



City of Durham Parish Council

The City of Durham Parish Council. Office 3, Clayport Library. 8
Millennium Place. Durham. DH1 1WA.

Telephone: 07510 074875

Email: parishclerk@cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk

SUMMONS

To all Members of the City of Durham Parish Council: Councillors E Ashby, J Ashby, V Ashfield, L Brown, N Brown, A Doig, D Freeman, R Friederichsen, R Hanson, G Holland, C Lattin, R Ormerod, E Scott, S Walker and H Weston.

You are hereby summoned to attend the **Meeting of the Council** to be held in the **Main Hall of the Merryoaks Community Hall, Park House Rd, Durham DH1 3QF** on **Thursday 24th October 2024 at 7:00pm** for the purpose of transacting the following Agenda business as shown.

Members of the public and press are also cordially invited to attend. Members of the public may address Council, Committee or Sub-Committee meetings for up to three minutes, with the agreement of the Chair of the meeting, provided that the statement is related to an item on the agenda. The speaker should approach the Clerk before the meeting commences to request to speak during the meeting.

Members are reminded that the Council has a general duty to consider the following matters in the exercise of any of its functions: Equal Opportunities, Health & Safety, Civility and Respect and Human Rights plus Social, Economic and Environmental matters.

Yours faithfully,

A. Shanley

Mr Adam Shanley

Clerk to the City of Durham Parish Council

AGENDA

- 1. TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE (OR NOT) APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE FROM TODAY'S MEETING**
- 2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS**
- 3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 25TH SEPTEMBER 2024**
- 4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
- 5. DISCUSSION WITH POLICE INSPECTOR DAVE CLARKE ON THE CITY'S OPERATION LENTIL**
- 6. COMMITTEE UPDATES**

- **Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from meetings held on 6th and 20th September and 4th October 2024.**

Copies of all approved minutes from these meetings can be found here:
<http://cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk/agendas-minutes/planning-committee/>

- **Environment Committee minutes from meetings held on 19th September 2024**

Copies of all approved minutes from these meetings can be found here:
<http://cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk/agendas-minutes/environment-committee/>

- **Finance Committee minutes from meetings held on 11th September 2024**

Copies of all approved minutes from these meetings can be found here:
<http://cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk/agendas-minutes/finance-committee/>

- Response to DCC's budget proposals for 2025-26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2026-2029
- Response to Section 106 by Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation and Durham City Hockey

- **Business Committee minutes from meetings held on 15th July 2024**

Copies of all approved minutes from these meetings can be found here:
<http://cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk/agendas-minutes/business-committee/>

- 7. CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Chair will provide a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 25th September 2024.

- 8. PROPOSAL TO CONTRACT THE SERVICES OF A GRANT FUNDRAISER FOR A PARISH COUNCIL PROJECT**

Due to the confidential nature of the following items, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and the public will be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in

paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the LGA 1972 Act and section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. At this point in time the press and the public will be asked to leave the room.

9. REPORT ON POLICY ON VEXATIOUS BEHAVIOUR

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Wednesday 25th September 2024 at 7:00pm in the Main Hall of the Merryoaks Community Hall, Park House Rd, Durham DH1 3QF.

Present: Councillors S Walker (in the **Chair**), E Ashby, J Ashby, V Ashfield, L Brown, A Doig, D Freeman, G Holland, C Lattin and E Scott.

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley and 4 members of the public.

1. TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE (OR NOT) APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE FROM TODAY'S MEETING

Apologies were received and **accepted** from Councillors R Ormerod, N Brown and R Friederichsen.

No other apologies were received.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

None received.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 25TH JULY 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th July 2024 were unanimously agreed as a true and accurate record of proceedings, subject to the sentence "*Members **agreed** (9 votes in favour, 1 against) to provide £3,000 towards the travel trade promotion alongside Visit County Durham, as set out in the report provided*" being amended to "*Members **agreed** (9 votes in favour, 1 against) to provide £3,000 towards the City specific travel trade promotion being delivered by Visit County Durham, as set out in the report provided*".

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None received.

5. COMMITTEE UPDATES

• Planning and Licensing Committee

Councillor G Holland presented the Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from meetings held on 12th and 29th July and 9th and 23rd August 2024. There being no queries from Members, Councillor G Holland moved on to Committee updates.

Report on the recent project to assess all Non-Designated Heritage Asset within the Conservation Area

The Clerk expressed his gratitude to the large numbers of volunteers who had recently come forward to support this important work as part of the Conservation Area Management Plan.

In particular, the Clerk took the opportunity to thank Sue Childs for her support and agreeing to administer the responses from each volunteer. The Clerk also thanked Lee Hall for a very useful training session as part of this project and advised that he was aware that this had been very positively received. Sue Childs reported that most of the volunteers had now returned their reports and photographs as part of this project and she was busy collating these into a format which could be easily handed over to DCC.

Sue advised that there were approximately 60 or so assets outstanding from the list. The Clerk advised that he would chase up the volunteers who had yet to return their forms and ask that this be completed as soon as possible, as per the original agreement with DCC.

The Committee thanked the Clerk and Sue Childs for their work on this project. In thanking Sue, the Council presented Sue Childs with two gifts as a token of the Council's appreciation for all of Sue's tremendous work on this project. The Chair took the opportunity to thank Sue for her dedication to the heritage of the City.

Response to the recent NPPF changes consultation

The Clerk took the opportunity to thank Members and partners for their support in considering the 106 questions as part of the extensive NPPF consultation earlier this month. The Clerk advised that these had been carefully considered and that the full response had been drafted in accordance with the discussions on this important consultation.

Members unanimously **agreed** the draft responses to this important consultation and thanked the Clerk for writing these on behalf of the Parish Council.

Report on freehold housing in the parish area and estate charges

The Clerk highlighted that the Parish Council has recently been contacted regarding concerns over so-called "fleecehold" estates and the impact of these arrangements on local residents.

