

# CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

**DRAFT Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting, held in the Durham Town Hall at 18:30pm on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2022.**

## **1. Welcome from the Chair of the Parish Council**

The Chair took the opportunity to thank all those present for attending the meeting today and highlighted that the last two years have been a significant challenge for all residents owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Chair wished all present good health and wishes.

## **2. Confirmation of the minutes of the last parish meeting**

Residents unanimously **confirmed** the Minutes of the Parish meeting held on Thursday 23rd May 2019 as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

## **3. Chair's update on the work of the Parish Council**

The Chair of the Parish Council provided an update on works carried out by the Parish Council since the last meeting of the parish. The Chair's report was as follows:

What an eventful four years it has been for our community and the Parish Council! Since its formation in 2018, the City of Durham Parish Council has established an ambitious programme of work to help preserve, support and enhance our community for years to come. It has been really wonderful to have such great community support throughout and to see the difference this work is already having across the whole of our Parish area.

To help deliver our programme, the Parish Council has established a number of Committees; each with a specific area of focus. These include: a Planning Committee (representing the parish on all planning matters and delivering a Neighbourhood Plan for our community), an Environment Committee (delivering a cleaner and greener community), a Licensing Committee (representing the parish on all licensing matters), a Finance Committee (ensuring the delivery of cost-effective services and advising the Parish Council on grant allocations to local voluntary and community organisations) and a Business Committee (supporting businesses and promoting Durham city as a place to visit and shop).

This year we are pushing ahead with our work with the five key priorities for our area as our guiding light:

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.

These have helped us in the programme of work we have delivered to date for the parish.

One major priority for the Parish Council since its formation has been to keep our community as clean and green as possible. I think it is right to say that keeping the environment around us as pleasant for residents as possible is the key issue for lots of our parish – whether we look at the regular contact we receive regarding littering and bins or improving our less loved areas in the public realm.

As a Parish Council, we have entered into a Service Level Agreement with Durham County Council to provide an enhanced Neighbourhood Warden Service for an additional 10 hours provision per week. Our Warden Dale works hard throughout the week with his colleagues to tackle issues relating to bins, low level anti-social behaviour, enforcing the PSPO around street drinking in the City and much more.

The Parish Council has also supplemented this work with the launch of its anti-cigarette butt campaign – providing free, bio-degradable pouches across the City to tackle the very real issue of cigarette-related litter which we and other cities suffer from. We have also carried out work to tackle chewing gum on street pavements and to get our pavements cleaned and looking their very best – with North Road and Claypath being two examples of this.

The Parish Council is also very concerned at the issue of air pollution in the City and we were delighted to take action pre-Covid in the City's Market Place – working together with our partners the Durham Markets Company – to introduce a code of non-usage of diesel generators in the Market Place. Instead providing the electrical equipment necessary for traders to go electric and, in the process, clean up the air we breathe when out in the City.

Keeping our area looking its best also involves a lot of work with many partners to make our communities greener. I'm delighted that the Parish Council has been very successful with projects such as tree planting, bulb planting across the parish, providing free bedding plants to our residents for public spaces, supporting Durham in Bloom, providing funding for fruit trees across our schools and supporting the construction of a sedum-roof shelter in our allotments site on North End. All of this could not be possible without the terrific support and involvement of our residents and our partners. A very big thanks to all for their hard work on this.

Working with local schools, we are also delighted to be providing Terracycle boxes to encourage the next generation to get recycling and to think about the impact of their actions on our climate. As a Parish Council who has declared a Climate Change emergency, our work at a local-level continues on this front.

Keeping our local environment enjoyable for all also means facing up to some significant challenges we face as a community. The Parish Council recognises – and many of us experience ourselves – the very real issue of late-night noise disturbance caused by a minority in our community. The Parish Council may not be a statutory body to deal with this issue in the same way in which the Police and DCC certainly are – but that doesn't mean we can't be proactive where residents

voice their concerns to us. I was delighted that last year we pushed on with our support for the resident-led *Shhh...11pm-7am* campaign in the City. This involved the installation of signs across the City on lampposts, thousands of *Shhh...* beer mats going into licensed premises across the City and in college bars, *Shhh...* banners being displayed at key entry points of the City, such as the Railway station and much more.

