

# **Durham City Safety Group**

## **Annual Update Report 2015/2016**



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## **CHAIR'S FOREWORD**

The City Safety Group was established in January 2015, to develop a multi-agency approach to address public safety concerns in Durham City following a series of river related incidents. These incidents, some of which resulted in tragic fatalities, primarily involved the city's university students, had association with the night time economy and occurred during a sixteen month period up to January 2015.



The group, which includes representatives from Durham County Council, Durham Cathedral, Durham Constabulary, Durham University, the University's Students' Union and the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service, worked together to develop a series of actions during a period of high emotion, alongside an unprecedented media interest at a regional and national level.

The shared commitment and urgency to resolving the issues in the city from senior officers from all partner agencies was unprecedented. This resulted in the work of the group being commended in the independent review of riverside safety by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) and on a national level, by the National Water Safety Forum, in the UK's first National Drowning Prevention Strategy

As Chair of the group it is my pleasure to introduce this annual report which sets out the excellent work of the group since its formation in January 2015.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all partners for their extensive work in developing and implementing the group delivery plan and for their continued dedication and support in continuing to ensure Durham remains a safe city to work, live and visit.

Oliver Sherratt  
Chair of the Durham City Safety Group  
July 2016

## **1. Introduction**

The Durham City Safety Group (the group) was established in January 2015 following a number of City centre river related incidents and near misses. Three of these incidents resulted in the tragic death of three students in the River Wear over a sixteen month period. All three deaths were linked to night time economy factors and the consumption of alcohol.

While Durham is a safe city, the night time economy in Durham City is similar to most other cities with a drinking culture continuing to evolve. The presence of the city's university and associated student accommodation near to the city centre also presents additional challenges. The risk associated with excessive alcohol consumption is also increased in Durham City for the general public as a whole, as a result of the close proximity of the river to many of the bars and night time venues. A multi-agency approach was required to respond to and reduce the risk of any further incidents. A cultural change was required, as well as infrastructure and physical safety improvements.

There was significant media attention arising from the fatalities at a local, regional and national level with potential for reputational damage to the various partners, local businesses, economy and Durham as a city.

In response, the group was formed and implemented a wide range of holistic measures which have further improved the safety of people who live, work and visit Durham City.

The Lumiere festival of light, which attracts in the region of 250,000 visitors to the city centre during a three day period and other large public events such as Durham Miners gala and Regatta have all been successfully delivered throughout 2015/16, without any river related safety incidents being reported.

## **2. Membership of the Group**

Membership of the group includes representation from Durham County Council, who also chairs the group, Durham Constabulary, Durham University, Durham Students' Union, Durham Cathedral and the Fire and Rescue Service.

From the start it was recognised that to be successful, there needed to be a shared commitment and urgency to tackling the issues. Senior representation from all partners was required to drive forward the work of the group at a time when speed was essential and there was public pressure to provide solutions following the tragic fatalities. It was also important that this was approached in a thoughtful, practical and proportionate way to ensure the improvements and actions were linked to the wider community and not just the students in the city.

The group quickly formed and set the following objectives:-

- To further improve safety in the city centre
- To undertake a review of riverside safety
- To change the drinking culture that was evolving in the city
- To reduce the risk of any further fatalities or near misses in the river
- To introduce short, medium and longer term education and awareness initiatives

### **3. Work of the Group**

#### **3.1 Independent Review of Riverside Safety**

In response to the fatal incidents, there was pressure from some to install barriers along the riverbanks to help prevent any further incidents. However in contrast, others urged the authorities not to install barriers which in their opinion would spoil the aesthetics of the city and would not be in keeping with the historic setting

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) was commissioned in February 2015 to undertake an independent review of riverside safety. The outcome of this was awaited by all stakeholders and media interest was significant.

The Group worked together to ensure a media launch was arranged and that the required works were considered to be a proportionate approach.

