

DURHAM CITY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING FORUM



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Annual Report 2017-18

Our Vision:

“Durham City’s potential as a beautiful and historic City will be realised through policy and action to improve and protect its qualities and by creating a diverse and resilient economy with attractive and affordable places to live. It will be supported by modern infrastructure, protected by adaptation to climate change and enriched by community engagement in its future.”

Who we are:

The Forum was officially constituted by Durham County Council in January 2014. The 39 members (up from 33 last year) of the Forum are volunteers who live and work in Durham City. The Forum held meetings on 3 November 2017, 19 January 2018 and 22 February 2018. Brief meetings were also held before Working Group meetings on nine days between 23 January and 20 March. The Working Group itself met 39 times between the 2017 AGM on February 17 and the 2018 AGM. This is twice the number of meetings compared to the previous year. The minutes and notes of meetings are published on the website.

The officers of the Forum were appointed at the AGM in February 2017:

Chair: Roger Cornwell

Treasurer: Sue Childs

Vice chair: John Ashby

Engagement Officer: Pippa Bell

Secretary: John Lowe

Project Manager: Ros Ward

Progress over the past year.

As reported to the last AGM, we were on the point of going out to consultation when Historic England told us that we would need a Strategic Environmental Assessment. This delayed us by eight months while we produced a 91 page Scoping Report, a 209 page Sustainability Appraisal, as well as a 177 page Consultation Draft Neighbourhood Plan. While this process was in many ways frustrating, the result was a Plan improved from the version we had in the Spring.

The consultation ran from 4th November till 18th December. This was preceded by a publicity programme: The *Durham Times* and the *Northern Echo* were particularly helpful. We hand delivered 10,000 leaflets, all by volunteer labour. We organised six drop-in events at various venues. 80 people came through the doors at the first one. However, a major disappointment was the failure of the University students to engage with us, despite having two consultation events on University premises.

We were very pleased with the level of responses. We had

- 133 questionnaires (78 paper, 55 electronic)
- 221 web comments from 59 individual people / groups
- 15 email responses
- 28 letters

The letters broke down as follows:

- 9 from statutory bodies, e.g. Historic England, Network Rail
- 8 From voluntary bodies, e.g. residents' groups, cricket club
- 6 from developers / student landlords
- 1 from a retired professor, analysing employment statistics
- 1 each from the Council, University, Cathedral and the WHS coordinator.

We had a constructive meeting with the Council to address the comments they made about the Sustainability Appraisal, which we are now revising. We applied to Locality for technical assistance with this task, and this was successful but there is a delay before the work can start.

The working group is progressing through the responses, theme by theme, meeting with Carole Dillon, Principal Spatial Policy Officer at the County Council, and the relevant Council Officers. We have been joined by people from the University, Historic England and the World Heritage Site. These meetings have been constructive and helpful. Disagreements remain, and we have agreed these will be left to the Independent Examiner to resolve. There are some areas where the policy in the Neighbourhood Plan would also be a policy in the forthcoming County Durham Plan. The Council now seems to be regarding these as an opportunity to try out the wording and use the experience to refine the policy. For our part, if the topic is addressed in the County Durham Plan we will need to review the Neighbourhood Plan and either modify or withdraw the relevant policy.

Representations on consultations and planning applications

Over the course of the year we have made representations on a number of consultations and planning applications, where we felt that if approved it would make implementing the Neighbourhood Plan more difficult.

We feel that the expansion of the University as described in its Masterplan and implemented in its planning applications at Mary's Field and Maiden Castle are over-extensions which will be to the detriment of the City and its residents, and in the latter case be unacceptable development in the Green Belt. Residents of course include students, for whom there will not be the infrastructure to enable them to move safely about the City, particularly on foot. We therefore opposed these applications, unfortunately without success.

We had more success in our opposition to a development for student housing at Holly Street, which was turned down by the Planning Committee and by the Inspector on appeal. We have been consulted over proposals for a Premier Inn on the Milburngate site, and felt the design was poor for such a key site.

Thanks

The following people took an active role in the work of the Forum over the past year, and our thanks are due to them: John Ashby, Pippa Bell, Sue Childs, Roger Cornwell, Mike Costello, Adam Deathe, Ann Evans, David Hook, Peter Jackson, Jonathan Lovell, John Lowe, Nigel Martin, David Miller, Matthew Phillips, Kirsty Thomas, Angela Tracy and Ros Ward. A measure of the work undertaken is the more than 700 emails sent between members of the Working Group in the course of the year, plus countless more between individuals.

We thank the County Council staff who have advised us, encouraged us, and criticised us; in particular Carole Dillon and Claire Hattam.

Thanks too to the members of the public and organisations, statutory and voluntary, who commented on our plan, and contributed to its improvement.

We are grateful to the City of Durham Trust who came to our rescue when Groundwork decided that our status did not permit them to pay our grant direct into our bank account. The Trust accepted the money on our behalf, and reimbursed us as expenditure was made.

Azure Printing, who printed our Draft Neighbourhood Plan, produced a quality product at a very reasonable price and in a timely manner, and were able at short notice to turn round our request for a reprint.

And finally, to the Durham Miners' Association for accommodating us throughout the year for the almost weekly meetings.

18 March 2018