

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Thursday 24th November 2022 at 19:00 in the Meeting Room, St. Cuthbert's Hospice, Park House Road. Durham. DH1 3QF

Present: Councillors A Doig (in the Chair), V Ashfield, E Ashby, C Lattin, N Brown, R Friederichsen, R Ormerod, E Scott, S Walker and H Weston.

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley, Ms Jennifer Thompson (Lowes Barn Community Centre), Mr Owen Cleugh and Ms Jacqui Toase (DCC) and two members of the public.

1. TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE (OR NOT) APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE FROM TODAY'S MEETING

Apologies were received from Councillors D Freeman, G Holland and L Brown. In receiving and accepting these apologies, the Chair noted that some Members were not present and had not submitted apologies to the Clerk in advance of this meeting. The Chair formally asked that a reminder be sent to all Councillors that apologies must be submitted to the Clerk no later than 24 hours in advance of any meeting of the Parish Council.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

Councillor S Walker declared an interest in Item 5 on the Agenda and took no part in the discussion on this item.

Councillor E Scott declared an interest in Item 13 on the Agenda and took no part in the discussion and vote on this item.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 27TH OCTOBER 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 27th October 2022 were unanimously agreed as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. PRESENTATION BY DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL ON THE SAFETY OF WOMEN AT NIGHT HUB

The Chair welcomed Mr Owen Cleugh and Jacqui Toase to the meeting. Owen and Jacqui began their remarks by thanking the Parish Council for its financial support for the hub earlier in the year. Owen highlighted that the Parish Council was the first organisation to respond to their request for funding and advised that this had helped to save the hub up to the point where the Safer Streets 4 application had been approved.

Owen advised that the hub is now fully funded up to September 2023 thanks to Safer Streets 4 funding. Owen also advised that the hub had worked proactively

with different partner agencies and this had proved to be invaluable from an operational perspective.

Owen reminded Members that the hub operates every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday night in the City centre up till 3am.

Councillor A Doig asked what the total annual running costs for the hub were. Owen advised that the total running costs for the hub for 12 months is £130,000. At present, Jacqui Toase is the only full-time, permanent member of the hub team and the hub is also supported by 14 volunteers.

Councillor A Doig asked if University students were the main users of the hub. Jacqui advised that this is certainly the case for the Wednesday evening but not on Fridays and Saturdays where the hub will deal with a mix of demographics.

Councillor H Weston asked if the hub and its volunteers are especially visible during the night time. Owen confirmed that this is indeed the case and that the hub is well-used with over 960 incidents dealt with since February 2022. Owen advised that it was no exaggeration to say that the hub staff had saved lives.

The Clerk asked if it is likely that the night-time economy trade could fund the hub in its entirety, given the clear benefits of the hub to help police and safeguard those users of the night-time economy of the City. Owen advised that he was aware that the Parish Council favoured a night-time levy but advised that this was beyond his remit to confirm in the future.

Members thanked Owen, Jacqui and the team for their excellent work. At this point, Owen and Jacqui thanked the Council and left the meeting.

5. UPDATE FROM THE LOWES BARN COMMUNITY CENTRE PROJECT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMUNITY CENTRE

The Chair welcomed Mrs Jennifer Thompson to the meeting. Jennifer thanked the Council for the opportunity to update Members on the development of the Lowes Barn Community Centre.

Jennifer advised that the development of the Centre, from concept to the current stage of build had taken many years to get to and over £709,000 in development costs; a lot of which has been provided by local County Councillor and AAP funding. Jennifer also thanked the Parish Council for its generous grant in 2020 to help prepare the ground for development.

Jennifer advised that a company was procured in 2018 to support the development of the Centre. Jennifer advised that the project had suffered from a series of setbacks and delays, primarily due to the cost and supply of build materials following the war in Ukraine, the pandemic and Brexit.

Jennifer advised that the Centre has been changed slightly due to the increase of development costs. Jennifer advised that the Trustees had agreed to forego some storage and one room in the Centre. In doing so, the Trustees had also aimed to make the Main Hall of the Centre as large and user-friendly as possible.