In addition to this, the Parish Council continues to work as an active partner on the City's ASB task force to seek solutions to problems relating to anti-social behaviour and we are hoping to extend this work later this year by providing advice to residents on "what they should do" if they are experiencing any form of ASB.

Of course, Durham hasn't been shortlisted for City of Culture 2025 for no reason and we must all play our part to ensure that we cherish and preserve all that makes Durham City the great place it is. That includes promoting our rich heritage as a parish. I was delighted that the Parish Council has been successful in a number of external funding bids to help us do just that – from the restoration of the Neville's Cross on the 675<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle itself last year, the restoration of the Ruth First mural on Providence Row to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ruth's tragic death, funding new blue plaques around the City marking buildings and people of significance in our parish and of course launching the 7 Hills trail map late last year – a trail which I understand has proven exceptionally popular with residents and visitors alike and we thank David Miller for all his hard work on this project. We are also keeping everything crossed for a good result for Durham next week for the City of Culture BID – a lot of work by so many has gone into this bid and it will be a huge honour to receive this incredible accolade for our County.

The last 2 years has clearly thrown up many challenges – not least the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the lives of our residents and sadly for those who we lost as a result of this global health emergency. In local Government terms, this presented a huge challenge as you can imagine. I am pleased that the Parish Council continued with much of its programme of work and also built upon this in response to the pandemic.

A key concern for us – in addition to the concerns of our residents' health – was the future of our local economy and the impact of the pandemic on our City's high street. It is essential for all of us who love to work, live and visit the City that we have a thriving high street for all - particularly families to enjoy and benefit from. As the Country came out of the first national lockdown, I was pleased that it was the City of Durham Parish Council who took action immediately to set up a Covid-19 business resilience fund – unprecedented for any Parish Council anywhere, to help businesses with covering the extra costs of making themselves Covid-safe for our residents.

In addition, the Parish Council has contracted the services of award-winning retail expert Graham Soutl who is supporting us with marketing all the amazing independent, family-run businesses in the City. Graham also helps in securing new

business tenants for vacant premises in the City as well as providing advice to businesses – entirely free to the business at the point of need.

To support this work, the Parish Council has also established a Totally Locally website – marketing independent businesses in the City and this is supplemented with a Totally Locally podcast which is proving really popular too.

Ultimately our aim is to get footfall to the City back to pre-pandemic levels and to make our City an even greater attraction for tourists than it is already.

Part of the City which is doing well at present is our thriving night-time economy. We are delighted to welcome students and visitors to our City so that they can enjoy everything that the City has to offer from a leisure and hospitality perspective. But that also comes with a responsibility to ensure that the worst excesses of the night-time economy are properly managed and do not adversely impact on our residents' health.

The City has a thriving night time economy and this is only set to grow in the next few years. As part our multi-agency approach to keep everyone safe, I was very pleased that the Parish Council was the first organisation in the City to provide significant funding to ensure the continuation of the newly-established Safety of Women at Night hub in St. Nicholas Church in the Market Place. This hub is providing an absolutely essential and, at times, life-saving service to residents and visitors and it is essential that this continues into the future. I am delighted to say that all of the key players in the City have committed to providing further funding to keep the service going this year.

As part of a longer-term strategy, the Parish Council is also leading on a campaign to have a late-night levy on all late-night economy premises introduced to ensure that those licensees who wish to make huge money from our night-time economy also contribute towards its policing. Our work on this continues, as do our efforts to request that a cumulative impact policy be introduced to the City, so that we can better regulate the density of licensed premises in a particular location of the City.

I am pleased that Dave Clarke is with us tonight as we've worked hard with Dave to provide the City's licensed premises with rapid-testing breathalysers and have also funded – for the first time in a long time in the City – a drugs dog to carry out sweeps of the City's premises and to help get drugs misuse out of our City.

In addition to this work by our Licensing Committee, we have also recently launched an annual "best-run licensed premises award" and were pleased to award the Colpitts Hotel with a Gold Award earlier this year.

