News

Five more years

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THE organisation responsible for improving Newcastle city centre has been given another five-year term after a resounding vote in its favour by businesses in the area.

NE1, which takes a levy from businesses and other organisations based in the city centre, has to be approved every five years by a vote of its members.

The ballot, which opened in September, has now been returned with an 88% vote in favour of the group carrying on and a record turnout of 904 votes.

NE1 boss Adrian Waddell said the ballot was a "vote for making things happen in Newcastle", with plans to revolutionise the city's Quayside, improve its shopping areas and deliver better transport and internet links.

The next five-year term, which begins next April, builds on achievements that include the Alive After Five late night shopping initiative, Newcastle Marina and Restaurant Week.

Mr Waddell said: "With the 'Yes' vote achieved today we are delighted that businesses have used their collective voice to endorse NE1's efforts and achievements and to support our plans for the coming five-year term.

"This is an exciting time for the city and the city region. These results give us a powerful mandate to go on delivering for Newcastle, as set out in our business plan.

"It means a great deal to us to have received such resounding support from the city's business community. NE1 was established in 2009 to provide a strong voice for businesses and the ability for them to invest collectively in the city centre.

"Over the past 10 years elements of our work have become more strategic, focusing on longer term, bold and ambitious projects that have had a transformational effect on the city. We will continue this approach alongside championing the shorter term, day to day, issues affecting our members, which are so important to them and to the city, including continued support for our highly valued Street Rangers and Clean Team.

"The result today is a vote for making things happen in Newcastle."

All 1,400 organisations and businesses in the NE1 postcode were balloted as part of the Business Improvement District renewal. The positive ballot will unlock around £10m of investment from the city's businesses over the next five years.

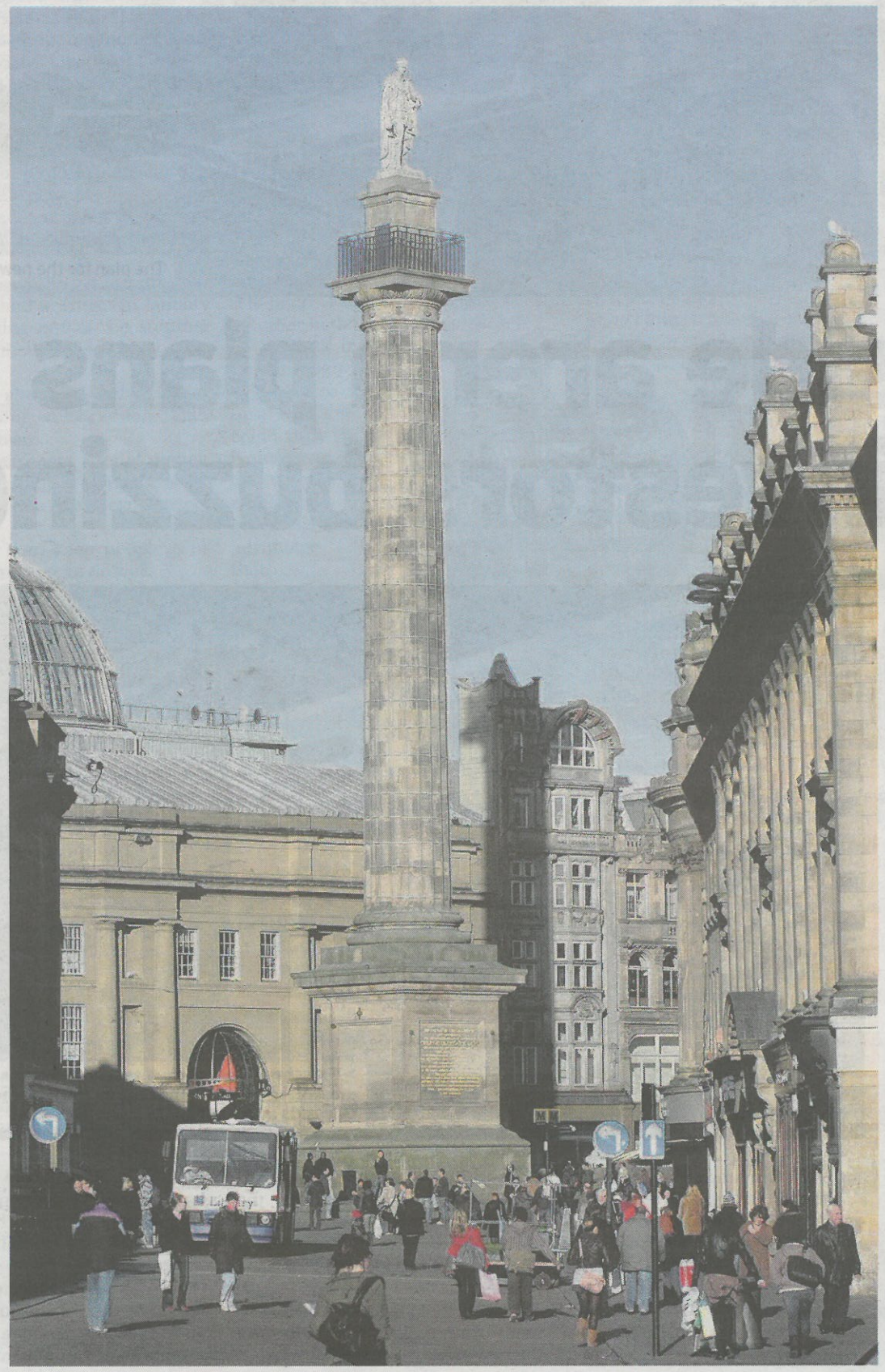
NE1 said it would be prioritising work on Newcastle's retail areas, the Quayside and the city's historic core. It also plans to make "greening" an essential part of all physical projects to create a better environment in the city centre.