The Clerk advised that, at present, these estate management charges are known to apply in Mount Oswald, Aykley Woods and St. Margaret's Garth in our parish area. In fact, approximately 40% of all new estates built in England over the last five years are covered by these types of charges.

The Clerk highlighted that freehold estates are private or mixed-tenure estates where, unlike other residential areas, shared areas and facilities, such as roads, play areas and open spaces, are not owned or looked after by the local authority. Responsibility for their maintenance will instead rest with a private company (often the original developer) or homeowners themselves through a residents' management company (RMC).

The Clerk also advised that responsibility for estate management is normally agreed when the local authority grants planning permission. Authorities can be reluctant to take responsibility for common areas (a process known as 'adoption') due to the maintenance costs involved.

The Clerk advised that these arrangements are often controversial as, unlike leaseholders, freehold homeowners on these estates currently have very limited rights over the cost and quality of services provided. The Clerk advised that this is clearly something which the present Government recognises as an issue as a proposed bill banning these arrangements was set out in the King's Speech in 2024.

Councillor L Brown highlighted that this arrangement was in place in several estates across Neville's Cross and that she understood the problem from residents' perspective. This was echoed by the Chair who highlighted the lack of recourse or rights for residents with these arrangements.

Councillor E Ashby highlighted that, whilst she was very much in favour of the first aspect of the report to write to the MP to request that the MP lobbies Government on this, she was equally concerned at the proposal in the second part of the report to ask that DCC adopts new estates. Councillor E Ashby highlighted the financial issues facing all local authorities at present and felt that DCC is unlikely to accept this.

Members unanimously **agreed** to write formally to the local MP on this matter and request that she lobby the Government on this matter and looks to end these new fleecehold arrangements for residents.

• **Environment Committee**

Councillor C Lattin presented the Environment Committee minutes from the meeting held on 9th July 2024. There being no queries from Members, Councillor C Lattin move on to Committee reports.

Proposal to launch a new Durham Tidy Gardens initiative

Councillor C Lattin highlighted the recent success of securing £8,000 from student landlords over the last two financial years and also advised that a portion of this funding was going towards additional waste collections for a Green Move In.

Councillor C Lattin also advised that an additional aspect of the funding from this appeal had been agreed by the Environment Committee to be directed towards supporting residents maintaining their front gardens (where applicable) and, as an added aspect of the proposal, to help educate residents on how to recycle.

The Clerk advised that, in establishing a number of reputable gardeners, the Parish Council has reached out to DCC and has been provided with 2 private companies who are able to cut grass and carry out general gardening maintenance. As such, there is no requirement on the Parish Council to provide gardening equipment or a service directly, this leaflet will simply pinpoint residents to an appropriate gardening service which will be chargeable for the resident.

Councillor C Lattin also advised that the Parish Council's Environment Committee is also keen to invite other gardening service providers to be part of this list of suppliers.

In the case of student properties, the Clerk highlighted that the Parish Council has received complaints from local residents about the condition of some student properties throughout the year. In a number of cases, landlord tenancy agreements stipulate that it is the tenants' responsibility to maintain the gardens and the Parish Council is also aware of anecdotal evidence that students are not having their deposits returned to them in full by some landlords because the garden areas are not maintained. Councillor C Lattin highlighted that this initiative by the Parish Council is entirely geared towards supporting residents in maintaining their gardens and, in the case of student properties, to make it easier for students to comply with their tenancy agreements and receive their deposit back in full.

The Clerk advised that Durham University has offered its support for this initiative although DSU does not support this initiative if student residents are expected to pay for the gardening service themselves.

The Clerk advised that anyone signing up for this scheme will have to do so via a Google Form allowing the Parish Council to assess the take-up of this initiative as well as supply those registering with a free bulbs pack.

The Clerk advised that the costs associated with this proposal involve the production and delivery of this leaflet at approx. £1,300 (based on 8,000 doors) as well as the cost of the bulb packs (dependent on take-up). The Clerk also advised that, although not every property will have a garden, a general delivery to all properties is easiest for the delivery company and each household will also benefit from the recycling information on the reverse of this leaflet too.

Councillor C Lattin stressed that all aspects of this initiative will be funded from the landlord appeal and will not come from Parish Council funds.

Councillors A Doig and V Ashfield advised that they felt that it would be difficult to recommend a supplier with whom the Parish Council has little to no knowledge or experience of working. Moreover, it was suggested that the Parish Council, if this scheme were launched, seeks to widen the list of suppliers residents could go to.

Councillor E Scott agreed that the Parish Council is not in a position to recommend suppliers.

It was **agreed** (8 votes in favour, 2 abstentions) that the scheme should be launched but in a more general way which warns tenants about the implications of losing their deposits if gardens aren't maintained but also did not recommend specific suppliers. The offer of free bulbs to students was also **agreed** to remain part of the scheme.

Proposal to request that BT remove or improve its telephone boxes within the Conservation Area.

The Clerk highlighted that there are several BT telephone boxes located around the parish area. Most of these boxes are relatively modern, glazed structures which are inappropriately designed for a Conservation Area.

Similarly, the traditional red phone boxes, such as telephone box at Lower Claypath and at Palace Green, make a positive contribution to the Conservation and, in fact, are considered Non-designated Heritage Assets (NDHAs). The Clerk advised that a number of these boxes are subject to vandalism, anti-social behaviour or are simply no longer functioning. The Clerk highlighted that, in June 2022, Ofcom updated its rules on public call boxes. BT now cannot remove a box if it meets one or more of these criteria:

- it is in a place without coverage from all four mobile network providers;
- it is located in an area with a high frequency of accidents or suicides;
- it has made 52 or more calls over the past 12 months; or
- there is other evidence that the box is reasonably needed at the site – for example if it is likely to be relied upon in the event of a local emergency, such as flooding, or if it is used to call helplines.

