

# CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

## Minutes of a meeting of the Business Committee held on Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2022 at 13:00 via Zoom

**Present:** Councillors E Scott (in the Chair), E Ashby and G Nair.

**Also present:** A Shanley (Clerk), Mr Graham Soutl (Parish Council retail consultant), Mr Colin Wilkes (Durham Markets Company), Liza Johnson (Durham BID) and Paul Howard (Durham BID).

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

Apologies were received from Cllrs Brown, Holland and Ormerod.

### **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 on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2022**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2022 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

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

None received.

### **5. Report by retail consultant Graham Soutl on work in Durham City**

Graham Soutl provided an update on his work in the City to the Committee.

Graham advised that 119 businesses in the City had been featured on the @IndieDurhamCity social media channels since the last meeting in November 2021.

Graham advised that the social media pages for the @IndieDurhamCity campaign had now reached 3,784 followers.

Graham also advised that 8,996 people had been reached via the @IndieDurhamCity social media pages in the last 28 days alone.

Graham advised that he had recently met with two potential new retailers in the City who are struggling to locate appropriate premises for their businesses and he was attempting to locate them a premises in the City.

Graham advised that the City now has 30+ new businesses since the beginning of the pandemic and advised that he felt that this showed the resilience and strength of the City.

Graham also advised that he had been liaising with Graham Wood (DCC) on financial support for businesses so that he could advise business appropriately on what funding is available for support.

Graham advised that he will be meeting with a number of businesses in the City this month – including Shuck Salons, Crushed Chilli Gallery and Newcastle Building Society – to see what more he could do to promote these businesses and their offer to consumers.

Graham also advised that he had been promoting the Council's "free after 2pm" parking scheme.

Graham also advised that he would soon be meeting with local MP Mary Foy as she had contacted him directly with an interest in what is happening in the City centre.

Graham advised that he had promoted the Fire and Ice festival over February 2022 and thought this had been a terrific success for the City.

Graham advised that he had promoted two independent indoor market businesses – Bound2Fit and Rewind – as cover stars in the @IndieDurhamCity channels.

Graham also advised that he had met with the landlord and new tenant for the former Topshop and Topman stores and was really looking forward to seeing this open.

Graham also advised that he had been promoting the Durham2025 City of Culture bid.

Graham also highlighted that he had done an interview with the Northern Echo to dispel some of myths around Silver Street and highlighted that Moon Jewellery has recently opened a new store there and this was having a really positive on the street scene at Silver Street.

Cllr E Ashby advised that she would like to see areas such as Riverwalk have a much more diverse mix of retail offer, as opposed to a high number of night-time economy premises, and asked if Graham could promote this as part of the strategy of the Parish Council.

## **6. Update from the Chair on her work as Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships**

The Chair advised that she had asked DCC to undertake a retail gap analysis for the City and hoped to have a copy of this to the Committee.

The Chair advised that she has asked DCC to work more closely with agents and landlords in Silver Street to see what more can be done about dealing with the empty units in Silver Street.

The Chair advised that she understood that there is soon to be good news for approximately 3 of the premises in Silver Street.

The Chair advised that DCC had now agreed the reopening of the DLI Museum and this will hopefully offer a real cultural centre / art space for the City.

The Chair advised that there is a huge offering of culture buildings in County Durham which will hopefully draw people to Durham for a longer dwelling time. For instance – the DLI Museum, Redhills, Ushaw College, the Oriental Museum, the Botanic gardens, Crook Hall and the World Heritage Site. The Chair advised that she felt that this made the idea of a tourist bus in Durham a lot more viable and advised that she is raising this with the transport team at DCC.

The Chair highlighted that there is soon to be some further news on the future of the new County Headquarters building at the Sands.

The Chair advised that the 'free after 2pm' initiative has been re-commissioned for a further 1 year up until April 2023 at a cost of £600,000. The Chair advised that this is not a perfect solution and one option which could be looked at is for a 'free for the first hour' scheme. Paul Howard advised that he felt that this latter option is certainly a better one for Durham.

## **7. Progressing a follow-up roundtable meeting with landlords in Durham City**

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council had attempted to host a roundtable meeting with landlords in Durham City at the end of January 2022. The Clerk advised that, whilst there had been a very good turnout from key stakeholders, such as Durham University, Durham County Council and Durham Students Union, only one landlord had attended the roundtable meeting.

The Clerk advised that invitations had been sent to all of the major landlords in the City but very few responses had been received.

The Committee noted that invitations sent out via letter and email to landlords may not be the best form of communication to arrange this type of meeting.

The Committee agreed that the Parish Council should attempt to host a further roundtable meeting with landlords, in light of the significant role of the private-rental sector in the City. The Committee **agreed** to commit to visit landlords face-to-face in order to help promote attendance at this meeting. It was **agreed** that a follow-up roundtable meeting with landlords should be arranged for later in the Summer 2022.

## **8. Request for support for events from Durham Markets Company**

Mr Colin Wilkes advised that Durham Markets Company is keen to continue its excellent working relationship with the City of Durham Parish Council in putting on events, ideally free at point of delivery, to encourage families back into the city centre and try to slowly reverse the trend of decreasing footfall as against pre pandemic levels.

Colin advised that families in particular need a reason to come into the city and we hope DPC will feel able to support these two events.

Colin advised that he and his team are looking to host a family science and fund day on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> April. Colin advised that this is a new event to be held at end of Easter holidays to combine education and fun. Working with Postcards from Space who will deliver a full programme of science-based experiments and interactive talks throughout the day, plus educational arts and crafts.

In addition, Colin advised that his team will have free face painting and science storytelling and hope to also engage the University outreach programme for some additional resource.