Improving connectivity in the city both from a digital perspective and its transport links will also form another key strand of NE1's work over the next five years.

City council leader Nick Forbes said: "NE1 has become a much valued delivery partner for our ambitious plans for the city - this strong result recognises the significant achievements to date and highlights business' confidence in the future of the city.

"The result demonstrates a growing sense of optimism and what we can collectively achieve by working together with a shared vision for the city and the wider region."

NE1 chairman Adam Serfontein said: "It is important to thank our businesses for their continued support and also key partners such as Newcastle City Council, both of which are hugely important in shaping and delivering NE1's programme. Exciting times lie ahead."



Engineer guilty over terror claim

Abdulrahman Alcharbati

AN engineer who told a court he believes he is Jesus Christ has been found guilty of encouraging acts of terrorism by posting ISIS videos on his Facebook account.

Abdulrahman Alcharbati shared the extremist material on his open social media page, including footage of executions and suicide bombings, which anyone could have seen.

Alcharbati had been warned and banned by Facebook for posting links to the terrorism videos but managed to convince them to reinstate his account.

The 32-year-old, of Westholme Gardens, Benwell, Newcastle, had denied seven offences under the Terrorism Act but a jury at Newcastle Crown Court unanimously convicted him on all charges. He will be sentenced in December and was told he will receive either a substantial jail sentence or a hospital order.

Prosecutors said that, as well as posting ISIS videos, he also had on his phone a 120-page bomb-making manual.

Alcharbati, who is originally from Syria, told counter terrorism police he had just been posting news from the Middle East.

Dan Pawson-Pounds, prosecuting, said during the trial: "This is a case about the dissemination, that is distribution and possession of terrorist material - not bombs, bullets or knives but the dissemination of internet links to extremist Islamic videos, encouraging the watcher to commit acts of terrorism.

"In terms of the possession charge, this is an electronic copy of a document which, in effect, gives step by step detailed instructions as to how to make improvised explosive devices, bombs."

Counter terrorism police raided Alcharbati's home in Noble Street, Sunderland , last year.

Giving evidence, he told jurors: "I still believe I am a messiah, I still believe I am Jesus Christ."

Alcharbati, will be sentenced on December 14 and was further remanded in custody.