Jennifer advised that there was clearly a gap in the market in this part of Durham for a community centre to bring the community together.

Jennifer advised that the centre was originally due to be completed by 17th December but it is now looking more likely that a completion date of the end of January 2023 will be the handover date.

Jennifer advised that, as soon as the Hall is completed, there will be a need to establish new policies and procedures for how the Hall will operate. The Trustees are also hoping to set up an online booking system for use of the Hall space, etc.

Councillor E Scott congratulated Jennifer and the team for their exceptional work on this project. Councillor E Scott highlighted that she had met with the ASDA Foundation and they are looking to fund similar projects as the Lowes Barn Community Centre development. Councillor E Scott advised that she would link Jennifer in to her point of contact there.

Councillor R Ormerod asked if there were any plans to use the old building for things like storage for instance. Jennifer advised that this had been looked into but it is likely that the Trustees would not wish to take on the added liability of such a building.

The Clerk asked if the Trustees had begun recruiting a Community Centre Manager. Jennifer advised that this is a future project for the Trustees but nothing had commenced yet with the main focus being on the development itself. Jennifer highlighted that Glen Walker joining the project had been invaluable given his expertise in project management, etc.

Members thanked Jennifer for her presentation and work on this project. At this point, Jennifer left the meeting.

6. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Both members of the public present advised that they were attending the meeting with a general interest in listening to the discussion on all items on the Agenda.

7. COMMITTEE UPDATES

• Planning and Licensing Committee

Councillor S Walker presented the minutes of the Planning and Licensing Committee meetings held on 14th and 28th October 2022. There being no queries from Members, Councillor S Walker moved on to Committee updates.

- Verbal update on the Sniperley Park developments

The Clerk began his remarks by expressing the thanks of the Chair of the Planning and Licensing Committee for the vast work everyone has put into the developments at Sniperley.

The Clerk advised that the Committee has highlighted this as yet another brilliant example of partnership working between the Parish Council, the City of Durham Trust, the CPRE and WRRAG - partnerships we greatly value as a Council.

The Clerk reminded Members that both County Durham Land LLP and Bellway Homes Ltd have withdrawn their non-determination appeals for both respective planning applications at Sniperley. The Clerk advised that this followed the decision of the Inspector not to allow amendments to the proposals at this stage of the process.

The Clerk advised that both developers have now indicated that they wish to work collaboratively with the County Council on a set of new applications for this new site.

The Clerk advised that the Parish Council is expecting both applications for this site at the start of 2023.

The Clerk confirmed that the Inspector's ruling is that costs will not be awarded in this instance and the Inspector has written to all Rule 6 (6) parties to indicate that no further action will be taken following the withdrawal of both appeals.

The Council thanked the Clerk for this update and **agreed** to await the new applications in due course.

• **Environment Committee**

Councillor C Lattin presented the minutes from the Environment Committee meeting held on 11th October 2022. There were no queries from Members on these minutes.

• **Business Committee**

Councillor E Scott presented the minutes from the Business Committee meeting held on 15th September 2022. There were no queries from Members on these minutes.

• **Finance Committee**

Councillor A Doig presented the minutes from the Finance Committee meeting held on 21st June 2022. There being no queries from Members, Councillor A Doig moved on to Committee updates.

- **Response to DCC budget 2023/24 consultation**

Members unanimously **agreed** the following response to DCC's consultation on budget proposals for 2023/24:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Durham County Council's consultation on its budget proposals for 2023/24. The Parish Council considered all of the documentation included as part of this consultation and wishes to make the following comments.

The financial context and changes to Government funding

Firstly, this is clearly an extremely difficult consultation to have to undertake and the Parish Council accepts that the factors which have led to this consultation are beyond the control of the County Council – increasing demand pressures in social care, crippling cuts to local Government funding from Central Government, significant increases in inflation and interest rates and energy costs.

