

20th March 2024

At the Court of Wardmote held at the The Courtyard Room, the Bishopsgate Institute London EC2M 4QH before Alderman Kawsar Zaman, Alderman of this Ward.

The Alderman welcomed electors and Common Councilmen to this annual Wardmote.

Minutes of the previous Wardmote of 22nd March 2023 having previously been circulated, were unanimously approved by this Wardmote, subject to a deletion of the last two sentences of paragraph 13 relating to the activities and responsibilities of Deputy Simon Duckworth prior to his appointment as Chief Commoner, which were no longer relevant.

The Alderman announced the appointment of his two Deputies for the ensuing year being Simon D'Olier Duckworth OBE, DL for the Ward Within and Shravan Joshi MBE for the Ward Without

The Alderman then appointed Mr T R Morris as Honorary Ward Clerk for the ensuing year.

As this was the Alderman's first Wardmote as chairman, he took the opportunity to report on several developments in both this Ward and the City as follows:-

1. The new City Corporate Plan was due to be published on 25th March outlining the City's aims and priorities, missions and outcomes for the next 5 years. These included economic destinations, public services, health and safety and taking a lead on environmental issues.
2. The City Plan 2040 is a new Local Plan for the Square Mile setting out its strategy and seeking to make the City a "7 days a week" attraction with cultural and leisure activities in addition to its commercial importance. The deadline for submissions being from mid April to May with approval scheduled for September 2024.
3. Street Cleansing. A budget of £1m had been set for this work by the Port Health and Environmental Services Committee and would include work around Liverpool Street Station and other parts of Bishopsgate. This allows for 70 frontline cleaners to enable services to be provided for 24 hours a day.
4. Cost of Living Issues. Pockets of poverty exist around Bishopsgate and in conjunction with Toynbee Hall Advice Service, local charities help and assistance is available. There is also a Household Assistance Fund available for those in need.
5. Policing in the Square Mile. Although our local Police Officers were reporting separately, the Alderman noted that the Square Mile was the safest

City Centre in the country with crime mainly limited to thefts and anti-social behaviour, although the City Police also lead on cyber crime and financial fraud.

6. Help for Small Businesses. The City provides a Small Businesses Research and Enterprise Service with an EBusiness Programme and digital skills training. Also in connection with the City Police support against cyber attacks can be provided.

7. City Markets Co-Location Plan. Progress is being made with a plan to relocate Smithfield, Billingsgate and New Spitalfields markets to a 42 acre site in Dagenham which would generate substantial new business and 3000 new jobs. Whilst there is no scheduled completion date the Corporation are aiming to complete the project by 2027.

The Alderman next informed the meeting that four of our Common Councilmen being present, he would invite each of them to address the meeting about their respective activities on behalf of this Ward and thereafter would invite the electorate to raise questions of these Councilmen.

. Accordingly Deputy Shravan Joshi, chairman of the Planning & Transportation Committee reported that although many complex planning issues were facing his committee, he would speak in particular about the redevelopment issues facing Liverpool Street Station. It is now the busiest station in Country with around 80m travellers using it each year. The current concourse is inadequate for this number of travellers, especially after the recent opening of the Elizabeth Line connection. An application has been submitted and consideration is being given to the wider heritage of the locality and it is hoped that such concerns will be addressed before the matter comes before the Planning Committee, which is anticipated later this year. He also mentioned the Healthy Streets Policy, which has reviewed how people commute whether by foot, cycle or vehicle and identified the areas most used by each. He referred to the Heritage Policy and concern for sites of historic interest and the potential impact of development on these sites. Mr Michael Kucharski, Secretary of the Tapestry Building Residents Association raised a question about the single lane traffic problems affecting Bishopsgate road itself. Shravan Joshi confirmed that the road is administered by Transport for London (TfL) but his committee had worked closely with Andy Lord of TfL to get their agreement to remove the temporary street furniture installed during lockdown.

Fr Chris Vipers also raised a question in relation to the empty buildings on the south side of Finsbury Circus and alternative uses for offices. Shravan confirmed that there had been some discussions about potentially converting it into an hotel, but no planning application had been submitted yet. Fr Chris Vipers also stressed the need for additional green spaces in the City, which Shravan supported and asked his fellow Councilman, Ben Murphy to address specifically, as it fell under the committees he sat on.

Matthew White raised a question about the need for clearer signage and demarcation of lanes for cyclists and pedestrians. Shravan confirmed that there was an ongoing Highways programme for plastic wands and demarcation to be made clearer and safer. As part of the Transport strategy, there are also plans to allow different forms of movement to mingle, where it is safe to do so.

The Alderman then invited Deputy Simon Duckworth to address the meeting and having now handed over as Chief Commoner he briefly mentioned his roles supporting Deputy Joshi on Planning & Transportation and his membership of the City's Port Health Committee but as these had both been covered he chose to focus on his role as a Board Member of the City Bridge Foundation Board. This is an independent charity established to maintain the 5 crossings over the River Thames but which now also supports many charities across Greater London, helping to underpin and extend the City's Local Authorities Services. Indeed it is London's biggest independent charity funder. Between £25 and £30 million are paid out each year to enable charitable causes and activities to carry out their work. They support a wide range field of causes including the assimilation and support to diverse communities, and both small and large charities working to provide opportunities, access and inclusion. This work did much to foster the City's ambition to be a genuinely good neighbour at the local and regional level

Wendy Hyde, past chairman of the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee spoke about her Committee's involvement in City events. In response to the need to re-activate the City post Covid, Destination City had originally arranged the big events, the Golden Key and Bartholomew Fair. An external review of the way forward was now being undertaken and was likely to result in smaller more regular events to encourage people back into the City, particularly at weekends. This will help small businesses and take advantage of the huge cultural heritage to be found in the City.