If a public call box that is the last at a site does not meet any of these four criteria, BT or KCOM can consult with the relevant local authority on removing it. BT and KCOM must take account of any views and evidence received from this consultation before deciding whether to remove the box. Public call boxes that are not the last at a site can be removed by BT and KCOM without consultation. BT maintains strict confidentiality regarding call volumes and will not share them with the Parish Council or any other agency.

The only exception to this policy occurs when law enforcement agencies request access to these records for investigative reasons.

Councillor L Brown highlighted that the list of BT phone boxes included in the Agenda by BT was incorrect and expressed her concern that BT appeared not to know the location of its assets.

Councillor E Ashby advised that whilst she supported the proposal in principle, she did not feel that the Parish Council should be looking to replace the boxes with a tree as suggested in the report.

Councillor D Freeman advised that he would only support an audit by BT as opposed to an all-out request to simply remove boxes as he felt that these telephone boxes were still used and valued by some members of the community.

Members unanimously **agreed** to ask BT to carry out an audit of its telephone boxes in the City of Durham Parish area. Where it is the case that the box does not meet any of the criteria above and is either broken or vandalised, this should be removed.

• **Finance Committee**

Councillor A Doig presented the Finance Committee minutes from the meeting held on 18th June 2024. There were no queries from Members.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 25th July 2024 as follows:

The Chair began by highlighting how wonderful it is to see the works to the City Theatre at Back Silver Street now completed. With new brickwork and windows, the Theatre is looking the best it has done in many years. These works highlighted how urgently in need of repair the building was and the Chair highlighted that this project has likely extended the life of the building significantly. The Chair remarked that this is a great project to undertake in order to safeguard this aspect of the City's cultural heritage and thanked the Durham Dramatic Society, DCC and Councillor Esther Ashby for all their work on this project. The Chair reminded Members that the Theatre is hoping to host a small thank you reception on 30th September at 6pm.

The Chair also extended her thanks and appreciation to Councillors Lattin and Ashfield. Through their initiative with local landlords, the Chair highlighted that we are now funding additional waste collections as part of a Green Move In operation alongside DCC. The Chair remarked that this is really so welcome for so many residents and in recognition of the amount of waste generated as many thousands of students move into the City for this coming academic year.

The Chair offered a huge congratulations to Durham University on its return to one of the top five Universities in the land by this year's Sunday Times Good University guide. The Chair remarked that this is a real source of pride for the community of which the University is a major part and long may that success continue. For anyone joining us in Durham for the first time this year, the Chair wished a very warm welcome.

The Chair offered further congratulations to Durham Cathedral on the news this month that visitor numbers have soared over the Summer thanks to the Peace Doves exhibition. The Chair remarked that it is amazing to hear that approximately 80,000 visitors came to our City to see this exhibition and it is clear that events at the Cathedral such as this are major drivers for additional footfall in Durham. The Chair advised that this is great news particularly as the Cathedral celebrates its 931st birthday this year.

The Chair remarked that she particularly welcomed the news this month that Durham County Council's Cabinet has now approved its Public Spaces Protection Order against anti-social behaviour. The Chair advised that she really hoped that this will be a further tool for the Police and Neighbourhood Wardens in tackling some of the behaviours we are witnessing from a small minority attending our City during the day.

The Chair remarked how pleased she was to hear that planning is well underway for the event to unveil the blue plaque dedicated to Professor Dame Rosemary Cramp. The Chair offered a very big thank you to Professor O'Brien, Professor Sarah Semple and the University's archaeology department for their support in this project. The Chair advised that the Parish Council looks forward to this event

on 4th October and the event the following month for the 33 Claypath blue plaque unveiling.

The Chair advised that she was deeply disappointed to hear in the news this week that talks over the Milburngate development remain at a deadlock. The Chair remarked that this half-finished development has blighted our City for years and there appears to be no end in sight. The Chair urged all parties to do all they can to expedite this process swiftly for the benefit of our City and its residents and finally get this development to a point where it is safe to be occupied.

The Chair advised that she joined issue with our Clerk's correspondence earlier this week on the report to DCC's Full Council today which appeared to suggest that an assessment of a Late Night Levy and Cumulative Impact Policy should only take place once Milburngate is completed. The Chair remarked that this seemed to be a commitment without a timescale and that she was therefore grateful to hear that this matter has now been deferred until the next Full Council in October with the reference to that timescale being removed.

The Chair offered her sincere congratulations to all involved in this year's Durham In Bloom competition. The Chair advised that it really is fantastic to see Andrew Jackson's legacy continue and to see Durham City win gold for best small city and Wharton Park for winning best in category for the first time this year too. A big well done everyone.

Finally, the Chair advised that she understands that Durham University will very soon be reaching out to us on two major new developments in our parish – namely the redevelopment of Hild and Bede and the development of a new Data Centre at Aykley Heads. The Chair highlighted that the Clerk has already circulated a meeting date and time for the Data Centre discussion and this will be going ahead on Wednesday 2nd October at 1pm at the former business school.

The Chair thanked Durham University for their engagement with us pre-application. The Chair remarked that she very much welcomed the proposal of a data centre at Aykley Heads and this investment in our City. The Chair highlighted that this has the potential to bring high-skilled jobs to our area as well as providing a highly advanced computing machine for exceptionally fast data processing.

7. TO REVIEW THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S PLANNING AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

The Clerk advised that there is a need to consider the Membership of the Planning and Licensing Committee. The Clerk highlighted that, although the Committee historically has not struggled to form a quorum, Members have noted that the Committee membership is very often reduced to five Members due to competing commitments.

The Committee meets every two weeks on a Friday at 12 noon to carry out the planning and licensing functions of the Parish Council. This is a very important Committee whose work is wide-ranging and planning matters and the way in which the Parish Council exercises its planning functions in particular are regularly listed

as being amongst our residents' top priorities. The licensing functions of this Committee are equally as important.