#### **3.2 Infrastructure Improvements**

Upon receipt of the RoSPA report and recommendations various site visits were undertaken by members of the group to identify the required infrastructure works and landowners and other key stakeholders were identified.

Following this, a feasibility study was undertaken by the Council which specified the required works and associated costs. A programme of works was then designed and funded equally by the Council, Cathedral and University. The total cost of the works, which Durham County Council was commissioned to undertake, was £225,000, which equated to a three way funding contribution of £75,000.

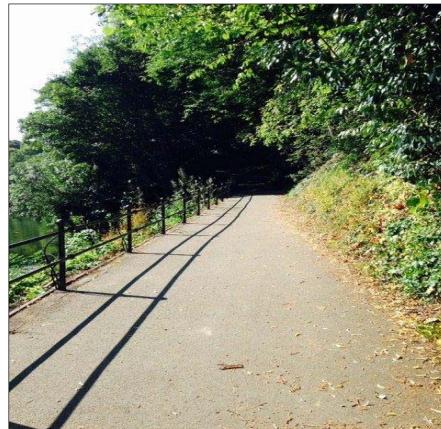
The infrastructure improvements carried out included the following:-

- Footpath refurbishment
- New fencing
- Additional Lighting
- New Public Rescue Equipment (PRE)
- Reduction of slip, trip, fall hazards

- New directional signs
- Riverbank Erosion Prevention
- Information on safe walking routes



*Before*



*After*

*Example of footpath refurbishment*

The footpaths are extremely well used especially during the summer months. Erosion is difficult to avoid therefore it is important that paths are well maintained. This work is further supported by regular inspection and monitoring regimes.

The materials used were carefully chosen to be in keeping with the surroundings.



*Before*



*After*



*After*

*Example of fencing improvements*

An example of the new fencing is above. Whilst initially concerns were raised by residents regarding the installation of fencing, the materials and designs were carefully chosen paying close attention to the aesthetics of the city and the fact this is a world heritage site.

Communication was sensitively managed and the fencing was successfully installed with no negative impact on the Council or its partners. This communication included a public display of the proposed works in a prime city centre location and updates to the Council's Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee.



*Before*



*After*



*After*

*Example of PRE Improvements*

The improvement of public rescue equipment (PRE) has been substantial.

All PRE has been upgraded and additional units have been installed at key risk locations. Aspects of these improvements were paid for by money raised by the mother of a Durham University student who wanted to support the efforts to prevent further tragedies.

Each PRE unit, in accordance with RoSPA assessment recommendations, has also been provided with information which includes a unique reference number, river locality (you are here) and instructions for emergencies.

Inspection and monitoring regimes are in place for the PRE within the City.

The RoSPA report recommended the development of a lighting policy along the riverbank. In response to this, new directional signage was installed directing footpath users towards an illuminated route.

Robust inspection and monitoring regimes are in place for footpaths, lighting and fencing throughout the City Centre

### **3.3 Promotion of Illuminated Night Time Walking Routes**

In addition to the improved directional signage, a poster showing the illuminated routes people are advised to take when walking after dark has been produced. This is for the benefit of all footpath users.

