



City of Durham Parish Council

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Date of summons: 16th January 2025

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 **Wednesday 22nd January 2025 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 28TH NOVEMBER 2024**
- 4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
- 5. ADOPTION OF THE CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COMMUNITY EMERGENCY PLAN**
- 6. COMMITTEE UPDATES**

- **Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from meetings held on 15th and 29th November 2024**

Copies of all approved minutes from these meetings can be found here:

<http://cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk/agendas-minutes/planning-committee/>

- Proposal to produce a report in support of a new Article 4 Direction removing the permitted development right to transform front gardens into paved parking areas.
- To consider the proposal to seek support from the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) to lobby Government on making health impacts one of the main licensing objectives under the Licensing Act.

- **Environment Committee minutes from the meeting held on 12th November 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 14th October 2024**

Copies of all approved minutes from these meetings can be found here:

<http://cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk/agendas-minutes/finance-committee/>

- 7. CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Chair will provide a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 28th November 2024.

- 8. PARISH COUNCIL STRATEGY 2025/26**

- 9. PARISH COUNCIL BUDGET FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2025/26**

- 10. PARISH COUNCIL PRECEPT REQUEST FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2025/26**

- 11. REQUEST FOR THE PARISH COUNCIL TO ENDORSE THE FOSSIL FUEL NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY**

12. REPORT ON THE PARISH COUNCIL'S INTERNAL CONTROLS

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.

13. FUTURE REVIEW OF SCHEME OF DELEGATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Thursday 28th November 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, N Brown, A Doig, D Freeman, R Friederichsen, G Holland, C Lattin, R Ormerod and E Scott.

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley, Jacqui Toase (DCC) and 9 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 L Brown, R Hanson and H Weston. No other apologies were received.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

Councillors E Scott, D Freeman and R Ormerod declared an interest in item 7 on the Agenda and took no part in the vote on this item.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 24TH OCTOBER 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th October 2024 were unanimously agreed as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr Rupert Benjamin advised that, following on from his last report to Full Council, the situation with the Housing Association and the area around his property had improved slightly and that he is continuing to liaise with the Housing Association and Wardens on other matters to be resolved. Mr Benjamin thanked the Parish Council and Jacqui Toase for their support and advised that he would keep the Council updated on this progress.

Ms Angela Tracy, co-Chair of the Sidegate Residents Association expressed serious concerns relating to the proposals to include Sidegate as part of the new Walking and Cycling routes within the city and provided the following report to Members:

Sidegate Residents Association unanimously opposes the scheme in Sidegate and members will do everything in their power to stop it from happening.

The SRA believes that Sidegate should not have been included in the list, as it totally different in scale to the others, at only 2.27 metres wide. (South Bailey is one example – wide, open and flat) Other routes on the list are main thoroughfares

with open views. It is being used because it provides a link in the chain from Framwellgate Peth to the riverside for cyclists. An alternative would be for cyclists to continue their journey down Framwellgate Peth and across Milburngate Bridge as they do at the present time – especially as Milburngate Bridge has been adopted as part of the National Cycle Route

Sidegate is a historic asset for residents and visitors - this scheme puts its heritage and character at risk.

The main reason for laying wheeler tracks across the City is for cars and bicycles. At the present time, this narrow street is traffic free except for two households who own cars within the project boundary and when the Wear floods. That leaves cyclists – the few who use the route, either get off their bikes or cycle down the cobbles. We have spoken to several cyclists and they do not feel it is needed.

At a recent Teams meeting with DCC staff involved in the project (including Rachel Smith, the Sidegate Project Manager) the importance of inclusivity was stressed and how the project would make Sidegate accessible to everyone, including those with mobility issues or disabilities. The SRA is not convinced that laying wheeler tracks will support these groups. Certainly, for people in wheelchairs, the wheeler tracks would be too far apart. The gradient is an existing challenge for certain groups and there is a pavement.

The SRA feels that the DCC should prioritise the safety of all pedestrians and has a real fear about the safety of providing wheeler tracks for cyclists - that is the speed at which they will come down the street, because of the gradient.

Residents coming down the steps from Diamond Terrace will walk straight onto the wheeler track and will have no sight of any cyclist approaching at speed. At the top of the street, walkers will get no warning of cyclists speeding down around the corner. For the safety of cyclists, they are at risk when residents in Sidegate back their cars onto the street.

As pedestrians, we already have experience of the danger of cyclists coming down at speed, on Framwellgate Peth. Pedestrians cannot hear them approaching. (I was thrown against the Milburngate fence, when a cyclist came down at high speed and hit my side)

The Association believes there is no business case for this project - it does not make any practical sense.

However, there are improvements that could be made. At some point the paving slabs on the pavement were removed and replaced with tarmac. The pavement could be improved, (like in South Bailey) with the slabs returned. Also in some places, the cobbles need relaying, where work has been done underground and the cobbles re-laid in a slapdash way.