The Clerk highlighted that the current membership of the Committee is as follows:

- Grenville Holland (Chair)
- Susan Walker (Vice-Chair)
- Esther Ashby
- John Ashby
- Nicola Brown
- Robert Hanson
- Carole Lattin

Councillor V Ashfield advised that she is content to step in more regularly as a substitute Member in the event that any Member is unable to attend any Committee meetings.

In light of some Members either not being able to attend these meetings at all and other Members having competing roles at the County Council, it was recognised that seeking replacement Members would be difficult.

Members recognised the issue of non-attendance but **agreed** that, on balance, the Committee Membership should stay as existing but with acceptance of Councillor V Ashfield's offer of being a more regular substitute for this Committee.

8. NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCIL'S CIVILITY AND RESPECT PLEDGE

The Chair highlighted that, throughout the local government sector, there are growing concerns about the impact bullying, harassment, and intimidation are having on local (parish and town) councils, councillors, clerks and council staff and the resulting effectiveness of local councils.

The Chair advised that the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), One Voice Wales, the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) and county associations have responded to this by setting up a Civility and Respect Working Group to oversee the Civility and Respect Project.

The Chair highlighted that NALC, SLCC, and OVW believe now is the time to put civility and respect at the top of the agenda and start a culture change for the local council sector.

The Chair advised that the Civility and Respect Pledge is being introduced because there is no place for bullying, harassment and intimidation within our sector. The pledge is easy for councils to sign up for and it will enable councils to demonstrate that they are committed to standing up to poor behaviour across our sector and to driving through positive changes which support civil and respectful conduct.

The Clerk reminded Members that the City of Durham Parish Council has adopted a Dignity at Work Policy and this is reviewed annually.

The Chair advised that NALC is inviting all Councils to take the Civility and Respect Pledge and those that do can legitimately showcase this logo on their website and all literature as a sign of the Parish Council's commitment to this area of our sector. To date, 1,591 Councils have signed the Civility and Respect Pledge.

The Chair highlighted that, by signing the Pledge, the City of Durham Parish Council is agreeing that the Council will treat Councillors employees, members of the public, and representatives of partner organisations and volunteers with civility and respect in their roles and that it:

- Has put in place a training programme for councillors and staff
- Has signed up to the Code of Conduct for councillors
- Has good governance arrangements in place including staff contracts and a dignity at work policy
- Will seek professional help at the early stages should civility and respect issues arise
- Will commit to calling out bullying and harassment if and when it happens
- Will continue to learn from best practices in the sector and aspire to be a role model/champion council through for example the Local Council Award Scheme
- Supports the continued lobbying for change in legislation to support the Civility and Respect Pledge including sanctions for elected members where appropriate

It was unanimously **agreed** that each Member should be invited to sign the Civility and Respect Pledge if they so wished.

9. PROPOSAL TO SUPPORT THE PROVISION OF YOUTH SERVICES IN THE CITY

The Clerk advised that, at the beginning of 2024, Durham Area Youth and Durham City Youth received funding through the ASB Trailblazer project to engage with young people who were presenting at several locations in Durham City. A small number of the young people were known to be causing an above average proportion of ASB, resulting in higher community tensions with residents and visitors. The project therefore very much focused on engagement and building up relationships with the aim of reducing this youth related ASB.

The Clerk advised that, over the length of the project, the youth workers have engaged with approximately 15 – 30 young people on a Friday evening and have made good inroads in helping some of them make positive choices around their actions.

The Clerk highlighted that this initial funding was very much a pilot project and in addition to it being successful in terms of engagement, has also brought an increased awareness around safeguarding issues in relation to some young people.

The Clerk advised that it has been reported that this has led to increased partnership working with Children and Young Peoples Community Support Service and there are now firm links with the exploitation and missing from home officers who are aware of the issues in the city.

The Clerk advised that additional funding has again been granted from the ASB Trailblazer fund and a proportion of this has been made available to the project which should be able to recommence in September 2024. The amount of funding has reduced meaning the project is only able to operate for a further three months, possibly until the beginning of January 2025.

The Clerk advised that the Parish Council has been asked if it would consider making a contribution of £2,000 towards this project. Although this was not budgeted for in January, the Finance Committee and Environment Committee have recently met and feel that there is flexibility within current budgets (e.g. contingencies) to fund this request.

Councillor V Ashfield advised that she could not be more in favour of this proposal and expressed her upset that youth services had been so heavily cut from local authority budgets in funding reductions. Councillor V Ashfield expressed the desire that youth service provision could one day become a statutory service by local authorities.

Councillor D Freeman also expressed his strong support for this initiative and expressed the hope that this could be a further step by the Parish Council to tackle anti-social behaviour in the City.

Members unanimously **approved** the allocation of £2,000 towards this project.

10. COMPLETION OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S EXTERNAL AUDIT 2023/24

The Clerk reminded Members that each year the Parish Council undergoes two sets of audits - one internal audit and one external audit. These audits are a legal requirement which assess the Parish Council's policies, standing orders, financial regulations, VAT returns, cashbook, bank statements, minutes, website and more to ensure good governance and compliance.

Earlier this year, the Internal Auditor carried out a review of the Parish Council's workings and provided a positive report, as provided to Members. Mazars LLP have now completed their external audit for the year ended 31 March 2024 and have certified the Annual Governance and Accountability Return. The Clerk advised that no issues have been identified in the external audit review. As such, the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 set out what the Parish Council must do at the conclusion of this audit.

Members thanked the Clerk for his work on this audit and unanimously **agreed** to note the conclusion of the external audit for 2023/24 and to instruct the Clerk to take all appropriate action, as set out in the report provided.

11. REPORT ON PLANNING FOR THE REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 2024 EVENT.

The Clerk presented an extensive report on plans for the Remembrance Sunday event this year, highlighting the huge amount of work going into planning this event.

