

# City of Durham Parish Council

## **Minutes of the Business Committee meeting held via Zoom at 11:00am on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

**Present:** Cllr R Ormerod, Cllr E Ashby, Cllr D Freeman, Cllr G Holland and Cllr S Walker.

**Also present:** Mr A Shanley (Parish Clerk), Paul Howard (Durham BID Manager) and Graham Soult (Parish Council retail consultant).

### **1. Welcome and apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor A Doig.

### **2. To receive any declarations of interest from members.**

The Chair declared an interest in Item 9 on the Agenda and took no part in the discussion on this item.

### **3. To receive and approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2024**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> July were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceeding.

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

None received.

### **5. Durham Business Viewpoints**

The Clerk advised that, due to unforeseen circumstances, James Wilson from Durham Markets Company is unable to attend this meeting. It was **agreed** that James should be invited back to the next meeting.

### **6. Report by Graham Soult on the filling of vacant premises in the City**

The Chair welcomed Graham Soult to the meeting.

Graham began his presentation by highlighting the recent change to the provision of services delivered by Canny Insights. Graham highlighted that this would be a one-day per month arrangement with more focus on the filling of empty retail units in the City as opposed to online or social media marketing of the City.

Graham highlighted a number of achievements since this new operation had been agreed, specifically around progressing ongoing leads for new businesses to take over empty retail premises.

Graham highlighted that he had worked closely with the owners of Course and had managed to secure them two new premises on North Road – now opened as Crush and Isla – and Graham advised that this high-quality offering is helping to change perceptions of North Road.

Graham also highlighted the recent opening of the People's Bookshop in Prince Bishops and advised that he has been supporting the owners with funding and other general queries.

Graham also highlighted two ongoing leads in Durham that he is currently working on; one with an existing independent business looking to expand into a bigger unit and another opportunity involving a North East Museum potentially going into a unit at Prince Bishops.

Graham also advised that he has met with a business that is looking for some bookable events space in the City and is looking to support them in this way.

Graham also advised that he has met with a Sunderland-based online retailer which is looking for circa 2,000sqft for retail/ event space and he has recently introduced this business to Prince Bishops.

Graham also advised that he had recently introduced Prince Bishops to the Head of Property and Estates at Marks and Spencer's and is hoping that this meeting will be beneficial in attracting a new food retailer into the City.

Graham advised that there were a number of new businesses keen on trading in Durham City who had the following space requirements –

Quality furniture retailer very keen on Durham which requires 5,000sqft. Graham advised that he has offered a tour of the City to the UK property director when suitable options emerge.

A beauty brand wants 750sqft with a prominent frontage and is looking at either Silver Street and Prince Bishops as potential locations.

A national brand wants over c.1,200sqft – this brand has previously rejected Prince Bishops but is very keen on Silver Street due to its high footfall.

Graham highlighted the importance of maintaining ongoing conversations with these businesses.

Graham highlighted that his perception of current trading in the City is that retailers are keen to see the redevelopment of Prince Bishops take place as soon as possible. In addition, Graham highlighted that the frontage of STACK is having a detrimental impact on the image of this street. The Clerk reported that the STACK frontage should be sorted imminently thanks to a scheme jointly worked on together with the Parish Council/ Durham BID.

The Chair thanked Graham for his excellent report and for his work on behalf of the Committee.

## **7. Report on the International Welcome to Durham City campaign**

Councillor E Ashby highlighted that she, the Clerk and Paul at Durham BID had recently launched the Parish Council's International Welcome to Durham City campaign. This includes the provision of posters in key entry points in the City as well as the Park and Ride sites which service the City.

Councillor E Ashby thanked the Clerk and Paul for their support in distributing these posters around various businesses but expressed disappointment that a number of businesses had not as yet installed these to their shop frontages.

Councillor E Ashby highlighted that there were a number of posters still available as part of this campaign and asked if the Committee could arrange for these posters to be installed in some of the colleges and PBSA sites around the City. The Clerk **agreed** to work with Councillor E Ashby and the University's Community Liaison Officer to arrange this, following unanimous agreement from the Committee.

