase in ticket sales and 93% of ticket purchasers saying they would recommend the festival to a friend or colleague.

Stephen also highlighted that he felt that part of the reason for this success was the beautiful new performance space they created on Palace Green, in a magnificent sculptured stretch marquee.

Stephen advised that he would like to build on the success of the Palace Green marquee, and in 2024 fill it with even more performances, including choirs, plays, children's shows and spoken word.

Stephen advised that the main marquee is 15 x 20 metres and seats 160. There will be a linked catering marquee, which will be where audiences gather before and after shows. The total cost of delivering the stretch tent marquee, giving the festival visibility in this high-profile space, is £10,700.

Stephen advised that the Fringe would very much appreciate a contribution of £5,000 towards the costs of delivering the marquee. This would be a much-needed contribution to our overall costs of c. £107,000 this year.

Sally advised that the Fringe would of course acknowledge the Parish Council's support in all literature and marketing materials for this year's Festival.

Stephen advised that the number of venues and local volunteers for this Festival had increased for the 2024 event and this was great.

The Chair asked about the pricing structure for the tickets for the Festival. Stephen advised that each performance is charged at £9.00 per ticket and there are also a family, block booking and concession priced ticket also. The Committee felt that this was extremely positive as a reachable and affordable cultural event for residents and families.

Councillor E Ashby asked if the Fringe has considered expanding its geographical location to include the outlying areas of the City centre such as in her Ward of Neville's Cross. Stephen advised that this was certainly a dream of the event organisers and he hoped that in two years' time this could become possible. Stephen advised that his goal in the immediate term is to grow ticket sales and a affiliation with the Durham Fringe Festival in a way which involved only the City centre-based locations for the time being.

Stephen also highlighted that acts were being recruited from around the region to come and perform in Durham City.

Councillor E Ashby also asked if the Fringe were managing to secure artists who would otherwise be performing elsewhere in the region/ country. Stephen advised that the Fringe does an open call for acts at the beginning of each year between January – end of February. This year alone, there were 185 applications to perform at the 2024 Festival and there is a jury of 20 who voted on each show; of which the highest rated in each category has secured a space.

The Committee thanked Stephen and Sally for their excellent work on this Festival and unanimously agreed to recommend to Full Council the allocation of £5,000 towards this year's Festival.

At this point, Stephen and Sally thanked the Committee and left the meeting.

6. Durham Business Viewpoints

The Chair welcomed Matthew Booth from Northern Stores and Deli to the meeting.

Matthew thanked the Parish Council for the opportunity to speak with them today. Matthew advised that he has owned a shop in Durham since 2019 and that this was originally funded from the European Union Regional Growth Fund to help give independent and local producers a space in the high street to help launch their businesses.

Matthew advised that, since beginning his business at Northern Stores and Deli, he had now launched two further businesses – a greengrocer and the newly opened Café at the Quarter – all of which are located in the Prince Bishops shopping centre.

Matthew advised that he loved trading in Durham and loved the people in Durham. Matthew advised that he felt that there is a lot of strong community support for local independents and that he was delighted to have supported events for Climate Action Durham as well as provide a home for Durham Pointers and their excellent bike and leaflets, etc.

Matthew advised that he would like to see more family-orientated events in the City centre to help drive footfall. Matthew highlighted the Durham Christmas Festival as an excellent trading time for Durham businesses and he would like to see more events like this in Durham.

Matthew felt that his store's location in proximity to the car park was a real advantage as he was aware that access to the City centre was an issue.

Matthew felt that the retail environment in Durham had become a lot more difficult, particularly with the growth of online retailing. Matthew advised that he hoped that the renovation of the Prince Bishops centre would have a positive impact on the retail environment of the City.

Councillor V Ashfield congratulated Matthew on his entrepreneurial spirit and thanked Matthew sincerely for his support for recent Climate Action Durham events.

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

The Chair welcomed Graham Soult to the meeting and invited Graham to provide his regular report to the Committee.

Graham provided the Committee with a report on his work since the last Business Committee meeting in March 2024. Graham advised that he had carried out seven visits to the City since March and that he continues to work proactively with them all on future plans in Durham.

Graham particularly highlighted that businesses trust him and the service he provides and all are willing to share their ideas, plans and concerns.

Graham also took the opportunity to highlight a number of new businesses having opened recently in the City such as Belli e Brutti, Isla, Café at the Quarter and

Anderson's Greengrocers. Graham advised that promoting these new openings helped to combat the narrative around the high street seemingly dying.

Graham advised that he continues to promote the City via social media with over 5,371 impressions across a range of platforms recently. Graham advised that he had been promoting independents recently such as The House of Eden, Hodgson Fish, Brooklyn Pizza Slice, Marla Jones Jewellery and Ace Vintage. In addition to which, Graham advised that he has been promoting events such as Fringe, the Parish Council's Torvill and Dean event as well as Durham Pointers.

Graham also highlighted that he was connecting prospective businesses with the agent of the Barclay's building in Durham; for which there is a strong interest for a new business venture in this location of the City.

Graham also advised that he had a productive one-to-one discussion with Durham Distillery about how to keep raising the profile of the business, including its retail offer and brilliant events space this business is providing.

Graham also advised that he had produced an updated proposal for Committee Members' consideration for the continuation of Indie Durham City into the future and that he was aware that this would be discussed in the closed session part of the meeting, though he was happy to take any questions on this.

Councillor V Ashfield advised that she felt that the Committee should be looking to Graham for greater guidance on where he felt the Parish Council's priorities in terms of improving the high street and business environment of the City should be.