The Clerk highlighted that he is working with partners to once again ensure that the Parish Council hosted a successful Remembrance weekend this year. The Clerk particularly highlighted this event as an important year as the City looks to mark the 200th anniversary of the RNLI. The Clerk advised that the Remembrance organisers were delighted to be welcoming the National Deputy Chair of the RNLI to the Remembrance Dinner and Parade this year as well as a contingent from the RNLI as part of the parade.

The Clerk also highlighted that the Parish Council would be working alongside the Durham Markets Company on the organisation of Uniformed Services Day on 1st November 2024 and would also be supporting the Festival of Remembrance this year too.

Councillor E Ashby expressed concerns at the workload of the Clerk for these events and sought assurances that the delivery of these events was being supported by other partner organisations. The Clerk thanked Councillor E Ashby for this and assured that the organisation of these events is being supported by partners, such as the County Council and others.

Members thanked the Clerk for his excellent work on this event and unanimously **agreed** to note the report provided and the preparations being made for this event and to delegate all organisational and budgetary responsibility for this event to the Clerk.

12. REPORT(S) FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

Report by Councillor J Ashby on the meeting of the University's student housing management group held on 6th September 2024

Councillor J Ashby presented the following report to Members:

- *On student numbers, the indications for the new Academic Year 2024/25 are of about 200 fewer post-graduates and about 100 more undergraduates than was intended. Definitive figures will come from the December 'census' once no-shows, late arrivals and early drop-outs have settled down. There are a few first years who did not opt for University accommodation but have not indicated that they have found themselves private accommodation, so the University is pro-actively addressing every case to make sure that they do have somewhere to live.*
- *The University's analysis that matches their address records against the County Council's Class N Exemptions has been completed, and the report with headlines and details will be made available soon. This report will be immensely useful in considering planning applications and also in thoughts about improving Policy 16.3.*

- *There has been a positive meeting with the Code of Practice landlords to consider possible further items of good practice. The Code of Practice will be promoted to students via the Housing Hub on the University website. Also, the PBSA liaison group is being re-started; this has greater importance than ever as it is apparent that PBSAs are the major route for decreasing the number of students in HMOs. However, the landlord representative reported that the costs of constructing PBSAs has risen sharply, with implications for rents and indeed for bringing any further PBSAs forward.*
- *The DCC representative explained that the disrepair workload is increasing as returning students report concerns with the new Academic Year's HMO accommodation. The team's compliance work regarding gas and electricity certificates is ongoing. A dedicated page for students on Do-it-Online has been created but needs to be made easier to find.*
- *A draft Additional Licensing Scheme has been put forward by DCC and is being considered by the University and DSU for a verdict in about 6 months' time. The landlord representative on the group reminded us that existing legislation provides most of the tools but is not consistently applied or enforced.*
- *The Durham Students Union will be launching a 'Rate Your Landlord' scheme shortly. DSU plan to hold a "Find your housing" fair/workshop in November, and wish to have the Parish Council and resident groups involved to provide a flavour of each locality. I indicated that this would be welcome.*
- *The County Council's Housing Strategy and Delivery Plan will be submitted to Full Council probably in January 2025. The Housing Needs SPD will be adopted under delegated powers by December 2024. Various amendments have been to recognise the particular nature of the housing market in and around Durham City, and the need for affordable housing for students. It is currently being reviewed in the light of the proposed changes to the NPPF. We need to see the final document for assurance, or not, on key issues for the Parish Council, such as the step-by-step methodology for assessing "need" for student accommodation of a particular type in a particular location.*

End of report

Report by Councillor C Lattin on the most recent meeting of Durham University's Community Engagement Task Force.

Councillor C Lattin presented the following report to Members:

- *The Chair, Claire O'Malley gave an update. She re-iterated that the University is being careful not to exceed the cap they have put on student numbers for 2024 – 5. There have been dups in applications for post graduate UK courses. She was open about the need to increase student fees.*
- *Richard Baker, Director of Development and Commercialisation, gave a presentation. The University see many opportunities for partnership with the North East devolution agreement. University Vice Chancellors are taking it in turns to sit on the devolution board for the North East Mayoral Authority. They are looking to develop further innovation and investment. He talked about Aykley Heads and NetPark in Sedgefield as particular growth areas. The university is an anchor institution in the north east and further re-development is taking place*

as part of the new Durham innovation district, in partnership with DCC. There are three catapults in Netpark, which all have innovation centres. Catapults are seen as schemes and projects which can cause and lead expansion.

- *Ged Baker spoke about developments in culture. There is to be a major exhibition on space sciences, including light years. This is in partnership with DCC on satellites. And is a three-year programme. Other partners are international e.g. NASA. There are estimated to be 10,000 new jobs to be created in satellite science. There will be a summer Space Fair. They are developing a touring exhibition about the James Webb space telescope. This links with the lux muralis at the cathedral. In October there will be a celebration of science in a marquee on Palace Green. Over 40 events are planned throughout the county for next year.*
- *Student Engagement Strategy – presented by Katie Binks who leads on Community Engagement and volunteering. She talked about the ongoing development of community involvement in the Assembly Rooms and local schools such as a Shakespeare project with Parkside School. Student and staff volunteers play an active role in developing performing art work with schools and also in sustainability. There are many summer schools, open to local schools such as Performing Arts summer camp, and many sporting activities. She gave an example of the university opening access to its Steinway pianos for school music exam practice. Volunteers also support music lessons and development. For the forthcoming year, their aim is to increase community use of university facilities from 10,000 to 12,000 and to continue to act as a hub for community sport. The overarching goal is to promote a culture amongst university students and staff of service to others. Opportunities should be meaningful and meet the needs of the community. 25% of staff members and one sixth of students are volunteers.*
- *A new development is E-Sports. This is a new space at Maiden Castle for gamers, to make it a safe environment and also a social one. Teams can play together or take on external teams. There was a tour of the E-Sports room which is indeed impressive – all the up-to-date equipment and comfortable gaming chairs! Already 200 students are signed up and taster sessions are being offered to the community, in school holidays. They also give tips on staying safe online, code clubs etc.*
- *James Cook from DCC Spatial policy told the meeting about the consultation of Minerals and Waste and also on the proposed National Policy Planning framework.*
- *Ashleigh White told the forum about the success of Operation Lentil and strategies to reduce parking in the Market Place and on Elvet Bridge. There is also a project to make rented properties safer. Many older properties only have one lock to the front doors which students then leave unlocked. They are proposing keypads.*

End of report

There being no further business, the Chair thanked Members for their attendance and contributions and closed the meeting.

