

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the Business Committee meeting held via Zoom at 13:00pm on Monday 15th July 2024

Present: Cllr R Ormerod, Cllr E Ashby, Cllr A Doig, Cllr D Freeman and Cllr S Walker.

Also present: Mr A Shanley (Parish Clerk), Ms Sarah Johnson (Visit County Durham), Mr Andrew McGuinness (Confederation of Passenger Transport UK), Joanne Soulsby (Moon Jewellery), Mr Paul Howard (Durham BID) and Councillor John Ashby.

1. Election of Chair of the Business Committee

Councillor R Ormerod was **elected** as Chair of the Parish Council's Business Committee. Nominated by Councillor D Freeman and seconded by Councillor S Walker.

There were no other nominations.

2. Election of Vice-Chair of the Business Committee

Councillor D Freeman was **elected** as Vice-Chair of the Parish Council's Business Committee. Nominated by Councillor R Ormerod and seconded by Councillor E Ashby.

There were no other nominations.

3. Welcome and apologies

Apologies were received and accepted from Councillor G Holland.

4. To receive any declarations of interest from members.

None received.

5. To receive and approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 21st May 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st May 2024 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

6. 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.

7. Durham Business Viewpoints

The Chair welcomed Joanna Soulsby from Moon Jewellery and thanked Joanna for joining the Business Committee today.

Joanna advised that local businesses are unhappy at the condition of Silver Street at present and advised that she felt that this historic trading street looks rather derelict.

Joanna advised that she felt that the negative aesthetic of Silver Street is having an adverse impact on both trading and local perception of the City. Joanna highlighted the issue of empty premises as well as the lack of events in the City which drive increased footfall. Joanna highlighted that she would like to see the City get to a stage where each month a big event was held to attract more visitors.

Joanna advised that her business does very well when the footfall is high in the City. Joanna advised that she hoped that improving the street aesthetic could help improve footfall and income of businesses.

Joanna also asked if a grant scheme for existing businesses, not just new businesses in their first six months, could be established.

The Clerk thanked Joanna for her presentation and advised the Committee that he and colleagues at Durham BID are presently working on some of these areas. The Chair also highlighted that Silver Street had, over the last 18 months, gone from 13 vacant premises to 3 and therefore it was felt that the street was improving markedly.

The Chair highlighted that the Parish Council had recently launched a Use It or Lose It campaign with local residents in order to promote use of retailers in local town centres as opposed to shopping online. Joanna advised that she really welcomed this initiative.

Councillor E Ashby asked if it might be possible to promote more businesses getting involved with the work of Durham BID and also asked what insight local traders have on the redevelopment of Prince Bishops. Joanna advised that she has not received an update on the redevelopment of Prince Bishops though she fully supported the proposal of more businesses getting involved in Durham BID and she had personally reached out to her neighbours in order to promote them getting involved.

Joanna also advised that she felt that there needs to be more of the personal stories behind the businesses advertised on social media by organisations such as Durham BID.

The Chair thanked Joanna for her presentation and for answering Members' questions.

8. Report and proposal from Visit County Durham on Travel Trade promotion

Following the review of the Parish Council's budget aimed at providing professional support for local businesses, the Clerk reminded Members that the Business Committee has been working to establish a different approach to the way the Parish Council markets the City centre, with a preference to move away from traditional social media marketing and more focus on driving visitor numbers directly.

The Chair welcomed Sarah Johnson, VCD Marketing and Communications Manager, to the meeting and thanked her for joining the Committee today. Sarah highlighted that Visit County Durham is the official tourism management organisation for the region and thanked the Committee for reaching out as part of efforts to strengthen the partnership with VCD. Sarah advised that she felt that this presents an opportunity to amplify our collective marketing efforts effectively.

Sarah thanked the Parish Council for its support in seeking 'coach friendly status' for Durham City. Andrew highlighted that the result of this application is expected imminently but that this is looking extremely positive.