The Committee thanked Graham for his report.

8. Update on the work of Durham BID

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

Paul began by confirming that footfall is doing very well thus far this year. Paul advised that cumulatively footfall is up by approximately 150,000 from the same period last year and is now back to pre-pandemic levels.

Paul advised that he and Sally Dixon had carried out approximately 150 business visits this month. Paul advised that generally speaking businesses were reporting a positive first quarter for the year but advised that food and drink venues appeared to be doing well whilst retailers were still struggling.

Paul particularly welcomed the new fruit and veg store in Prince Bishops.

Paul advised that the next restaurant week campaign led by Durham BID would be going live on 23rd August; slightly earlier this year following feedback from local businesses.

Paul also advised that the next Shopwatch meeting is set to take place at the BID office on 31st May and opened the invitation to all Members to attend this. Paul advised that he was aware that the City has experienced some anti-social

behaviour recently and he encouraged everyone to get involved in the live PSPO consultation launched by DCC earlier this month.

Paul advised that Durham BID is investing heavily in social media marketing as a means to promote individual business offering as well as driving footfall into the city centre.

Councillor E Ashby asked if Durham BID would support promoting an international Welcome campaign for shop frontages. Paul advised that he would be delighted to support this and asked Councillor E Ashby to link in with him on this.

The Chair thanked Paul for his excellent report and his ongoing work in the city centre.

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

The Clerk advised that the planning application had now been approved for the new windows to the City Theatre and he and Councillor E Ashby were liaising with the City Theatre and the selected contractors on the organisation of this work.

The Clerk also advised that the City Theatre had been successful in securing £20,000 from the Targeted Business Improvement scheme from DCC towards these works.

The Clerk also took the opportunity to thank Councillor E Ashby for her work in chairing a recent meeting of the businesses who use Fowler's Yard for their waste storage and this has certainly highlighted the complexity of resolving this issue given that a number of businesses are in long contracts with different suppliers and internal bin storage is not a possibility for a number of these businesses.

The Clerk advised that the recently introduced fixed penalty notice of £1,000 for waste and fly tipping has now come into force and that he was aware of a number of fines being issued in this area to both students and businesses and this may go some way in addressing the side waste issue.

Councillor E Ashby advised that she was aware that the Parish Council has agreed to survey the businesses in Fowler's Yard and that she was in the middle of producing this survey for circulation and approval.

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

The Clerk reminded Members that the Committee had held a special meeting alongside Colin Jubb on 2nd May to look at the issue of the Framwellgate waterside coach drop-off and this followed a site visit which the Clerk advised he had undertaken with Councillor E Ashby.

At that special meeting of the Committee, the Clerk highlighted that it was agreed that a fully-costed landscape plan should be sought, in order to assist the Parish Council in a) designing an appropriate scheme and b) access wider funding such as BNG funding within the parish.

The Clerk advised that DCC's Stuart Priestley (DCC ecology) discussed this with him and advised that whilst the answer was not an all out 'no' in terms of accessing this funding, DCC would need to see a fully worked-up plan first. The Clerk advised that he has asked for quotes from a number of recommended suppliers for producing such a plan and have received one bid to date.

At the special Committee meeting, the Clerk advised that it was also identified that, whilst the Business Committee may not have a budget for this project, this could potentially be drawn from the Environment Committee's budget to improve the River Wear (£5,000 agreed in January).

The Clerk advised that the Environment Committee met earlier this month and supports the proposed improvements to this part of the City in principle, however the Committee were advised at that meeting that an application for the 2nd phase of Milburngate is coming forward imminently and there were also concerns expressed that phase 1 of the site is still unfinished and therefore it is not clear if this current coach drop-off site might be needed as either a compound or other space to facilitate the completion of phase 1 or start of phase 2.

In light of this uncertainty, the Clerk advised that the Committee did not feel it appropriate to dedicate funds to the wider initiative for landscape design at this present time. However, as an immediate albeit temporary uplift and improvement of the area, it was proposed that the Environment Committee funds the installation of 3 x 3-tier flower planters and the Clerk advised that DCC is presently costing this up for the Parish Council.

Councillor E Ashby highlighted the support from local businesses for benches in this area and asked if businesses could be asked to provide funding towards greening up this area. The Committee agreed to support this and asked the Clerk to write out to all businesses to promote this. The Clerk asked Durham BID Manager Paul Howard if he might be able to help provide specific email addresses and postal addresses for businesses. Paul advised that he felt that the best way to promote this would be via the BID's regular newsletter.

The Committee **agreed** that this would offer a (albeit temporary) uplift to this area of the City and thanked the Clerk for his work on this.

11. Events report

The Clerk advised that planning is well underway for the 6th June event being led by the Parish Council for the D-Day anniversary. The Clerk reported that the Parish Council is delighted to have secured His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant to support this event and light the beacon along with the new Mayor of Durham Councillor Liz Brown.

In addition, the Clerk advised that he was busy liaising with the Durham Markets Company on the organisation of this year's Children's Book Festival and would provide a report to colleagues in due course on this event.

The Committee thanked the Clerk for his ongoing work in relation to events in the City.

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

Tuesday 16th July 2024 at 1pm

Tuesday 17th September 2024 at 1pm

Due to the confidential nature of the following items, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and the public were excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the LGA 1972 Act and section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. At this point in time the press and the public were asked to leave the room.

The Committee **agreed** to recommend a set of short-term targets to the next available Full Council meeting in relation to the ongoing relationship with the Indie Durham City project on the basis of a one-day per month agreement.

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
(15th July 2024)**