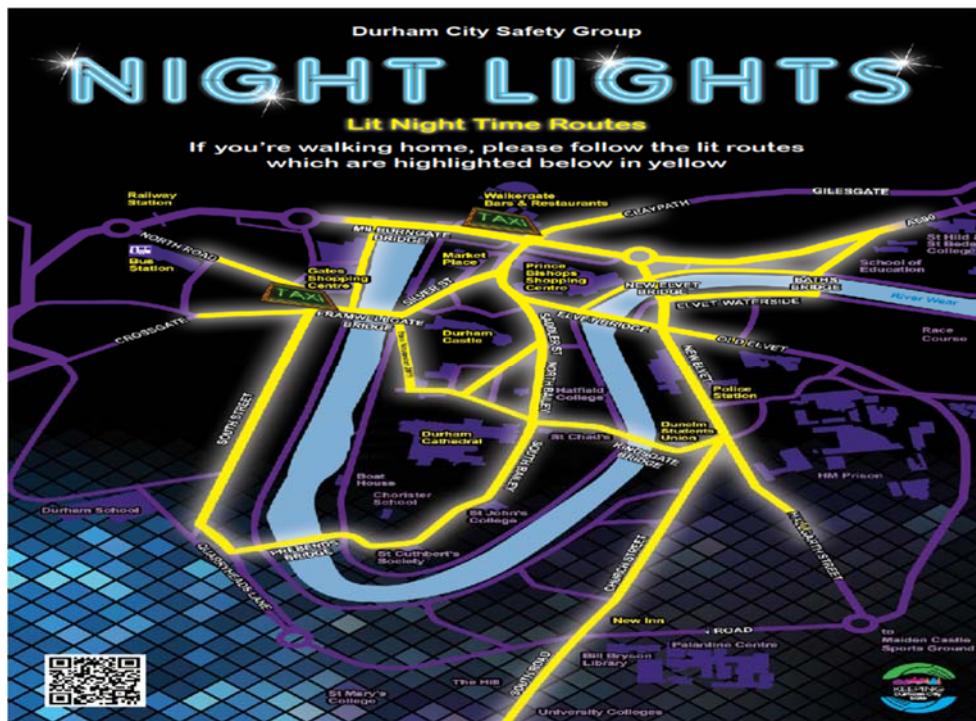


*Example of improved directional signage*



*Improved lighting at Windy Gap*

The following poster has been distributed to University colleges and is on display in city centre pubs and clubs and various locations across the city. It is downloadable via a QR code on all marketing materials and published on a variety of web sites. This information is also available through a 'student app' which has recently been developed.



### 3.4 Risk Assessment of Weir Structures

Within Durham City there are five weir structures. Although these were not specifically included in the RoSPA independent assessment, it was recognised that they are high risk areas and further specialist assessment was required. These structures were assessed independently by the Councils Health and Safety Team, on behalf of the group, following specialist technical training. Additional actions have been implemented following the assessments including additional fencing and upgraded PRE. The outcomes of the assessments have been cascaded to key partners such as the Fire and Rescue Service and Environment agency.

### 3.5 Working with Licensed Premises and Improving Guardianship Arrangements

Substantial work has been carried out with all Durham City licensees to improve guardianship arrangements in the city. The aim of this is to prevent people who are vulnerable due to alcohol consumption from being left to walk home alone.

Bar staff have received responsible alcohol retail training, focusing on the following:-

- Pre-loading – looking at how much alcohol is being consumed at home and how this impacts on an evening in the City.
- Hiding the signs – looking at how people make great efforts to appear sober to gain entry to a licensed premise.

- Checking sobriety in more detail – simple tests and checks to gain a more accurate assessment of how much alcohol has been consumed by an individual.
- How does alcohol make people vulnerable? – looking at what are the dangers of alcohol.
- Refusing service – looking at what happens next and how the customer can be helped.
- The safety of lone customers – Recognising when an individual needs support and working with partners in the city to ensure a vulnerable individual is not left alone.

Bespoke training was also given to owners/managers of licensed premises which focused on law, guardianship arrangements and responsible alcohol retailing.



*Terry Collins (Former Chair of the City Safety Group) and Carol Feenan (City Centre Manager) along with Licensees who have completed the training*

The safe city watch radio scheme, which was already in operation in the city, was also extended to improve communication and linkages between door supervisors, volunteers and university security.

### 3.6 Working with the University and Durham Students Union

The University has undertaken significant action in response to the river incidents. They have focused on addressing two areas of concern raised by the incidents; responsible alcohol consumption and student safety. The actions are ongoing and include:-

#### Alcohol Awareness and Use Policy

A student alcohol awareness and use policy has been developed and implemented across the university. This focuses on making students aware of the potential effects of alcohol, particularly as they can relate to health, behaviour, safety and academic performance and to establish guidelines for its proper use.