For a Local Authority to make savings of £37.4million is an incredibly difficult exercise and it is clear from this consultation that every avenue to achieve this without impacting so heavily on frontline services has been explored.

The loss of around 3,000 staff to the Authority since 2010 is a damning indictment of the Government's changes to funding for local authorities and it is a credit to all staff at the County Council who have managed to maintain services since 2010 against this backdrop. It is deeply worrying to hear that further staff reductions are being proposed as part of an £11.8million savings exercise and residents must be assured that this will not impact on services to the most vulnerable in our County.

Changes to central Government funding have had a particularly acute adverse impact on County Durham. In the financial year 2019/20 a total of £7,429,000 was lost in Council tax revenue in Durham due to Class M and Class N (student) exemptions. The figure for 2020/21 has increased by £1,368,335 to £8,797,335. In addition to which £41,174 was also lost due to 'Student Disregards'. Prior to changes which commenced in 2010, central Government funding formula would have filled this gap in funding. This funding has now been removed entirely and this can only have a significant impact on services at the County Council.

The fact that DCC spends over 60% of its total expenditure on caring for our most vulnerable residents simply serves to highlight the life and death demands which Council officers are charged with each day.

Incoming raising proposals

The Parish Council very much welcomes most of the income raising proposals set out at this consultation, particularly taking advantage of selling renewable energy back to the grid. However, the aspect relating to increased demand for planning application services is concerning – does this mean that there will be greater pressure for the County Council to sell its assets for house building outside the scope of the local development plan for the area?

Review of Area Action Partnerships

The Parish Council appreciates the opportunity to comment on DCC's Area Action Partnerships created in 2009 to bridge the (perceived) gap between local communities and the new Unitary authority.

Durham residents have had the chance to see and hear from public service representatives via Board meetings and also vote for community priorities. The Task and Finish groups encourage community involvement but, even in the

compact city, numbers need boosting despite the efforts of the excellent AAP team. Time and venues for meetings can also be a practical difficulty so if the number of AAP's was reduced public engagement could be even lower.

As a way of disbursing public funds the application forms and the system need refining. However, abolishing or cutting the number of AAP's would make the grants process more remote but not necessarily more efficient.

The opportunity for contact between the public and the police, health, fire service, councillors, voluntary groups and other organisations on a regular basis is valued and should remain. There may be a useful role for Parish Councils to be more active in working across the space between the local community and the County Council.

Council tax reduction scheme

Finally, the County Council has shown itself to be a compassionate Local Authority and must be commended for being one of only a few Councils which still retain a Council Tax Reduction scheme for the most vulnerable residents.

We look forward to seeing the results of this consultation in due course.

End of response

8. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 27th October 2022 as follows:

Firstly, the Chair thanked everyone involved in the unveiling of the blue plaque dedicated to the first 3 female graduates of Durham University over the weekend. The Chair remarked that this was a fantastic event and the Council owes its thanks to the Environment Committee, the Durham Women's Banner Group and St. Hild and St. Bede's college. The Chair advised that he felt that the Council has ensured that women's history in our City is there for all to read about and remember and serves as an inspiration to us all. The Chair advised that he felt that the blue plaques scheme had been terrific and offered a very big thank you to all involved.

The Chair also thanked all those involved in the organisation of the Durham City Remembrance weekend this month. Remembrance Sunday by all accounts was a terrific success and we thank His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant Sue Snowdon for her generous letter to us. The Chair advised that that Sue and others remarked that the event had been the best yet in Durham which is a huge credit to those involved in organising the event. The Chair advised that he placed a wreath at the DLI statue in the Market Place on Armistice Day on behalf of the Parish Council and that he was moved to see the huge numbers of people who attended the event.

The Chair advised that he knew many Councillors were impressed with the stats provided by the Safety of Women at Night hub earlier this month and from Jacqui and Owen's presentation today. The Chair remarked that this goes to show that the investment was worth every penny when we see people safeguarded and given access to care. The Chair advised that he was delighted that the Parish Council

was the first organisation to offer funding in February of this year to ensure that the hub can continue now and into the future.