So far as the Earth Day element of the programme is concerned, Colin advised that his team is working with relevant departments at DCC to have stands on the day to promote the likes of family cycle trails, sustainability, environmental issues etc, and we will look to promote a 'science based' treasure trail around the city centre as well.

Including the marquee hire, Colin advised that the cost of the event will be £2100 and asked if the Parish Council would consider supporting the event to the amount of £1000.

In addition, Colin highlighted that DMC is hoping to host the usual annual nostalgia event to bring parts of the school history curriculum to life with living history re-enactors, military vehicles, period musical entertainment and free children's activities.

Colin advised that this would be an additional reason to encourage families into the city on a bank holiday Monday.

The cost of this event is £1100 and Colin asked if the Parish Council would consider supporting the event to the amount of £500.

The Committee **agreed** to fund the above events at a total cost of £1,000 for the science fun day and £500 for the nostalgia day.

## **9. Lessons from Durham 2021 Christmas events and planning for Christmas 2022**

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council had been actively involved in the following Christmas events:

**28<sup>th</sup> November 2021** – the official Christmas light switch on event took place in the Market Place, delivered and organised by Durham BID. The cycle Christmas tree – funded by the Parish Council - was also installed from 28<sup>th</sup> November at Prince Bishops.

**3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> December** – the Christmas Festival at Palace Green took place, this was organised and delivered by the Durham Markets Company in partnership with Durham University and Durham Cathedral and with support from the Parish Council.

**Every weekend in December leading up to Christmas** – the usual outdoor market in the Market Place took place. In addition to which, the Christmas farmers and producers' market took place on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> December and an additional festive outdoor market took place on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> December.

**Every weekend in December leading up to Christmas** – Prince Bishops Place organised its usual Santa's grotto.

**12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> December** – Durham Markets Company hosted a Christmas-themed arts and crafts events and also arranged for some street entertainment (LED jugglers) and storytelling.

**19<sup>th</sup> December** – Stage invaders were in place to compliment the Market on the Sunday, funded by the Parish Council.

The Clerk also advised that, for the first time in Durham, the Parish Council helped set up a Charity Christmas gift wrap service, delivered by local charities and volunteers. The Clerk advised that this had raised a few hundred pounds for local charities but it is hoped that this could be built on for future years.

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council has agreed a total budget of £6,000 towards delivering Christmas events in the City.

## **10. Update on events planning for Queen's Platinum Jubilee**

The Clerk highlighted that it is becoming very clear that the Parish Council and the Durham Markets Company will be the lead organisers for the Platinum Jubilee events in the City.

The Clerk set out a timetable of events currently being worked through as part of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations this year.

The Clerk advised that the agreed partnership and additional resource for organising the event provided by Durham Markets Company is working extremely well and this has proven to be an essential resource to the Parish Council for these events. The Clerk reminded Members that this is being funded from the budget allocated to an assistant for the Clerk and not directly from the agreed events budget.

The Clerk highlighted that the events for the Jubilee weekend (2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> June 2022) would be kickstarted with the lighting of a beacon at 9:45pm on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> June. The Clerk advised that all partners involved in the Jubilee organising committee are keen to see that the City has a beacon lighting event on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2022.

The Clerk advised that the Freeman have commissioned an artist blacksmith to produce a 4 metre high permanent beacon for the City and that he and Cllr E Ashby, along with relevant DCC officers, have had a site visit at Wharton Park (the Freeman's desired location for the beacon) in order to assess the suitability of this site.

The Clerk advised that the Freeman are extremely keen that the beacon be located in the centre of Windy Hill in Wharton Park and have reduced the original height of the beacon (originally ordered at 5.6 metres) to 4 metres so as to benefit from the Parish Council's Permitted Development Rights (as set out in schedule 12 of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015).

The Clerk advised that the proposed location is subject to DCC agreement (Clean and Green who manage the site, Planning and Conservation) and the Parish Council will need to consider that this location has an impact on a view to the World Heritage Site. The Clerk advised that the issue of ongoing maintenance responsibility and whether the County Council will accept this has yet to be confirmed. The Freeman have recently indicated that they would expect the Parish Council to assume responsibility for the beacon in the event that the County Council is unable to do so.

The Clerk advised that, in order to progress this, a further site visit with relevant DCC representatives, the Freeman and the Parish Council has been arranged for 25<sup>th</sup> March.

The Clerk highlighted that a report on this would be coming forwards to the next Full Council meeting.

The Chair thanked all those involved in the enormous amount of work on this important event.

## **11. Update on the work of Durham BID**

Paul Howard advised that Durham BID had recently employed an events assistant in Emma Wright.

Paul advised that the events calendar is coming together for the City very nicely. Paul advised that the BID would be arranging a dinosaur day on Riverwalk over the weekend and this is looking very exciting indeed.

Paul advised that he hoped to deliver a one month long lego trail in the City over the summer and planning for a Food and Drinks Festival is well underway for October 2022.

Paul advised that he was hearing a lot of new businesses were keen to take on a unit in the City but were struggling to find an appropriate premises in the City. Paul advised that he is meeting with one such business tomorrow and he hoped that Silver Street would be looking a lot better in the coming months.

Paul advised that Durham BID is currently working on updating its website in order to offer a much easier directory of businesses in the City.

Paul highlighted that footfall to the City last weekend was almost back up to pre-pandemic levels, which is positive news.

Paul also advised that the renewal ballot for Durham BID would be taking place in September 2022. Paul advised that businesses would soon be consulted on what their priorities are for next 5 years in the City.

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

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Scott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G" and a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council Business Committee  
(22<sup>nd</sup> March 2022)**