### Alcohol Impact Project

Working with the Students Union, the university has established and funded an alcohol impact project run under the auspices of the Nation Union of Students.

This project aims to embed social norms of responsible drinking at the University, changing attitudes towards alcohol, and building a healthier, safer and more productive student community.

### Get Home Safe Scheme

This scheme is designed to support vulnerable students in an emergency situation by helping them get home safely if they have run out of money.

Students can use a taxi firm, which is a member of the scheme, by quoting the scheme. The taxi firm will then take the student to their destination and take possession of their University Campus Card as proof of the journey.

The University will pay for any fare via an account established with the taxi firm. The student is however still responsible for repaying the fee and is required to do so via Durham Students Union within 48 hours of the journey.

Once the fare is settled, the campus card is returned to the student.

This scheme operates seven days a week throughout the year. .

### Sexual Violence Task Force

In addition, whilst no specifically related to river incidents, the University established a Sexual Violence Task Force to look at this key area of student safety and support. The Task Force produced a written report making recommendations to enhance the support of students impacted by sexual violence and misconduct and to engender a cultural change through education and training in this area.

### Durham Student Union – Social Norms Campaign

The Council's Public Health Service has also provided £50,000 of funding to Durham Students Union to develop a student peer led awareness raising campaign to educate students about staying safe and personal wellbeing.

It was recognised that many students consume alcohol in their halls of residence or other accommodation before going out for the night. This is a practice known as preloading.

Whilst also being cheaper than drinking at licensed premises, this also means that students consume larger measures than they would at pubs and clubs meaning that some students are drunk before going out for the night.

The funding provided by the Council is being used to fund a campaign promoting protective behaviours such as not leaving friends alone who have been drinking, ensuring friends get back home safely, planning how to get home and eating before drinking.

The social norm campaign targets key dates in the student calendar under the close observation of the group and is regularly reviewed to ensure that the messages remain relevant.



*Examples of some of the posters displayed as part of the social norms campaign*

### The Durham City Partnership: Alcohol, Student Safety and Wellbeing Working Group

In 2015, the University worked with Durham Constabulary to establish a Working Group to keep key issues of student safety in Durham City under active review. The Group comprises of stakeholders from the University, the Students' Union, Durham County Council, Durham Constabulary and County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service. The Group works in partnership to support student safety and wellbeing and aims to reduce the potential for alcohol related incidents in Durham City. In 2015/16 the Group has:-

- Developed a plan for communicating safety issues to incoming students during induction drawing on the partners;
- Taken forward a number of Public Health England initiatives relating to responsible alcohol consumption;
- Promoted campaigns from charities in relation to water safety;
- Piloted a street triage system drawing on student volunteers. The lessons learned from this were used to guide students wishing to volunteer in this way in the future.

Strong partnership working has resolved issues in relation to the Student Union nightbus service which has now been re-established, contingency planning in

relation to the induction week and attempts by a company to promote an irresponsible and unsafe drinking event to students.

The Partnership continues to meet regularly and report to the City Safety Group. The existence and work of this partnership was commended in the RoSPA report.

### 3.7 Working with Emergency Services

Substantial work has been carried out through working in partnership with the emergency services.

Durham Constabulary has added Balcon Emergency Lifeline (BELL) throw lines to eighty of their emergency vehicles which will enable more responsive, effective and safer river rescues. The BELL throw line is a piece of kit enables the user to deploy a high strength polypropylene line from the waterside and pull the victim to safety.

The Fire and Rescue Service also hosted a number of water safety events including projecting water safety videos onto Framwellgate Bridge whilst doing displays in the river below.

### 3.8 Working with Royal National Lifeboat Institution

The RNLI has an ongoing national initiative to raise awareness of the dangers of the waterway after the consumption of alcohol.

As part of this initiative the RNLI provided promotional packs of glassware, beer mats and bar runners showing water safety messages linked to alcohol related risks.

These promotional packs were delivered to and used by pubs near the riverside to communicate the dangers of the waterway.