Signed,

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council
(24th October 2024)**

ITEM 6: RESPONSE TO DCC'S BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2025-26 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2026-2029

Durham County Council is facing a budget gap of £64.1 million over the next four years. The council is seeking to balance its budget through a combination of savings, a council tax increase, and using the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Support Reserve:

- **Savings:** The council has identified savings of £8.083 million for 2024/25 and £16.360 million for the MTFP period. These savings include staff reductions, back-office savings, and changes to how front-line services are delivered.
- **Council tax increase:** The council is proposing to increase council tax by the maximum of 2.99%.
- **MTFP Support Reserve:** The council will use £3.798 million from the MTFP Support Reserve to balance the 2024/25 budget. This is a short-term solution to allow time to develop more sustainable savings for 2025/26.

The County Council is also seeking public input on the proposed budget solutions. The council's budget challenges are due to a number of factors, including:

- Unfunded budget pressures, particularly in children's social care and home-to-school transport
- Pay and price inflation, which is partially linked to expected increases in the National Living Wage
- Uncertainty about how available funding will be shared between councils

The Parish Council's Finance Committee recently met and considered the consultation on this matter and has agreed the following draft response to this consultation:

"Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this important consultation on the County Council's budget proposals for 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2026-2029

This is clearly an extremely difficult consultation to have to undertake and the City of Durham Parish Council accepts that the factors which have led to this consultation are beyond the control of the County Council – increasing demand pressures in statutory social care, crippling cuts to local Government funding from Central Government and increasing costs to deliver these services.

For a Local Authority to make additional savings of £64.1million over the next four years is an incredibly difficult task indeed and it is clear from this consultation that almost every avenue to achieve this without impacting so heavily on frontline and statutory services has been explored.

DCC priorities

Durham County Council has shown itself to be a compassionate authority, whether through the retention of part of the LCTRS grant paid to Parish and Town Councils or, as one of only a few remaining local authorities in the country to do so, the provision of support offered to the most vulnerable households in our county through Council Tax discounts (33,400 households receiving 100% support). We applaud the Council for this commitment to supporting local services for those most in need.

The Parish Council would not support any changes to this support offered by Durham County Council.

Moreover, 62% of DCC's overall gross expenditure accounts for Adult and Health Services as well as Children and Young People's Services and options for savings in areas such as social care, are generally limited due to the statutory nature of the services. The fact that DCC spends over 60% of its total expenditure on caring for our most vulnerable residents simply serves to highlight the life and death demands which Council officers are charged with each day.

Council tax increase of 2.99%

As the consultation highlights, a 2.99% increase in DCC's Council Tax is equal to an annual £57.83 increase on a Band D property which is around £1.11 a week. However, in County Durham, 57% of Council Tax payers live in a Band A property and 84% of all properties are in Bands A to C, which means that the majority of people will be charged less than this.

Whilst we are deeply reluctant to advocate a position which would see our residents pay more in Council tax during this cost-of-living crisis, proposing a 2.99% Council tax increase at this present time would be highly irresponsible and unsustainable without further direct Government funding for which Durham County Council has no guarantee. As such, we cannot see how, in this current climate, the County Council can have any choice other than to raise Council tax by 4.99% and, in the event that this threshold is raised in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on 30th October 2024, even beyond this level.

The level of financial risk Durham County Council is presently exposed to is deeply concerning indeed. By the end of the 2025/26 financial year, the Council's reserves will have reduced by £73 million since 1 April 2022 and general reserves will be only 5% of the Council's Net Expenditure.

Moreover, as with other Local Authorities, Durham County Council must prepare itself for an above-inflation pay award to public sector worker of between 5.5% to 6%, as announced by the Chancellor in July 2024.

Raising additional income

The Parish Council very much welcomes most of the income raising proposals set out at this consultation. However, a long-term strategy for how Durham County Council manages and/or retains its 850+ building assets across the county is

clearly missing from these proposals. This should be an urgent priority for the Administration as a means of both generating further income as well as potentially dealing with other priority issues such as addressing the housing crisis in our county. As of January 2023, 10,271 residents were on a waiting list for a social house with those in Band 1 waiting on average 227 days (FOI response ref: 5796513).

In addition, the Parish Council very much welcomes and supports the Council in applying an additional 100% Council Tax premium on Second Homes from April 2025, with the expectation that this will generate an extra £0.7 million. This is in addition to the 1,398 properties across the county paying the empty homes council tax premium (as at January 2024).

Proposed savings

As you are aware from the City of Durham Parish Council's response to the County Council's recent consultation on changes to the way it delivers face-to-face services, we simply cannot support the Council's proposals to reduce the Customer Access Points to one day per week.

The face-to-face Customer Access Point at Clayport is invaluable in assisting residents with a wide range of issues, including housing, social services, benefits and other Council services. We regard the easy access, predominantly appointment-free, face-to-face aspect of this service to be of real benefit to our residents.

For many in our community, especially the elderly, disabled and those without reliable internet access, the CAP represents a vital resource for obtaining information and support. The face-to-face assistance offered at the CAP cannot be replaced for 80% of the working week by online services or telephone support, which we know some residents find difficult to navigate.