#### **8. Update on the retail unit at Mount Oswald**

The Clerk and Councillor E Ashby highlighted the long-running issues in seeing the retail unit at Mount Oswald finally occupied. The Clerk advised that a requirement for a new retail unit on this site formed part of the Masterplan and planning consent for the Mount Oswald development.

The Clerk advised that he had struggled to receive any responses from the new Community Liaison Officer at Banks on a definitive date on when this unit will be occupied, however the Clerk advised that he has now had sight of a leaflet confirming that this unit will be occupied by a mini ASDA.

Councillor E Ashby offered to liaise with the new Community Liaison Officer at Banks to attempt to get a firm commitment on a date on when the new unit will be occupied and actively retailing.

#### **9. Discussion on anti-shoplifting strategies in North Road in Durham City**

Councillor E Ashby highlighted a new alarm system at North Road's Sainsbury's and expressed concerns about the wellbeing of staff as a result of noise, etc. Councillor E Ashby advised that this system seems to have been removed but asked that the Shopwatch meetings consider what measures each of the different retailers are taking in order to address issues of shoplifting.

Paul highlighted that the Shopwatch meetings are very well-attended and the radios initiated by the Police and Parish Council have been really so welcome to support the City becoming more resilient to crime and anti-social behaviour.

Paul also welcomed the new PSPO in Durham City which has just been approved by DCC's Cabinet. Paul advised that he hoped that this would be another tool in the box for the Police and Neighbourhood Wardens to be able to tackle these sorts of problems.

The Committee **agreed** to consider the expansion of the Shopwatch initiative with appropriate funding allocated towards additional radios.

#### **10. Update on the new STACK unit on Silver Street**

It was highlighted that works are due to commence on Silver Street for the new STACK unit in Easter 2025. Members expressed frustration at the poor condition of the frontage of 4-6 Silver Street and advised that STACK should be encouraged

to address this problem; not least because the unit is subject to significant fly posting and occupies a large area of the total street scene of Silver Street.

Paul presented a proposal for the new frontage which he had worked for some weeks on with a designer and a local business, this involved vertical-laid timber cladding along with a "Coming Soon" messaging and iconic images of Durham designed into the timber, e.g. the Rose Window of the Cathedral. Members expressed their disappointment at this style of frontage and asked that this be reconsidered.

Paul advised that he is still liaising with the Council's Design and Conservation and Regeneration teams on this and he hoped to have an assurance that this could be installed in a relatively quick timeframe.

### **11. Update on the redevelopment of Prince Bishops in Durham City**

Councillor E Ashby asked both the Business Committee and Planning and Licensing Committee to do all they can to remain updated on progress with this development, given its significant influence on the success of the City centre as a retailing environment. The Committee agreed to do all it can to remain updated on how this progresses, with the Clerk reporting that he had been verbally advised that the Citrus Group is hoping to commence work to the Centre in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2025.

### **12. Report on coach management and the riverbanks**

Councillor E Ashby highlighted that she had recently observed tourists waiting to be picked up by their coach in poor weather and asked if consideration could be given to the Parish Council potentially funding a shelter in this area to allow tourists to at least remain dry during poor weather.

The Clerk advised that he would be happy to look into this alongside the Council's highways team as there is still approximately £4,000 remaining in the City Theatre project budget.

### **13. Events report**

The Clerk provided a very positive report on this year's Durham Children's Book Festival and provided footfall stats from this event. Members warmly welcomed the work carried out for this excellent event and took the opportunity to thank the Clerk and Durham Markets Company for their work on this event.

The Clerk reported that planning was well in-hand for the Remembrance Day event and that he is liaising with all partners to ensure a successful event in the City.

The Clerk reported that Prince Bishops is hoping to host Durham Duck Race in the new financial year. As a result, the Clerk reported that the £3,000 earmarked for this event was no longer needed for this current financial year. As such, Members **agreed** to allocate this funding to the Christmas light switch on in November for the City. In addition, it was also **agreed** to allocate £7,000 towards the Christmas Festival this year.

The Committee thanked the Clerk for his substantial work with this event.

**14. Dates of future meeting(s) of this Committee:**

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> November 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  
(19<sup>th</sup> November 2024)**