*Examples of some of the promotional materials*

#### **4. Working with Volunteers**

There has been improved working with Durham Street Lights, a volunteer group which patrols the city centre on a Saturday evening assisting vulnerable people. A safe haven was initially set up for volunteer groups to take people who were considered vulnerable due to excessive alcohol consumption. This was a pilot scheme involving the council, Police and University.

Through effective partnership working, a number of difficulties were overcome including finding a suitable venue and providing necessary equipment and training in addition to overcoming safeguarding and liability issues.

Following a review of the safe haven and the needs of volunteers, it was agreed that the safe haven was no longer required although this would continue to be reviewed.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Whilst it is accepted that there is no single solution to prevent further accidents in the future, the effective partnership of the group has enabled extensive physical, educational and cultural work to be carried out over a relatively short period of time.

This has been acknowledged by RoSPA who hosted their National Water Safety Conference in Durham City in October 2015 and reflected in the UK's first National Drowning Prevention Strategy, launched at Westminster on 29 February 2016. In addition a recommendation from the RoSPA review of riverside safety was that the leadership, multiagency and collaborative approach within the group should be commended. The County Coroner also stated following the last inquest in May 2015, that the group were 'one step ahead regarding this matter'.

It is pleasing to report that since the formation of the group, river related incidents have decreased significantly and there have been no further fatalities. This should be particularly noted taking into account the significant public events held within the City Centre during 2016. However it should be remembered that whilst the physical improvements and various interventions are wide ranging, there is still a significant emphasis on individual responsibility in terms of everyone taking responsibility for their own and others safety, whilst consuming alcohol in a safe and sensible way.

Any incidents or near misses within the river corridor are reported to the members of the Group. The details are recorded to determine the full impact of the group improvements and to identify if any further safety improvements may be required.

## **6. Next Steps**

The group will continue to meet on a quarterly basis to monitor progress and ensure that Durham continues to be a safe city. However a meeting will be held immediately should there be any further significant incidents, to review what happened and to consider if further action is required

The group will continue to maintain momentum, recognising that key messages should continue as students leave the city and new students arrive. There is a continuous turnover of people living in the city and therefore there is no room for complacency.

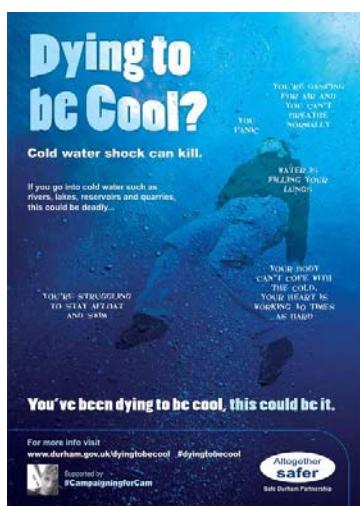
The Durham City Partnership will also continue to meet and feed into the City Safety Group on a bi-monthly basis. This group focuses on supporting student safety and wellbeing and reducing the potential for alcohol related incidents.

Sexual violence has recently been identified as an increasing concern for students and will therefore be targeted as part of the work of the Durham City Partnership.

## **7. Wider Safety Improvements**

Although not commissioned by the group, the Council has taken the decision to expand its work in relation to water safety. A further open water safety group was established in February 2015 focusing on safety relating to open water (lakes, rivers, reservoirs) across the county in locations other than Durham city centre.

As part of this work the Council is working with a bereaved family to promote the dangers of open water and cold water shock through its 'Dying to be Cool' campaign.



*'Dying to be Cool' campaign literature*

A risk assessment has been carried out on open water across the County and the open water policy has been revised accordingly.

The open water safety group continues to meet and is working towards a consistent approach to water safety across the county.

A ‘student app’ is also being developed by the Council which, when downloaded, provides the student community with a wide range of useful information including personal safety and how to get home safely following a night out in the city. This software went live as a pilot on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2016 to determine whether it will be rolled out further.