

# CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Full Parish Council held on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 18:00 via Zoom.**

**Present:** Councillors E Scott (Chair), E Ashby, J Ashby, V Ashfield, L Brown, S Cahill, R Cornwell, A Doig, J Elmer, D Freeman, R Ormerod, C Reeves and M Ross.

**Also present:** Parish Clerk Adam Shanley.

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

Apologies were received from Cllr G Holland.

**2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS**

None received.

**3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None received.

**4. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 10<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2020**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

**5. COMMITTEE UPDATES**

**Planning Committee**

Cllr R Cornwell presented the minutes from meetings of the Planning Committee held on 27 November, 11 December and 8 January. There being no queries from Members, Cllr R Cornwell moved on to Committee reports.

Cllr R Cornwell provided an update on the progress of the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan. Cllr R Cornwell advised that he and Sue Childs had had a very constructive meeting with Durham County Council on the outstanding issue of the maps provided as part of the Neighbourhood Plan and a number of good suggestions had been made at this meeting; including extending the designated green space areas of Flass Vale and Observatory Hill. Cllr R Cornwell advised that we are still awaiting the outcome of the proofreading being carried out by DCC on the Neighbourhood Plan.

Cllr R Cornwell also reminded Members that Durham County Council is currently consulting on a number of spatial planning policy documents. In particular, Cllr R Cornwell advised that the County Council is consulting on

a proposed extension of the Article 4 Direction area relating to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) for the Mount Oswald area in the parish. The Article 4 Direction would mean that any change from a family home to an HMO would require planning permission. This would enable the Council to assess the suitability of the proposals in line with the County Durham Plan. Cllr R Cornwell reminded Members that the Parish Council had already contracted the services of a planning consultant to build an evidence base in support of this proposal, in anticipation of this consultation. Cllr R Cornwell presented this report to Members. In doing so, Cllr R Cornwell also reminded Members that Durham County Council is holding two online consultation events for the Article 4 Direction in February.

Members **agreed** to support the proposed extension to the Article 4 Direction.

Members also **approved** the report by the Parish Council's planning consultant on this consultation, subject to any minor amends which may arise as a result of the County Council's drop-in consultation events.

### **Environment Committee**

Cllr V Ashfield presented the minutes from the meeting of the Environment Committee held on 24 November. There being no queries from Members, Cllr V Ashfield moved on to Committee reports.

Cllr V Ashfield reminded Members that that Sunday October 17th 2021 will mark the 675th anniversary of the Battle of Neville's Cross.

Cllr V Ashfield advised that the local County Councillors for Neville's Cross have been developing a proposal to improve the information boards and the waymarking of this walk and, in order to progress this proposal further, a meeting took place between DCC officers and Cllrs L Brown and R Cornwell and the Parish Clerk on 14<sup>th</sup> January. At this meeting, it was proposed that DCC officers look to carry out a condition survey of the existing information boards, the Cross and the waymarking of the walk with a view to having these repaired/upgraded in time for the 675<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle. DCC officers have progressed well with this scheme and are intending on submitting a Section 106 application to help fund this proposal. A follow up meeting with Durham County Council is planned for 2<sup>nd</sup> February to go over the final details of the application.

Cllr V Ashfield advised that, at its January meeting, the Parish Council's Environment Committee considered this project and agreed to support such an application for Section 106 funding.

The Clerk advised that it was originally expected that the Parish Council would lead on this project, however DCC Officers have been working on this and hope that the Parish Council will act in a consultative capacity and support the project in any way possible.

The Clerk also advised that a further proposal has been put forward that the Parish Council looks to organise a commemorative walk of the Battle Walk. The key idea would be to involve the local schools, student residents and permanent residents and have someone knowledgeable on the subject of the Battle provide a talk during the walk. The Clerk also advised that a further proposal has been put

forward that a church service be organised after the walk. The suggestion has also been made that the Parish Council also tries to get the BBC interested in covering a short documentary about the Battle.

The Clerk advised that this commemorative walk would need to be subject to the relevant Covid-19 restrictions at the time and would need to be appropriately risk assessed.

Cllr V Ashfield advised that this walk represents an important part of our Parish's heritage and the promotion of our local heritage is a key part of the Parish Council's agreed Strategy and Looking Forwards document. A project to promote this Anniversary would be considered consistent with the aims of both of these important documents.

Members **agreed** to support the project to improve the Battle of Neville's Cross heritage. Members also **agreed** to organise a commemorative walk of the Battle of Neville's Cross Walk and to delegate responsibility to the Clerk to do this.