Limiting access to this facility would disproportionately impact the most vulnerable members of our community who rely on direct interaction to resolve their issues. It would also undermine the Council's commitment to accessibility and community support.

The Parish Council very much welcomes the proposal to switch to more sustainable and perennial forms of planting across the county. As we have seen from our success in the Northumbria in Bloom contest, Durham consistently performs highly in this area and the Council's Clean and Green team must be commended for their work on this. That being said, the way the County Council delivers this service – much valued by our residents – must be made more sustainable as it should not be automatically assumed that Parish and Town Councils across the county can assume responsibility for this into the future”.

**DECISION
REQUIRED**

For Members to agree the Parish Council's response to Durham County Council's consultation on its budget proposals for 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2026-2029.

ITEM 6: RESPONSE TO SECTION 106 BY DURHAM CATHEDRAL SCHOOLS FOUNDATION AND DURHAM CITY HOCKEY

A new Section 106 grant application has been submitted by Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation (DCSF) which seeks funding to improve hockey facilities at their site in Durham. The key proposal is to refurbish the existing AstroTurf and install floodlighting. These upgrades are essential to expand the usage of the pitch, particularly for local clubs like Durham City Hockey, as the demand for hockey facilities has exceeded supply, especially with university growth limiting access to other pitches.

The project is valued at £373,469.92, including £83,514 for floodlighting. The Foundation will provide £12,000 in management costs and match funds from the Section 106 agreement. The total amount of funding sought from Section 106 is £141,015.20.

The improvements will make the pitch available for community use, particularly in the evenings and on weekends, with fees set below market rates. The project is supported by Durham County Council, as it aligns with their leisure strategy and sports pitch development plans, and is backed by local sports groups and governing bodies such as England Hockey.

If this application is approved, the work is scheduled to begin in July 2025 and complete by October 2025.

As Members are aware, because of the strict timetable in which to respond to this application (within 21 days of receipt of the application documentation), this matter was delegated to the Parish Council's Finance Committee at the beginning of October and the Committee has agreed the following response:

"Thank you for consulting the Parish Council on this Section 106 application by Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation and Durham City Hockey. The City of Durham Parish Council joins the Local Ward Member Councillor Liz Brown in strongly objecting to this application in its entirety.

The site itself is within the grounds of this historic school complex located within the Durham City Conservation Area, occupying a prominent corner position at the junction of Quarryheads Lane and Grove Street / Margery Lane. The site is within the inner setting of Durham World Heritage Site (WHS), the boundary being some 158 metres to the west at its closest point defined by the west-end of Prebends Bridge. The floodlighting of such a prominent part of the inner setting of the Durham WHS is completely unacceptable and the lack of any heritage or visual impact assessment on our World Heritage Site within this application is significant.

The proposal would also involve the floodlighting of Clay Lane. Clay Lane is designated as a Local Green Space in the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan. As noted in para. 4.102 of the Neighbourhood Plan, it "has been an important pedestrian route into Durham since the medieval period and continues to serve as a major pedestrian artery into the City centre." It is a Public Footpath (Durham City FP15). Near the junction with Margery Lane, a short section, unadopted as a

public highway, has been made passable by motor vehicles giving access to Rowanwood, Spring Cottage, and the Durham Archery Tennis Club. Nearby, Blind Lane and Margery Lane are deeply cut into the rising landform, typical of historic routes. Together with Pimlico, they help create a semi-rural quality, in contrast to the closely developed streets of the City core. These links help to unify the woodland and greenspace across this part of the Conservation Area and attach it to the woodland of the gorge surrounding the Peninsula. The point made in stressing this is that this area is a remnant of the once extensive greenspace that surrounded the historic city core and that has been lost in much of the rest of the conservation area. This is fully recognised in the Neighbourhood Plan in identifying Clay Lane as Local Open Space, backed up by its further inclusion as part of Observatory Hill grouping in the Emerald Network proposals.

Moreover, Clay Lane is a wildlife corridor within the City known for roosting bats, birds and badger – all European Protected Species (EPS). EPS are species of plants and animals (other than birds) protected by law throughout the European Union. They are listed in Annexes II and IV of the European Habitats Directive and receive full protection under The Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended). This makes it an offence to:

- deliberately capture,
- injure or kill any European Protected Species (EPS)
- deliberately disturb any European Protected Species (EPS);
- damage or destroy a breeding site or place of rest or shelter used by any European Protected Species (EPS).

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) adds further protection by making it an offence to intentionally or recklessly³⁰ disturb an EPS while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection, or to obstruct access to any structure or place the species uses for shelter or protection.

It is particularly notable that, in responding to a recent planning application in our parish (application ref: **DM/23/01661/FPA**), the County Ecologist raised serious concerns that "development in this area has the potential to impact both active and inactive (badger) setts (which may become active again at any time), the loss of available commuting and foraging routes for badger, increased levels of disturbance and the isolation of the clan via habitat fragmentation resulting in their inability to persist in the area in the longer term" and required an "assessment into the longer term impacts of development on the badger population, particularly as they are an urban clan in Durham City and have limited opportunities within the local area".

The Parish Council regards the floodlighting of Clay Lane and its likely impact on EPS in this area to be totally unacceptable and objects further to this application on ecological grounds. Again, the lack of any ecological impact assessment of these floodlights is notable.