The Chair reminded Members that the Committee had previously agreed to work collaboratively with VCD on driving additional footfall to the City directly through a travel trade promotion

Sarah highlighted that Visit County Durham is able to offer the following package for advertising Durham City through its travel trade promotion:

- Discover Durham annual membership, invitation to meetings, social media support
- Dedicated page on the Discover Durham website, featuring content on retail, food and drink and events
- Key City events featured in the What's On section
- Dedicated Durham City solus e-newsletter to groups and travel trade database
- Dedicated Christmas Festival solus e-newsletter to groups and travel trade database
- Dedicated Christmas Festival or general banner advert on DiscoverDurham.co.uk x 2 months
- Dedicated Christmas Festival or general e-newsletter banner advert x 2 months
- Joint funding of an advertorial in one of the travel trade publications
- Joint funding of a media visit (potentially linked to the Fringe)

Sarah advised that the total cost for this package would be £3,000. The Clerk highlighted that this would be well within the allocated budget for this priority but stressed that the Committee would likely look to fund a focus on another event other than the Christmas Festival which is already extremely well catered for. For example, the Clerk highlighted the need to grow events such as Durham Fringe. This was agreed by Members.

The Committee unanimously **agreed** to recommend this proposal for approval at the next Full Parish Council meeting in July.

The Chair thanked Sarah and Andrew for their time in speaking with the Committee. At this point, Sarah and Andrew left the meeting.

9. Update on the work of Durham BID

The Chair welcomed Paul Howard, Durham BID Manager, to the meeting.

Paul highlighted that the big news for Durham City was the planning approval for the re-development of Prince Bishops. Paul highlighted that Durham BID is still

awaiting further information on how and when this development will take place over the coming months.

Paul also highlighted that footfall in the City remains relatively buoyant and this was very good news although numbers are still lower than pre-Covid.

Paul advised that the Miner's Gala had been a great success with huge footfall seen in the City during the event itself. Paul advised that he had received mixed feedback on how this had impacted on business income during the event with some businesses recording a high number of sales and others not so well.

Paul highlighted the new Beamish store in Prince Bishops and advised that this had been the most successful social media post by Durham BID in many years, reaching nearly 200,000 users.

Paul also highlighted that the new Treats store opened on Silver Street over the weekend and this had been very positively received.

Paul also asked for funding towards an initiative to improve the aesthetics of Silver Street and advised that he would be contacting the Clerk with more details on his proposed initiative.

Paul also advised that he is busy planning the Christmas light switch on in Durham City for this year.

Councillor E Ashby asked Paul if there was any progress on the launch of the International Welcome to Durham City campaign. The Clerk advised that he would be able to produce a design for these posters for shop frontages and get these produced. Paul offered to support the Parish Council in launching this scheme going door-to-door to businesses.

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

The Clerk highlighted that the City Theatre has now signed the agreed the Terms and Conditions the Parish Council produced as part of its agreement to fund part of the works to the City Theatre. The Clerk highlighted that the Parish Council would be providing £6,000 of its own funding (from an agreed budget of £10,000) towards this project, with the City Theatre also putting in £4,000 and the County Council's Improvement Grant also providing the remaining £20,000 towards this project.

The Clerk highlighted that he had met with the City Theatre and its agreed contractors on a number of occasions and made it clear that the Parish Council would not be project managing this development. The Clerk advised that the contractors hoped to commence work on-site in August 2024.

The Clerk also highlighted that the issue of the waste storage at Fowler's Yard remains a significant problem and the Parish Council is continuing to try and address this issue with colleagues, not least through the new Fixed Penalty Notices issued by the Parish Council-funded Neighbourhood Wardens.

11. Events report –

The Clerk advised that the Parish Council had received a formal note of thanks from the organisers of the Durham Fringe festival and the Committee took the opportunity to congratulate the Fringe on a successful year of ticket sales and fantastic shows. The Committee agreed that it was great to see this event return year on year and to see it grow as quickly as it has.

The Clerk also reminded Members that the Children's Book Festival is set to take place in August holidays across two days. The Clerk advised that he has liaised with James Wilson at the Markets Company and that a request had been made of funding of £3,500 towards this event. The Clerk highlighted that the Parish Council usually supports this event with £4,300 but that the organisers were cutting down on some aspects of the costs for this event.

The Committee unanimously **agreed** the £3,500 contribution towards this event and thanked Durham Markets Company for their ongoing commitment to this event.

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

Tuesday 17th September 2024 at 1pm

Tuesday 19th November 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.

13. Follow-up to reviewing arrangements for supporting independent businesses in Durham City

The Committee **agreed** to reach out to Graham Soult and request that he supports the Parish Council in marketing empty premises in the City on a one-day per month basis. This arrangement would continue until the end of March 2024.

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
(27th September 2024)**