The aim of this award is twofold - to bring the day time and night time economies of the City together in some way and to make the early evening and night time economies more appealing for families. It recognises those premises which go above and beyond in how they operate responsibly and we look forward to this being a regular feature of our work.

You'll have seen from the minutes in front of you that the last time we met as a parish, we were in the midst of the battle against the new County Headquarters

building at the Sands. Sadly our campaign and work to get a judicial review against the construction of this building was unsuccessful. The fact that the building is there at all is a great tragedy to our City and I'd like to thank all those who supported the Parish Council's battle against its construction. Clearly, as we all know now, the building may soon be set for a new purpose and we await the outcome of this with interest.

Equally, the Parish Council – together with the Durham City Freemen, local residents and others – took on a huge fight against the de-registration of the former coach park at the Sands as common land and were sadly unsuccessful. I am however very happy with the case we made to the Inspectorate and I thank everyone involved in this process. The Sands is a beautiful, much-loved part of our City and it is essential we do all we can to maintain it for its natural beauty and recreational purposes for residents.

This work has been led by the Parish Council's Planning Committee, in addition to their substantial work in representing the parish on planning matters. Analysing literally hundreds of applications every year and studying thousands of documents which go with them is a massive undertaking and I am delighted at the successes we have had in protecting our Conservation Area, our World Heritage Site, our precious greenbelt as well as protecting against overdevelopment and the further studentification of our City. A big thank you to everyone involved in this essential work.

Of course, these successes in planning have come in no small part thanks to the adoption of our Neighbourhood Plan. This again was a huge undertaking led by members of the Neighbourhood Plan Group – volunteers who gave hundreds of hours of their time to ensure that the future of development in our parish is decided by our community.

Equally, the Parish Council has been working closely with the County Council in starting the process of creating a Conservation Area Management Plan. The principal aim of the Management Plan is to improve the understanding of the conservation area and establish a positive strategy for its preservation and enhancement. It will include a costed Management and Maintenance Action Plan which specifies the resources which will be required to maintain the upkeep of the conservation area over the longer term and ensure that it is a shared and deliverable vision.

A good Parish Council is also one which manages your money well. The Parish Council has been successful in a number of external funding bids and, as a result of this, and good financial management has managed to keep the Parish Council's precept frozen for the fourth year in a row at just over £34. This is one of the lowest precept charges across the County and we've managed to deliver a huge programme of work with this funding. At the same time, our auditors have yet again commended the Parish Council for its excellent management and governance over the last financial year.

In addition to this, I am pleased that we also commit to providing financial grant support to many local community and voluntary organisations across our parish – from those which provide a hub for parts of our community to those organisations

which work with and on behalf of supporting those who are most vulnerable – I am delighted that we have been able to support their work.

I am pleased that the Parish Council has proven itself as an organisation which really punches above its weight in working on behalf of our community. This is publicly on show no more so than when the Parish Council works on events in the City – two major events the Parish Council has taken a lead on since our formation are the annual Remembrance Day event in the City as well as this year the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee celebrations and I hope you will all join us next week as we seek to honour Her Majesty’s service to the nation. These events are huge undertakings and wouldn’t be possible without the work of our Councillors and our dedicated Parish Clerk Adam.

I’d like to end by thanking everyone for their support and work in the City over these last years and above all to my fellow Parish Councillors for their voluntary work all year round as well as to our Clerk for all of his work.

#### **4. Presentation on the Durham Cathedral Estates Strategy**

The Chair welcomed Maya Polenz, Chief Property Officer (Durham Cathedral) and Andrew Usher, Visitor Experience and Enterprise Director (Durham Cathedral) to the meeting.

Maya thanked the Parish Council for allowing her to attend this meeting. Maya highlighted that the Cathedral owns a substantial estate, albeit the size of the estate has reduced slightly over the year.

Maya advised that, during the pandemic, the Cathedral really took the opportunity to consider a longer-term strategy for its estates, with the objective of keeping as much of this as open as possible for public use and enjoyment.

