

Crossgate Community Partnership

Annual report 2017

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 decrease from 140 last year). Attendance at our meetings ranged from 10 to 16. The median was 14, plus guests, and the average was 13.5.

PACT meetings

Changes to police rotas meant that the half-hour PACT¹ sessions at the start of each meeting have now ceased. Initially a written report was sent, but that stopped after February. There is now a city-wide PACT meeting held monthly in the University's Elvet Riverside building, and Ann Evans attends this on our behalf when she can, taking our concerns forward and reporting back.

Council Consultation on Letting Boards

We made a submission to this consultation in February, urging that a mandatory Regulation 7 ban on lettings boards should be imposed in the conservation area. We were disappointed that this did not result in a swift decision to seek such a ban, and in November our Chair asked the Council Cabinet when it would be progressed. Finally, one year later, the Council has agreed with our proposal, but there are a number of hoops to go through and a ban is probably still a year away.

Bus Station "Consultation"

We had to resort to Freedom of Information requests to extract information about the responses to the 2014 and 2016 consultations on the proposed new bus station. In the case of the 2016 consultation, we had to appeal.

Planning issues

A lot of time has been spent considering planning applications and failures to apply for planning permission. After the introduction of the Article 4 Direction, which requires planning permission before a family home is converted to an HMO, a number of landlords asserted that their property had been converted before the cut-off date of 17 September 2016. One case, at 24 Nevilledale Terrace, was the subject of enforcement action by the Council and an unsuccessful appeal by the owner, who is now seeking a review in the High Court. We are now seeing developers bringing forward proposals for one and two bedroom flats, which avoid the Article 4 by being too small to be an HMO. One example is the successful application to build 12 flats adjacent to 24 The Avenue. We are also seeing applications to extend existing HMOs, which we oppose, particularly where these make it difficult to convert the house back to a family home.

Town Council

This year saw a successful referendum for a Town Council, something that CCP welcomed. The next stage will be to elect the Town Councillors in May. This new body could take on some of the work currently carried out by CCP.

1 Police and Communities Together

Neighbourhood Plan

The end of the year saw a consultation on a draft neighbourhood plan which, when it is finally made, could help address some of the deficiencies in the existing planning policies that we have experienced.

Waste collection and recycling

As in previous years, this has been an ongoing problem. There are two aspects: student houses where the residents do not follow the guidance about what to put out and where, and obstruction of the pavements by commercial bins, a particular problem in Neville Street and around Domino's Pizza at the Sutton Street / North Road junction. Victoria Burrell (Durham County Council Waste Strategy Team Manager) attended our October meeting to discuss this issue.

University expansion

The University has this year published its Masterplan, which shows an increase in student numbers of around 6,000 by 2027. Despite our representatives attending University presentations extolling its virtues, we remain convinced that a growth of this size is bad for the City. We continue to participate in the Durham University / Residents Forum (DURF) which meets senior University staff several times a year. We also helped distribute leaflets at the start of the autumn term to incoming student residents.

Student behaviour

This is a continuing problem, and peaked at the end of the summer term and again at the start of the autumn term. Calls to the 101 non-emergency number are not being dealt with quickly enough.

County Hospital

Development continues. We have dealt with complaints about disturbance, particularly vibration, from the site, and also concern about a new electricity substation to serve the site.

Redevelopment of St Margaret's Student Flats

The owners of St Margaret's Student Flats held a pre-submission consultation for their proposals to demolish the flats and then build a larger replacement. The site is within 10 metres of a children's playground and a house, and very close to both the nursing home and the children's nursery. Distribution of leaflets advertising the consultation was very patchy. We made sure that local residents, and St John's College, were aware of the implications and encouraged them to respond. The promised planning application has not materialised and the existing flats have been refurbished. This probably counts as a success.

County Councillors

This year two of our long-standing councillors, Grenville Holland and Nigel Martin, stood down from the Council and we thanked them for their long years of service to our community. They were replaced as the representatives of Neville's Cross at the May elections by Liz Brown and Elizabeth Scott, who joined Richard Ormerod, who along with David Freeman (who focusses on Elvet Residents) represent Elvet and Gilesgate. We have been pleased with the help that all our local Councillors have been able to offer both at and outside our meetings, and in particular in speaking at planning committee meetings.

In conclusion...

The January meeting elected five trustees to look after matters between monthly meetings. They were Liz Brown, Roger Cornwell (chair), Alan Doig, Ann Evans and Simon Squires (treasurer). The Forum remains without a secretary, and secretarial tasks were shared around. Our thanks are due to Jean Rogers who has taken minutes of our meetings throughout the year, and published them on the CCP website.

This annual report is necessarily a summary of our activities during 2017. 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.

Roger Cornwell (Chair)

4 February 2018