Cllr V Ashfield reminded Members that the proposal of the Parish Council launching its own blue plaque scheme was considered at a recent Full Parish Council meeting and the Environment Committee agreed to take this forward as a heritage project.

Cllr V Ashfield advised that this scheme is based loosely on the English Heritage scheme for blue plaques in London and has been delivered in other local areas outside London by various Parish and Town Councils. Cllr V Ashfield advised that launching such a scheme would be an encouragement for residents to celebrate their heritage and an opportunity to engender Civic Pride. If the scheme is successful, Cllr V Ashfield also suggested that this could form part of a heritage trail in the City which could attract more visitors.

Cllr V Ashfield presented a proposed set of criteria to help commemorate important people, buildings and events from the Parish.

For Members **agreed** to launch the blue plaque scheme and **approved** the proposed criteria and procedure for launching this scheme.

Members also **approved** this scheme being advertised via the Parish Council newsletter and other means as appropriate.

In agreeing the procedure for considering new applications, it was **agreed** that the Full Parish Council should make the overall decision on the merits of each new application.

## **Finance Committee**

Cllr A Doig presented the minutes from the meeting of the Finance Committee held on 26 November 2020. There were no queries from Members however the Council took the opportunity to thank the Clerk for his work and for achieving a successful outcome from the recent audits of the Council.

## 6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

The Chair advised that she had received some very positive feedback from a member of the public on the work of the Parish Council.

The Chair asked Members how they wished to proceed in assessing the Parish Council's Strategy. Members felt that a review of the Strategy next month would be the best way to go about this.

The Chair advised that a date had now been set for the public inquiry into the County Council's application to de-register the former coach park as common land. This date is now the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

The Chair thanked all those involved in successfully securing the Section 106 funding towards the renewal of the Ruth First mural on Providence Row.

The Chair advised that the Parish Council had hosted a very positive roundtable meeting with over 30 local independent businesses in January and the Business Committee would be progressing a plan following this meeting.

The Chair advised that the inaugural meeting of the Parish Council's Community Residents' Association Forum would be happening in February and all local associations had agreed to attend.

The Chair advised that the Parish Council had received a number of complaints about the return of students to Durham City. Following which, the Parish Council had a joint meeting with Durham Police to try and address this. The Chair advised that the Clerk had circulated notes from this meeting.

The Chair advised that the Parish Council had recently learned of the death of the former (interim) Clerk's mother. The Chair advised that she had asked the Clerk to write a letter of condolence to the former (interim) Clerk on behalf of the Parish Council.

## 7. PARISH COUNCIL BUDGET FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2021/22

Members approved the following budget for the financial year 2021/22:

### Planning Committee

Item of potential expenditure	Cost (£)
<b>PRIORITY 1: Professional support in responding to planning applications</b>	4,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 2: Production of two Supplementary Planning Documents</b> (Trees and a Design Guide)	4,000.00
<b>TOTAL PROVISION IN 2021-22 AGAINST PRIORITIES</b>	<b>8,000.00</b>

### Business Committee

Item of potential expenditure	Cost (£)
<b>PRIORITY 1: Professional support for independent businesses in Durham</b>	10,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 2: E-commerce website for Durham City Businesses</b>	4,000.00
<b>TOTAL PROVISION IN 2021-22 AGAINST PRIORITIES</b>	<b>14,000.00</b>

### Licensing Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
<b>PRIORITY 1: Licensing training conference</b>	1,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 2: Award for best run licensed premises</b>	500.00
<b>PRIORITY 3: Enhanced police drug search of licensed premises</b>	600.00
<b>TOTAL PROVISION IN 2021-22 AGAINST PRIORITIES</b>	<b>2,100.00</b>

### Environment Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
<b>PRIORITY 1: Being a voice for the City</b>	
Young People's Environment Working Group	£5,000
Climate lobbying	£1,500
<b>PRIORITY 2: Noise abatement</b>	
Evening Wardens	£3,000
<b>PRIORITY 3: Clean Air, Clean and Green City</b>	
Improve unmaintained Footpaths, unadopted and green areas	£10,000
Encourage Walking, Cycling & Sustainable Travel (active streets)	£1,000
Durham in Bloom and planting	£10,000
<b>PRIORITY 4: Heritage</b>	
Adding content to the Heritage App	£3,000