Maya advised that the Cathedral lead a public consultation on this over a year ago and the riverbanks and their welfare had come back as being one of residents’ top priorities in the City. Since this was highlighted to the Cathedral, Maya advised that she had been working with DCC on projects to improve the riverbanks for Durham residents; recognising the important value they have not just in terms of landscaping around the World Heritage Site but also for their public use and enjoyment aspect.

Maya advised that DCC has also been leading on a feasibility study for projects to improve the riverbanks. Maya advised that the main parts of the river which DCC has been looking at stretches from Shincliffe to Kepier.

Maya also advised that DCC is looking to improve access to the river from residential areas.

Maya highlighted that it is important to think about the longer-term financial sustainability of the river and advised that the 3 Mill buildings are currently being reviewed to see if they can be brought back into some commercial/ public use.

Victoria Ashfield asked if the Cathedral had considered installing Swift boxes around its estate as a home for these birds; highlighting the recent correspondence from the RSPB on this important issue. Maya advised that Swift boxes could be considered for the future but also advised that the Cathedral had already worked on a project to protect bats roosting in the Cathedral itself.

Alice Severs asked if the Cathedral could possibly consider extending the Cathedral bus service to a Sunday service in order to support those with mobility issues to get to and from the Cathedral on this day too. Andrew Usher advised that this is something he would certainly like to see happen however highlighted that this would require substantial subsidies from the County Council in order to be a viable option.

Liz Brown highlighted residents' concerns about the fencing off of a field at Observatory Hill.

Liz expressed disappointment that the land at Observatory Hill was fenced off and ploughed without pre-announcement to local residents who really value access to this land. The Chair also highlighted the importance of consultation with residents on the management of green spaces and expressed that he felt that communication is essential.

Maya advised that she felt that the tenant should have consulted with local residents and the Cathedral prior to blocking off the Hill. Maya advised that the tenant's plans are focused around biodiversity and regenerating the Hill.

Maya advised that the tenant is happy to allow public access to the Hill and residents need to understand that this is a farming area.

Maya also advised that it is important to the Cathedral that this land is farmed for financial sustainability purposes.

The Chair thanked Maya and Andrew for their excellent presentation and answers to residents' questions.

## **5. Durham Police update on the City of Durham parish area**

The Chair welcomed Dave Clarke to the meeting and Dave thanked the Parish Council for the opportunity to speak at this meeting today.

Dave introduced himself as the Neighbourhood Inspector for Durham City. Dave recognised that there had been a number of Inspectors in the City over the past number of years but assured attendees that he would be in post in the City for the foreseeable future.

Dave advised that he believes strongly in being a visible presence in the City centre and is always happy to meet with representatives of the local community. Dave highlighted that he hosts a monthly meeting with local Parish and Town Councils at the Police HQ to discuss any issues within their area.

Mike Costello highlighted the issue of student-related anti-social behaviour and late night noise disturbance and the difficulties in getting through via the 101 call system. Mike asked if the Police might be able to look at an Operation OAK style model – similar to that which operates in Jesmond through Northumbria Police – for Durham City centre. Dave advised that he has a general idea of costs for this and highlighted that this would need to be a partnership-led and funded activity but that he was happy to look into this.

## **6. Questions from members of the public**

Janet George thanked the Parish Council for all of its excellent work over the last few years. Janet expressed frustration that the Section 106 projects had had to be put on hold in the Elvet and Gilesgate Ward. Janet advised that residents have had to put up with a lot of development in the area recently and should be able to see some benefit from this; for example Janet was very keen on the idea of sedum roofed bus shelters in lower Claypath. The Clerk advised that he was aware of the frustration from local residents about this and advised that the County Council had identified the Section 106 funds as part of the Levelling Up bid to Government; the outcome of this we wouldn't know until the New Year. The Clerk advised Janet that he would keep residents updated on this.

Lynda Lovell expressed her disappointment at having been copied into an email from a local Parish and County Councillor which made certain libellous claims against two other Parish Council Members and asked the Chair why the Member had not been asked to make a full public apology about this. The Chair advised that the Parish Council had no role in these matters and that the County Council's Monitoring Officer and Standards Committee were responsible for deciding such matters.

