

Crossgate Community Partnership

Annual report 2015

Crossgate Community Partnership (CCP) is a charity whose objects are:

- to promote the conservation and improvement of the physical and natural environment of Crossgate and the surrounding area in Durham City
- to promote the establishment, continuation, and improvement of local amenities
- to build and maintain a strong, safe, healthy, and balanced community by encouraging the residents of Crossgate and neighbouring areas to participate in community activities.

The principal way we do this is to hold monthly residents meetings to identify current issues and address them. We are grateful to the North Road Methodist Church for hosting these meetings for a modest charge. We also have an email list where members can exchange views between meetings.

We have 136 local residents registered as members (a slight increase from 134 last year). Attendance at our meetings ranged from 12 to 23. The median was 16.5, plus guests, and the average was 16.3.

Police representatives have attended eight of the meetings and submitted a written report for the other four. We have a half-hour PACT¹ session at the start of each meeting, which sets priorities that we would like to see addressed by the police. The main issues have been disturbance from late-night student revellers, dangerous cycling, burglaries and bicycle theft. In the summer months aggressive begging was a concern. Our main contacts are PCSOs Steven Bell and Rebecca Carey. They have been joined by colleagues on various occasions. Our thanks to all of these officers.

An innovation this year has been the use of Community Protection Notices to deal with anti-social behaviour such as loud parties continuing after 11pm. The first stage has been to issue CPN warnings advising that if the problem continues a CPN will be issued. 32 of the 44 warnings issued have been in the Crossgate area. This has been largely effective in curbing the late night disturbances but up to the end of November it was necessary to issue a follow-up CPN in 5 cases, 4 of which were in our area. The December figures are awaited and will probably record further end-of-term disturbances. If a CPN is breached then the next step is a fixed penalty or a court appearance, and as far as we are aware neither has proved necessary.

The owners of the Kingslodge Hotel appealed against a refusal of planning permission to convert it into a student residence. CCP made further representations and we were pleased when the planning inspector refused the appeal. However the Council planning committees continued to approve further applications for PBSAs throughout the City, including two (the Berendsen laundry site and The Gates) in our area, despite our objections and the very considerable over provision of student accommodation in the City. A decision on proposals for Fram Well House (which we have also opposed) is pending.

A second planning application to redevelop the County Hospital as a large student residence was refused by the County Planning Committee in April, due in no small measure to representations made by several CCP members and also our local Councillors. This was appealed by the developer and a hearing was held in early December, at which at least eight CCP members spoke, plus the secretary of the City of Durham Trust and a representative of the local MP. The outcome is awaited.

Last year CCP representatives took part in the Examination in Public of the County Durham Plan. In February the Inspector issued his Interim Report, which found for the objectors on most of the major issues. However, the County Council and a group of developers sought a judicial review of this report on four grounds, and succeeded in getting the report overturned on one of those grounds, when the Department

1 Police and Communities Together

for Communities and Local Government conceded that the conduct of the EIP was unfair. As part of the compromise the Council withdrew its Plan, which is now being “amended and refreshed” and the process of consultation, submission and examination will be repeated in 2016.

A consequence of the hiatus in the County Durham Plan has been the lack of a policy to deal with student accommodation. The Council consulted on an interim policy, which the CCP along with others argued needs strengthening. The results of the consultation are being assessed and it is likely to be put to a Cabinet meeting later this month.

We have also been urging the Council to introduce a measure (an *Article 7 direction*) to control the display of “To let” boards on student properties. These are a blight on the area, particularly between November and January, and the existing voluntary code of practice is ignored by many local estate agents.

CCP and several individual members have been involved in the Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum, which is drawing up a neighbourhood plan for the unparished area of the City (excepting Newton Hall). More details are on the NPF website at npf.durhamcity.org.uk

The Durham University – Residents Forum (DURF) was established in October 2014 and is now up and running on a regular basis. The City Liaison Group, coordinated via the office of Durham’s Police & Crime Commissioner, has now ceased operation since a major part of its role has been taken over by DURF. DURF is chaired by Professor Graham Towl (the University’s Pro Vice-Chancellor), and attended by representatives from Durham Students Union and all six of the city’s residents’ groups. Various CCP Trustees have been attending DURF on behalf of the CCP, and Mike Costello is now its secretary. Meetings have been frank and constructive, and discussions continue to cover planning issues around HMOs and new student accommodation; refuse collection in city areas dominated by HMOs; communicating with livers-out on ‘good neighbour’ issues; how to learn from other universities’ practice.

The recycling and rubbish collection remain an uphill struggle. The large number of students cause problems though a mixture of being unaware of what the system is, ignoring it, and depositing large volumes of rubbish at the end of term. Their landlords also dispose of rubbish inappropriately.

We have been pleased with the help that our local Councillors, Grenville Holland, Nigel Martin and Richard Ormerod have been able to offer both at and outside our meetings, and in particular in speaking at planning committee meetings. David Freeman focusses on Elvet Residents. We are also grateful for the help that Roberta Blackman-Woods MP has given at key moments, notably for her support on the County Hospital and working behind the scenes.

The January meeting elected six trustees to look after matters between monthly meetings. They were Roger Cornwell (chair), Ruth Chambers (secretary), Liz Brown, Mike Costello, Ann Evans, and Simon Squires (treasurer). Ruth Chambers resigned in October following the sudden death of her husband. Ruth did an enormous amount of work for CCP, with charm, efficiency and effectiveness, and we owe her our thanks and best wishes for the future. Mike Costello also stood down for personal reasons in October and he too has been an effective member of the team, particularly for his work liaising with the national HMO Lobby and DURF.

Our thanks are due to Jean Rogers who has taken minutes of our meetings throughout the year, and published them on the CCP website.

A fuller account of the work of CCP is on our website at crossgate.durhamcity.org.uk which includes the minutes of our monthly meetings (see crossgate.durhamcity.org.uk/minutes) and how to apply to us for small grants to enhance the area.

4 January 2016