Creation of a map for the Seven Hills Trail	£1,000
Creation of new blue plaques in the parish	£2,000
<b>PRIORITY 5: Appearance of the City</b>	
Neighbourhood Warden SLA with DCC	£10,000
Easter and Christmas Frontages Awards	£5,000
<b>PRIORITY 6: Climate Emergency</b>	
Encourage a green infrastructure	£2,000
Encourage electric vehicles	£1,000
Reduction in Plastic Use	£1,000
Explore and encourage sustainable food	£1,000
<b>TOTAL PROVISION IN 2021-22 AGAINST PRIORITIES</b>	<b>56,500.00</b>

### Full Council

Item of Expenditure	Cost (£)
<b>PRIORITY 1:</b> Administration of Parish Council (rent, room hire, audit, insurance, printing and postage, newsletters, website, other expenditure)	15,000
<b>PRIORITY 2:</b> Training budget	3,000
<b>PRIORITY 3:</b> Events (Remembrance events and Christmas)	6,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 4:</b> grants for local community and voluntary organisations	20,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 5:</b> Staffing costs – including salary, National Insurance contributions and workplace pension	49,440.00
<b>TOTAL PROVISION IN 2021-22 AGAINST PRIORITIES</b>	<b>93,440.00</b>

Committee	Proposed expenditure (2021/2022) against priorities (£)
<b>Planning Committee</b>	<b>8,000.00</b>
<b>Licensing Committee</b>	<b>2,100.00</b>
<b>Environment Committee</b>	<b>56,500.00</b>
<b>Business Committee</b>	<b>14,000.00</b>
<b>Full Council</b>	<b>93,440.00</b>
<b>TOTAL POTENTIAL PROVISION IN 2021-2022 AGAINST PRIORITIES</b>	<b>174,040.00</b>

It was also agreed to ring fence the following expenditure for the next financial year from the current financial year's budget:

General Reserves	£45,000
Contingencies	£15,000
Licensing budget	£1,500
Durham in Bloom expenditure (agreed activities from 2020 now commencing in Spring 2021)	£7,500
Admin support role – including salary, National Insurance contributions and workplace pension	£15,000
Legal costs for public inquiry into the Common Land at the Sands	£7,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£91,000</b>

## **8. PARISH COUNCIL PRECEPT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2021/22**

Councillors **agreed** to keep the Band D charge the same as the current financial year as for 2021-22. Therefore the Band D charge for 2021/22 would generate a total precept of £153,849.93 (based on a tax base of 4,412.1).

The Clerk also reported that the LCTRS grant payable to the City of Durham for 2021/22 is £622.00. Previously the total amount paid to the Parish Council was £0.

The Clerk also reported that the County Council had offered to fund the remaining balance of £16.12 to the Parish Council in light of the reduction in the City of Durham parish's tax base.

Members **agreed** to the offer by Durham County Council that a one-off payment of £16.12 be paid to the Parish Council in recognition of the reduction in the Council tax base for the Parish.

## **9. RESPONSE TO THE POLICE, CRIME AND VICTIMS COMMISSIONER'S PRECEPT REQUEST CONSULTATION**

The Clerk advised that the Office of Durham Police, Crime & Victims' Commissioner is currently consulting on the recommendation that the Policing Precept (part of the Council Tax) be increased by the maximum of £15 per year in Band D properties (this will increase and decrease according to a resident's banding). This equates to nearly a 7% increase.

The Clerk advised that the purpose of this increase is to help ensure that there will be more officers on the street and in the communities of Durham and Darlington.

Members **agreed** their response to this consultation as follows:

### **Introduction**

The Office of the Durham Police, Crime & Victims' Commissioner is currently consulting on the recommendation that the Policing Precept (part of the Council Tax) be increased by the maximum of £15 per year in Band D properties (this will increase and decrease according to a resident's banding) for the financial year 2021-22. This equates to an increase of approximately 7%.

### **Explanation**

The Office of the Durham Police, Crime & Victims' Commissioner proposes that the purpose of this increase includes help to:

- ensure that there will be more officers on the street and in the communities of Durham and Darlington;
- more funding to ensure it has adequate resources to meet its demand from calls for service; responding to 999 and 101 calls in a timely way;
- invest in maintaining officer numbers, victim support services to provide vital support to residents recovering from a range of crime types;
- ensure the force are able to maintain PCSO numbers and a visible neighbourhood policing in communities and also bring forward the force's planned recruitment;
- invest in carrying out in more telephone investigations where possible which save time for both the force and its citizens.