The Sculpture in the City programme is continuing and the new sculpture trail will be launched in July.

Action was being taken regarding rubbish in the street, particularly around hotspots like Liverpool Street Station. Additional funding has been allocated, additional staff recruited so improvements should be visible within the next few months.

Benjamin Murphy, spoke firstly about his work on the Community and Children's Services Committee, but particularly focusing on homelessness, rough sleeping and begging which is an issue in Bishopsgate. He explained that due to the national economic pressures, the volume of individuals making approaches for support of guidance or advice from the Corporation had risen from 19 individuals in 2019 to 534 in 2023. Those needing temporary accommodation had risen from 68 in 2019 to 133 in 2023 and those rough sleeping had risen from 41 in 2019 to 61 in 2023. In response, a number of actions have been taken, including building new social housing, campaigning to repeal of the Vagrancy Act, the introduction of multi-agency Operation Luscombe, which targets beggars in the City and offers intervention drop-in sessions at St Botolph Without Church, rather than immediate criminalisation. He outlined changes to the Corporation's outreach models for rough sleepers, which has included basic medical and hygiene care going to patients where they are. He also provided information on the Streelink app and website, which allowed City residents and workers to report rough sleepers online, so that support could be dispatched easily. He explained that after years

of campaigning, the City Corporation have just opened a new 14-bed Rough Sleeping Assessment Centre on Snow Hill Court run by charity Thames Reach. This is in addition to the £700,000 investment the City makes at the Grange Road Hotel run by St Mungo's.

Like Shravan Joshi, he sits on the City's Education Board and is a Director and the Sponsor Trustee of the City of London Academies Trust, working with a large number of schools and academies across London and the Southeast. His area of focus has been on improving social mobility, connectivity between City business future workforce planning and education providers especially in digital and fusion skills and helping schools deal with the challenges in student behaviour following the Covid-19 pandemic.

As Member of the Finance and Policy and Resources Committees, he has been helping stabilise the finances of the Corporation, which he described as being asset rich and cash poor. Due to major capital programmes, the Corporation's finances are fully committed to at least the next 15 years. Therefore, creative thinking is needed to address the Corporation's backlog of maintenance on assets. He urged those present to recognise difficult decisions may lay ahead. Finally, as Chairman of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee and a member of the Natural Environment Board and West Ham Park Committee, he reminded members of the value of the 11,000 acres of open spaces the City Corporation manages across London and the Home Counties. These spaces attract many millions of visitors annually and offset 48% of all of the carbon generated by the City Corporation. A recent Natural Capital Audit evidenced that these open spaces deliver £282.6m of public benefits through health and wellbeing, flood defences and air quality. Within Bishopsgate, two open spaces receiving investment include Finsbury Park Gardens, which following the Crossrail take-over will re-open to the public before the end of 2024 and Jubilee Square Gardens next to Devonshire Square, which has had a £680,000 overhaul and will also open by year-end 2024.

Tom Sleigh was unfortunately unable to attend this Wardmote for health reasons

Andrew Mayer was also unable to attend but the Ward Clerk read a short message from him about his work with the Culture Heritage and Libraries Committee, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

The Alderman then invited PC Jack Rose and PC George Williams to provide a report on policing activities in the Ward over the previous year.

They started by reporting that the overall rates for crime in the City were low with less than 1 murder per quarter, less than 25 rapes per quarter and the main offences were shoplifting and antisocial behaviour. With regard to the former they had adopted a neighbourhood crime strategy by dividing the City into 4 clusters and helping small businesses with preventative work, improving their security and running a Safe Business Action Day.

With regard to the latter, their cycle team were tackling antisocial cycling under Operation Lewis and whilst violence against women had shown an increase, it was believed that some of this was as a result of increased reporting. In order

to reduce this violence the police had deployed more officers around hotspots, introduced a Christmas safety hub with medical supplies, tea and biscuits and the designation of “safe havens” at Guildhall and the Old Bailey. It was suggested that these safe havens should be more widely published

Specifically in relation to Bishopsgate, theft around the Station was the main crime with common assault and actual bodily harm occurring as the night time economy increased with the influx of tourists. The Safe Business Action Day had demonstrated that if a shoplifter was apprehended and the goods returned to the shop, the retailer was unlikely to press charges, leaving the police unable to proceed.

Michael Kucharski raised the problem of illegal Ebikes in Brick Lane and also the illegal use of loudspeakers after dark which the police agreed to follow up. Specifically in relation to loudspeakers he referred to Section 62 of the Pollution Act 1974 which says that:-

“subject to the provisions of this section a loudspeaker in the street shall not be operated:-

a) between the hours of 9 in the evening and 8 in the following morning for any purpose

b) at any other time for the purpose of advertising any entertainment trade or business

and any person who operates or permits the operation of a loudspeaker in contravention of this subsection shall be guilty of an offence”

The problem of busking was also raised and the police were seeking to prevent it with the use of Community Protection Notices. Where the buskers did return then they could be arrested.

There being no further questions Deputy Simon Duckworth proposed a vote of thanks to the Alderman for his courtesy and ability in presiding at these proceedings and this was seconded by Deputy Shravan Joshi and unanimously approved by all.

The Alderman replied and there being no further business duly closed the Wardmote at 6.50pm