The Chair reminded Members that the Clerk has circulated details of the Parish Council's Christmas civic event – taking place on 12th December at the Town Hall again this year. The invitation is open to all Councillors and their partners. The Chair remarked that this is a great event which gives us the opportunity to say thank you to everyone for their help and support this year ahead of what we hope will be an enjoyable Christmas break. The Chair asked Members to let the Clerk know if they are able to attend.

The Chair offered his congratulations and thanks to all those involved in ensuring that the right decision was reached over the Sniperley Park developments this month; both developers having now withdrawn their appeals with the Inspectorate. The Chair advised that these proposals would have had a serious impact on our parish, particularly the local road network and services such as GPs and schools. The Chair advised that the Council shall now await the amended proposals from both developers in the coming months.

The Chair expressed his delight to see how successful the 7 Hills trail map has been since its launch. All 5,000 leaflets have now gone out across the Parish area and the University in particular has been supporting the Parish Council in promoting this trail. Huge credit goes to David Miller and the Environment Committee for this project. David is so encouraged by the trail's success; he is now on to the next one as part of our collective efforts to mark the 80th Anniversary of the City of Durham Trust.

Finally, the Chair said a big thank you to all those residents who took an active role in the Parish Council's recent consultation on its priorities and the precept. The Chair remarked that it was good to read some of the feedback received from residents who rate the Parish Council either excellent or very good and of course we'll be considering all feedback in the weeks ahead as we formalise our budget and strategy for 2023/24 as a Council.

9. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF RESIDENT FEEDBACK TO PARISH COUNCIL CONSULTATION

Members noted the below executive summary of resident feedback to the Parish Council consultation:

How would you rate the City of Durham Parish Council's performance since it was founded in 2018? Please provide details

From the 91 responses received to this consultation:

40 rated the performance of the Parish Council since 2018 as being either excellent or very good. Positive feedback in particular was received in relation to the Council acting on behalf of residents' concerns in relation to the County HQ building, the Council's work in planning and in improving the local environment.

27 respondents rated the performance of the Parish Council as being either good or OK.

10 respondents rated the performance of the Parish Council as being either 'not good or poor'.

In both cases where the response on the performance of the Parish Council has been either 'good to OK' or 'not good to poor', respondents have highlighted that their main concerns appear to be beyond the powers of the Parish Council to directly act on or general statements about issues such as studentification, the perceived state of the City centre, etc. have been included.

14 of the 91 responses did not answer this specific question.

What would you most like to see the City of Durham Parish Council prioritise over the next year?

The main issues highlighted through this consultation were as follows (in order of priority):

- Addressing the studentification of the parish area
- Making the community safer and addressing anti-social behaviour such as noise and late-night anti-social behaviour.
- Improving the cleanliness and appearance of the parish area.
- Improving the condition of footpaths within the parish area.
- Improving publicity for events in the City centre and promoting tourism.
- Tackling car parking issues and the lack of car parking spaces for residents.
- Attracting more independent retailers in the City centre.

What do you feel are the additional issues in the City of Durham Parish area and would you be prepared to pay a small increase in the Parish Council's precept to fund solutions?

Additional issues highlighted through this consultation were as follows:

- Reducing traffic in and around the City centre (traffic along the A167 at school pick-up and drop-off times was specifically highlighted).
- Need for a greater police presence (both day time and night time) and for night time Neighbourhood Wardens.
- Improving the air quality of the City centre.
- Addressing the anti-social behaviour and street scene appearance of North Road.
- More events for families in the City centre.
- More community art space in the City.
- All new homes should be carbon neutral with solar panels, etc.

From the 91 responses received to this consultation:

40 said that they would be willing to pay an increase in the precept.

19 said that they would not be willing to pay an increase in the precept.

32 of the 91 responses did not answer this specific question about an increase in the precept.

What are the best ways for the Parish Council to keep residents updated on its work in the community? (For example, public meetings, website, newsletters...)