### **Response**

The City of Durham Parish Council is aware of the budgetary reductions to all police forces across the UK, including those to Durham Constabulary. In principle, the City of Durham Parish Council would be minded to approve the proposed increase but it has a number of reservations that would require further information than that provided to date.

The grounds for the increase and the 1-10 rankings for investment are dissimilar, with the former very much reflecting local operational priorities and the latter more shaped by both county-wide and national policing agendas. We understand the demands placed on Police resources when faced with such a wide range of issues in urban and rural communities across the County. However, as representatives of people living in the City, we have become increasingly concerned at the growth in concerns expressed by residents, particularly in relation to:

- The inability of the 101 service to respond positively to requests that would normally then engage either with the Police or the University's Covid-19 Marshall resource;
- The decline in PCSO support for the City centre since the appointment of the new Chief Constable;
- The absence of an effective and visible police presence to address Covid-19 related issues and more general ASB behaviour, notably in the evenings and at weekends.

While a number of the above could be addressed by a more positive and linked-up approach, the City of Durham Parish Council would still be concerned that any approval to raise the precept would then not see the benefits invested in the grounds proposed by the Office of the Durham Police, Crime & Victims' Commissioner for the benefit of the residents of Durham City.

### **Decision**

In such circumstances, and until the Office of the Durham Police, Crime & Victims' Commissioner is able to clarify exactly how it intends to allocate the increase and exactly how such allocation will benefit the residents of Durham City, the City of Durham Parish Council is unable to make a decision on the consultation proposal. It invites the Office of the Durham Police, Crime & Victims' Commissioner to provide such information as soon as possible.

### **10. PROPOSAL FOR JANUARY 2021 EDITION OF THE PARISH COUNCIL NEWSLETTER AND INCREASING THE AUDIENCE OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S FACEBOOK PAGE.**

The Clerk reminded Members that the proposal of the Parish Council launching its own newsletter was approved some months ago by Full Council. The Clerk advised that a draft copy of the first edition of the newsletter has been circulated to all Members.

The Clerk reminded Members that it was originally envisaged that this newsletter would be in a hard copy format and would be delivered through every door of the Parish. Due to the latest Covid-19 restrictions however, this is not possible and the proposal now is that the January/February edition of this newsletter be in an electronic format only.

The Clerk advised that an electronic format would mean that the newsletter is distributed to all local residents' groups and partner organisations via e-mail, is posted on the Parish Council's website and Facebook page.

Members **agreed** that the January/February edition of the Parish Council newsletter should be in an electronic format only.

Members also **agreed** to promote the Parish Council's Facebook page as set out in the report and, in so doing, **agreed** to allocate a total budget of £250 towards this.

### **11. MOTION BY CLLR R ORMEROD ON PUBLIC TOILETS IN DURHAM CITY**

Councillors agreed the following amended motion on the issue of public toilets in Durham City centre:

***"The City of Durham Parish Council invites DCC to seek solutions in conjunction with the Parish Council for the provision of public toilets in Durham City centre. The current situation is unhelpful to the local economy and residents with certain health issues. This Council undertakes to write to the Chief Executive of DCC to explore with them both the current situation and the options for longer term permanent provision".***

## **12. REPORTS FROM PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES**

### **- Durham University engagement task force report**

Cllr J Ashby provided the following report to Members following a recent meeting of the Durham University engagement task force:

Cllr Alan Doig and I were appointed to the Durham University Community Engagement Task Force as the Parish Council reps and Cllr David Freeman as the County Council rep.

Since my last report on the Task Force meeting held on 14 September 2020 there has been just one more meeting so far, held on 3 December 2020. The principal topic was managing COVID-19; it was felt that the University Community COVID Group was proving useful, and that the current priority was safe arrangements for departures at the end of term. Returns will be in the week beginning 11 January 2021 but face-to-face teaching will be staggered. The Community Response Team contract will be extended. Problems with 101 are being reported; the Police rep said that recruitment is underway.

The DSU rep noted that it has been a very stressful term for students and staff. Students had signed accommodation contracts a year ago and landlords were being asked to reduce rents for unoccupied rooms. Testing for COVID is a prerequisite for participating in extra-curricular activities. Students are appreciating that they live in a 'green' city. DSU is commissioning a review to tackle the "toxic culture" of the University.