## **7. City of Durham Good Citizen 2022 awards**

The Chair presented the City of Durham Good Citizen 2022 awards to Roger Cornwell, Richard Hornby, John Ashby and Joan Nix with the following presentations:

Roger Cornwell

Roger was one of the founder members of the Crossgate Community Partnership and has chaired it for many years. He was also Chair of the City of Durham Trust until 2017 when he resigned on his election as Parish Council. You would think in his 75th year he would be slowing down but no. He has an encyclopaedic knowledge of Durham and has a filing system to rival Durham Records Office. He was a brilliant chair of the Parish Council's planning committee and taught the current chair all she knows about planning. If anyone on the Parish Council has a query, he's always available and interested. Roger has attended many meetings of the Parish Council helping us all with his acquired wisdom. Finally he has the most amazing wine cellar.

**Richard Hornby**

Richard believes in the importance of the local community and devotes his efforts, time and commitment to supporting people within his neighbourhood.

He has been the very active chair of Gilesgate Residents Association for 5 years and has done a great deal to get the association organised and active, socially and in supporting residents. He is a member of Durham University Residents' Forum, the Parishes Community Forum and as a past graduate of the university combines understanding of issues affecting residents with an appreciation of students' perspectives. In his role as a university tutor, he maintains this contact. It is his initiative which led to the development by the university of the Student Community wardens, and he was instrumental in appointing our first two. He is excellent at tackling planning matters, presenting well-argued cases – usually in opposition to plans – and speaking effectively at DCC committee. His current work load includes developing a Gilesgate Community Emergency plan and also a Gilesgate Neighbourhood Plan.

During the Covid lockdown, he drew together all the volunteer organisations, churches and Community Centres in the area into a Gilesgate Covid Volunteers group. This enabled each of the various groups to support each other, to find out what was happening and to avoid duplication of effort. Arising from this came his involvement in the food Bank at the local Baptist Church, which then spawned a well-being group where residents could also collect with their food, clothes, toys for the children and books. Every Saturday morning, he is on site, collecting donated food, sorting into appropriate food parcels and delivering to residents in need.

Also during lockdown he became a DCC Covid champion, spreading information and advice. He worked on the vaccine buses as a volunteer. He has pioneered meeting using the hybrid model of some people face to face, some on Facebook and some on line. He is passionately interested in local history and consulting old maps and is currently working on an update of an early walk he found in a local newspaper of 1910. Above all, he is kind, patient and would help anyone.

### **John Ashby**

We all know that John has worked for the Parish Council from its inception and for many, many years before that when he worked on the Neighbourhood Plan; provided advice on the County Durham Plan; and worked with the City of Durham Trust to support our whole area.

Since leaving the Parish Council last May, far from reducing his involvement, he has continued to work for, with and on behalf of the Parish Council and the Parish area in a range of capacities and on a range of projects including our ongoing efforts against ASB, his liaison with the University on DURF, and his generous advice and support to the Parish Council's Planning Committee. His advice is always immeasurable and his help has been invaluable. His commitment to our area is known by so many of our residents.

### **Joan Nix**

Joan is a true champion of our community in Merryoaks. Joan has served as President of the local WI here for many years and in that time has contributed enormously to improving our community. No task is too big or too small for Joan. Most recently she has taken on a number of community knitting projects; being one of the main drivers behind the Parish Council's phenomenal cascading poppy display in 2020 and again as part of an Easter fundraiser in Neville's Cross which resulted in a beautiful daffodil cross which helped raised much needed funds locally for the Marie Curie Foundation. Joan is an amazing pillar of our community, always looking out for the wellbeing of others both within and outside the Women's Institute organisation in Durham and is a tireless fundraiser for many worthy causes. She takes on so much of the organisation of what makes Neville's Cross so wonderful and she richly deserves some recognition for this tireless work.

Before closing the meeting, the Chair and Councillor Esther Ashby also presented the Clerk with a gift to say a huge thank you for all his work in planning the Platinum Jubilee events.

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

**Signed by Councillor Alan Doig (Chair of the Parish Council)**  
**Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2023**