A mixed response was received to this particular question, with most respondents highlighting that use of electrical communications such as Facebook, the website and emails are low cost and efficient ways of communicating with residents.

Others preferred more public meetings, a Parish Council newsletter and more advertising in the local press.

Some respondents highlighted the need for responses to emails from elected Members.

Other matters

11 responses were received from residents outside of the parish area and are therefore not included for consideration as part of this report.

End of executive summary

10. PARISH COUNCIL STRATEGY 2023/24

The Clerk reminded Councillors that the Parish Council has agreed to formulate its strategy for 2023/24 ahead of the budget setting process in January 2023.

The Clerk highlighted that the aim of the Parish Council's strategy is to give local residents, Councillors and Officers a clear understanding of what the council is trying to achieve and how it intends to deliver its aims and objectives. The strategy sets out what the areas of development or change the Council intends to focus on over the next year outlining those areas of service that are identified as priority aims and objectives.

As part of this, the Clerk advised that all Parish Council Committees are being asked to agree their priorities for the forthcoming financial year so that this can feed into the Parish Council's budget agreement.

The Clerk reminded Members that, last year, the Parish Council agreed the following overarching priorities for Full Council:

1. Being an ambitious voice for the city
2. Enhancing the physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish
3. Upholding the Neighbourhood Plan and representing the parish on planning matters
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.

Within the scope of these overarching aims of the Council; a number of the Parish Council's Committees have agreed their priorities for 2023/24. However, the Clerk

highlighted that Members may wish to alter these overarching aims of the Council in view of the resident consultation feedback.

Members unanimously **agreed** that the overarching priorities for the Full Parish Council for 2023/24 should remain as they were for 2022/23 (above).

11. UPDATE ON PAY SCALES FOR 2022/23 PAY SETTLEMENT

The Clerk advised that the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) has been advised by the Local Government Association that agreement has now been reached on the pay award for local government services ('Green Book') employees, covering the period 1 from April 2022.

The Clerk advised that an agreement has been reached that all pay columns will receive an increase of £1,925.00, to be backdated from 1st April 2022.

The Clerk also advised that the NJC has agreed that from 1 April 2023, all employees covered by this National Agreement, regardless of their current leave entitlement or length of service, will receive a permanent increase of one day (pro rata for part-timers) to their annual leave entitlement.

The Clerk highlighted that the NJC has also agreed to enter into discussions on homeworking policies, mental health support and maternity etc leave.

The Clerk reminded Members that sufficient funding for this increase was allocated by the Parish Council in January 2022. If approved, all pay arrears will be paid in the November 2022 payroll window.

Members unanimously **agreed** to accept the £1,925 increase to the Clerk's salary and to make the necessary arrangements for arrears to be paid in the November 2022 payroll window.

12. MOTION BY CLLR S WALKER ON WHITE RIBBON DAY

Members unanimously **agreed** the following motion on White Ribbon Day:

"This Council supports the aims of White Ribbon Day and encourages its members and the wider community of the City of Durham to make the White Ribbon Promise to never use, excuse or remain silent about violence against women".

13. MOTION BY CLLR R ORMEROD ON THE PARK AND RIDE SERVICES

Members unanimously **agreed** the following amended motion on the park and ride services:

"This Council undertakes to write to the Chair of the Bus Board of Durham County Council to urge the County Council to extend, extend and tailor park and ride services - for example, for hospital visiting, night economy workers, Sunday working and recreational tourism uses - and to introduce electric buses as soon as possible, in the interests of benefitting various user requirements and of reducing pollution and congestion in our City".

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.

14. LICENSE REVIEW APPLICATION

The Council unanimously **agreed** to allocate a total of up to £3,000 towards legal costs for the review hearing for the Woodman Inn pub.

There being no further business, the Chair thanked Members for their attendance and participation and closed the meeting.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'A' followed by a wavy line and a long horizontal stroke.

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council
(26th January 2023)**