The various Sub-Group chairs gave updates:

- Citizenship (Parish rep Cllr V Ashfield): Hannah noted some breaches including a few high-level incidents.
- Lived Environment (Parish rep Cllr J Ashby): had not met for a long time. All Estate work is on or ahead of programme.
- Economy (Parish rep Cllr E Ashby): is to look at commercialisation of University spin-outs; breaking economic impacts into city centre, wider city, County, and the region and beyond; promoting local procurement (currently 35%); and reviewing the Memorandum of Understanding with the County Council.
- Culture (Parish rep Cllr C Reeves): a local website is being created to help people engage with business and culture.
- Durham For All (was the late Cllr J Atkinson): no chair's report.

The as-yet-unknown big picture continues to be how the University adjusts in the medium and long term to the financial and teaching consequences of the 'new normal'.

End of report

Cllr Alan Doig proposed that, recognising that the work of the Community Engagement Task Force is somewhat different from the rationale for its establishment, the Parish Council reduces its membership of the main committee to one councillor and one councillor for each of the sub-committees. This was **agreed** by Members.

- **Durham University engagement task force (economic sub group) report**

Cllr E Ashby provided the following report to Council following a recent meeting of Durham University's engagement task force economic sub group:

**Partner updates**

**City Business perspectives**

BID. The city centre continues to show greater resilience than many other high streets nationally despite media reports to the contrary. Talks are ongoing re empty premises e.g. the Cooplands site. It was anticipated that the hospitality sector would show regrowth in May. There has been praise for DCC's work in supporting local businesses from outside this area.

DMC. The market has now been closed for 7 of the last 12 months. This is particularly hard for the operators who, unlike stallholders, receive no support at all. The Jan/Feb lockdown was not too bad for traders. Overall the last 10 months had been very hard for Independent businesses.

**Community perspectives**

EA. Replying to my query about the ongoing effects of Covid induced absence of students on the part time work available to other young people and the general effects of ZHE Sarah Slavin said that DCC and partners have two pieces of work ongoing involving economic analysis of employment. She will ask that this question is included in that work.

Residents are keen that if the University and private sector partners have to review their long term provision of accommodation for students' partners begin looking now at the potential for repurposing whole or parts of buildings to meet other housing needs.

The residential use of empty space above shops in the city centre has been discussed for many years so the Parish Council welcomes plans for the first such development with retail provision on the ground floor and student and other

accommodation above. Another such development is ready to let and 2 others could be in the pipeline soon. This adds welcome vitality to the street scene.

The Parish Council was sad to hear of the recent death of Prof. Sir Arnold Wolfendale. He was a shining example of the breadth of cultural and social value that the University brings to the local community.

### **Business Durham/DCC**

Sarah Slavin reported on work around supporting local business including the £670k Business Recovery grant applications already received. Business rate payments for closures is now ongoing after some delay in Government guidance to local authorities.

The County Council report on Social Value went to Cabinet last week.

The most recent Covid infection 7 day rate was 398 compared with the national average of 591 in England. A vaccination centre at County Hall opens next week with front line staff the priority. Outbreak control continues good.

Peter Allen announced a Business School event on Social Value is being planned and it would be good to get DCC on board with that.

### **The University**

Tim Hammond reported that the modifications at Net Park Enterprise Zone to provide incubator units and new communal space had been slowed by Lockdown and were expected to launch in April.

The Commercialisation of Research Seed Fund had launched with £1.2m already committed with another 6 firms competing for the June funding round.

A second project by the 4 Universities and the LEP (Prevention North) engaging new major investment houses will tackle key challenges in health, aging, city centres and post Covid recovery. There is still £75m to find [of the original huge fig. which I missed.]

The University is part of new talks between the N East and Westminster about sustainable regional growth.

Energy and digital developments are ongoing at Akeley Heads.

Marek Toparski updated on the new programme for retaining graduate talent. Work has been on the back burner due to Covid. Prize money for the Blueprint competition in March has been raised. For the first time the 6 finalists will have mentoring support.

Sarah MaCallister – the major item for students is ongoing accommodation related stress.

### **3 Durham Digitale**

Peter Allen and Ged Matthews

This new initiative began as a place making exercise based on a Pokemon style app featuring local places, people and stories. Current partners include DCC, BID, VCD

The scope has widened considerably with hopes to trial pilot themes in April. GM is happy to talk to the Parish Council with more details.

**4 Priority Action Areas/ feedback on Plan on a Page.**

Generally agreed to be useful as a focus for discussion. Agreed it would be a regular agenda item.

End of report.

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

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Scott". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council  
(25<sup>th</sup> February 2021)**