*Putting aside the practicalities of this proposal, you will be aware that both the Parish Council and Local Ward Member Councillor Liz Brown have made attempts to secure funding to resolve the flooding issues at both Merryoaks playing field and the Sheraton Park playing field as the local football team has unfortunately had to find an alternative site to play because of a waterlogged pitch. Doing so would bring these pitches back into use. These proposals have always been declined on the basis that this did not provide **new** playing facilities. In spite of this, this application proposes a like-for-like replacement of an Astroturf pitch and does not provide any new facilities at all. Instead, this funding from another development in Neville's Cross would be spent primarily on replacement works, the main beneficiaries of which will be the school and its pupils itself and not fully accessible (or free) to the public. Essentially passing a community asset into the ownership and control of a private body over which the local community - for which Section 106 projects are intended - have no control in terms of access and costs is totally unacceptable.*

Moreover, we cannot see that this application has sufficiently demonstrated an unmet demand for a hockey playing field nor that this would encourage a wider take-up of the sport. It is surely better to look at a more publicly accessible, Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) style pitch which would allow for a greater range of sports to be enjoyed.

*The Parish Council appreciates that there is a five-year repayment clause within the Section 106 application associated with application **8/CMA/4/73**. The County Council has been aware of this since 2011 however and have failed to consult with the Parish Council or indeed any other community group prior to this application being submitted. We cannot accept that support for this proposal by Durham University, DCC Sport and Leisure, England Hockey and Sports England in any way demonstrates local community support as appears to be the conclusion from Section 10 of the application form.*

We urge the County Council to refuse this application and must stress that we would regard its approval as entirely unacceptable”.

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to approve the response to this Section 106 application, as set in the above report.
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ITEM 8: PROPOSAL TO CONTRACT THE SERVICES OF A GRANT FUNDRAISER FOR A PARISH COUNCIL PROJECT

As Members are aware, in agreeing its budget for financial year 2024/25 in January 2024, Members unanimously approved a fund of £15,000 towards assistance for the Clerk in supporting the functions and aims of the Parish Council.

Although originally envisaged to be administrative support, Members are aware that previous efforts to recruit at this level have been unsuccessful and the Council has also acquired the Fathom app, an AI minute taker which sits alongside Zoom and the Clerk reports that this is cutting down his workload and supporting the minute taking aspect of his work.

The Council has previously expressed a desire to focus on acquiring external funding for projects within the City of Durham parish area. As such, it was agreed at Full Council's July Full Council meeting that this fund be used to finance a number of one-off, time-limited pieces of work on a contract basis for grant funding and the Council advertised this contract opportunity via its website and the Clerk also reached out to the AAP Manager to identify if staff support from the AAP team might be a possibility.

In doing so, the Parish Council also agreed to focus on 3 particular areas for achieving external finance from this budget: a green/clean air project, heritage at risk and culture.

The Parish Council has successfully been able to deliver on a number of projects on a similar contractual basis with external consultants; including the investigation into HMOs across the City, retail support for City centre businesses, the production of an evidence-base for an Article 4 Direction in Mount Oswald and a report into the distinction between planning/ licensing hours in premises across the City.

Since advertising this contract, the Parish Council has received one expression of interest from a local resident who has experience of grant funding. The full content of her proposal is included below and is based on a day rate of £250/day:

Proposal Summary:

I am writing to propose my services as a Grant Co-ordinator for the City of Durham Parish Council, with a focus on securing funding for environmental sustainability projects. My goal is to assist the Parish Council in identifying, applying for, and managing grants and any other funding opportunities that support initiatives like conservation, energy efficiency, green infrastructure, and community environmental education.

Objectives:

- 1. Identify Funding Sources: Research and identify potential grants and any other funding sources that align with the Parish Council's environmental goals.*
- 2. Grant Application Development: Write, prepare, and submit high-quality grant proposals that meet the specific requirements of each funding source.*

3. *Project Coordination: Collaborate with the Parish Council to develop and implement environmental projects, ensuring that each project is aligned with the funding criteria and community needs.*
4. *Compliance and Reporting: Ensure that all funded projects comply with grant guidelines and are executed within budget. I will also manage timely reporting to funders, including progress updates and financial reports.*
5. *Community Engagement: Encourage community involvement and foster partnerships with local organisations to support environmental sustainability projects.*

Key Responsibilities:

- *Conduct in-depth research on grant opportunities related to environmental conservation and sustainability.*
- *Create detailed budgets and project timelines for grant applications.*
- *Manage the entire grant process from proposal writing to project implementation and post-grant reporting.*
- *Build relationships with potential funders and stakeholders to increase funding opportunities.*
- *Maintain an organised system to track applications, deadlines, and grant deliverables.*

Experience and examples:

I have valuable experience in writing bids and also sourcing funding pots relevant to specific projects, examples include:

- *The National Lottery Community Fund - Successful bid being granted for just over £105,000 to hire someone for the position of Centre Manager at Merryoaks Community Hall, fixed term for 3 years.*
- *AAP Fun and Food funding - secured x 3 pots of funding for Lowes Barn Community CIO to allow children in the local area to attend various activities at Merryoaks Community Hall. This also allowed us to provide free healthy meals and snacks.*
- *Point North (formally County Durham Community Foundation) - Welfare Winter Packs project - one of the young volunteers where I used to work at Investing in Children wanted to help support the homeless and came up with the idea of Winter welfare packs to hand out. The packs included insulated gloves, socks, hats plus hand warmers. £2000 was secured for this project.*
- *County Durham Sport Satellite funding - £4500 was secured to support harder to reach groups to take part in physical activity sessions. These sessions were offered to young people with disabilities, those experiencing mental health difficulties and also a home education group.*

The Parish Council's Environment Committee has expressed a desire to focus fundraising efforts on areas such as green-roof bus shelters and topiary statues, examples of which can be seen below:

If Members are minded to approve the awarding of this contract, it is proposed that a defined budget be agreed with the applicant and the Council.

Green roof bus shelters



Topiary statues



DECISIONS REQUIRED

- 1) For Members to consider the above report and decide on the awarding of this grant fundraising contract.
- 2) If 1 is approved, for Members to agree to the proposed projects for the fundraiser to work on.
- 3) For Members to delegate responsibility to managing this contract to the Parish Council's Environment Committee.