The Chair thanked Ms Tracy for her report and advised that the Parish Council would consider this when it is formally consulted on the new scheme and has had sight of the proposals.

Mr John Metson presented a proposal that Durham City should twin with Dar Salah in Palestine as follows:

Thank you very much for inviting me to talk about this subject. Perhaps I should explain first how the idea of twinning between our city and a town in Palestine has arisen. I've been involved with Palestine Solidarity for a long time, and as a result of this have been in touch with the Britain Palestine Friendship and Twinning Network, which promotes human connections between British and Palestinian communities. Recently this organisation has let us know that the town of Dar Salah in the occupied West Bank is very keen to twin with a town or city in the UK, such as Durham.

What is to be gained from a twinning relationship? First of all, it is a very practical way of showing support for Palestinians. The experience of Palestinians over the past 100 years and more has been one of steady erosion of their rights and colonisation of their land. Without going too much into Middle Eastern history and politics, it's fair to say that throughout that time British governments have failed them, and now, at one of the worst moments in their history, I'm afraid British politicians are failing them again.

Twinning would allow the people of Durham in some small way to redress these failures and contribute to the cause of justice and peace in Palestine. It would enable us to connect directly with a Palestinian community, to learn about its culture, and to better understand its problems. There is a multitude of ways in which the connection could be developed. Links could be built between councils, schools, churches, sports clubs and other types of organisations. There could be exchange visits: people from here could go to Palestine to experience the situation there for themselves, and Palestinians could be invited here to tell their own stories. All kinds of events could be organised – films, talks, concerts, exhibitions – that would involve many people, would promote interest in Palestine, and could perhaps be used to raise funds.

I should tell you a little about Dar Salah. This town – or perhaps it should more accurately be described as a collection of villages – lies just to the east of Bethlehem and just south of Jerusalem. It is on the edge of the Judean desert, and has panoramic views across the desert to the Dead Sea and Jordan. I went there many years ago, and I remember it as extremely beautiful. It has a population of about 10,000. Roughly half of these are from families that have always lived there, and the other half are the descendants of refugees who fled there from what is now Israel in 1948. The population includes both Muslims and Christians. There are a number of mosques and a Greek Orthodox monastery within the municipality, and the fifth-century monastery of Mar Saba is not far away. Agriculture is an important part of the economy, with reliance on olives, cereals and livestock – mainly sheep and goats. Many people used to find employment in Israel, but that has been prohibited since the beginning of the war in Gaza, with the result that work and money are scarce.

Like all of the West Bank, Dar Salah suffers acutely the effects of occupation. The infamous Separation Wall runs through it, cutting residents off from their lands and from each other. There are many restrictions on movement. Checkpoints especially make it difficult to get from one place to another. Access to Jerusalem – for markets, hospitals, al-Aqsa mosque, and so on – is extremely limited. Water

is also a problem: this is controlled by the Israelis, and is in very short supply, especially for the purposes of irrigation.

Our lives in Durham are – at least for many of us – prosperous and secure in comparison. For this reason the main beneficiaries of a twinning arrangement would likely be the residents of Dar Salah – which is perhaps as it should be, but I think that we too could gain a great deal from friendship with this town. We actually have much to learn from them. We might also find we had things in common. For example, the idea of solidarity, which old mining communities here understand well, is highly valued by Palestinians, and our solidarity with them during this time of trial would, I know, be hugely appreciated.

At the moment Durham is not twinned with any place outside of Europe, apart from Durham in North Carolina. The mayor and council of Dar Salah – some of whom I have talked to via zoom – are very enthusiastic about forming a link with our city. My hope is that you will give serious consideration to this proposal.

The Chair thanked Mr Metson for his report and advised that Members would consider this accordingly and the Clerk would respond to him in due course on this matter accordingly.

Mr Roger Cornwell and Mr Richard Huzzey advised that they were attending to hear the discussion relating to item 5 and the report on the Sam Green blue plaque proposal and asked Members to support this proposal. Mr Huzzey advised that he is presently carrying out research in relation to Sam Green and his life in Durham.

5. COMMITTEE UPDATES

• Planning and Licensing Committee

Councillor G Holland presented the minutes of the Planning and Licensing Committee meetings held on 18th October and 1st November 2024. There were no queries from Members on these minutes.

• Environment Committee

Councillor C Lattin presented the minutes of the Environment Committee meeting held on 8th October 2024. There were no queries from Members on these minutes and therefore Councillor C Lattin moved on to Committee updates.

Proposal for a new heritage blue plaque dedicated to former Crossgate Councillor Sam Green

Councillor C Lattin presented a proposal to fund a new blue plaque commemorating former Councillor Sam Green.

Councillor C Lattin advised that Sam was an openly gay psychiatric nurse and Liberal politician who was elected as a member of Durham City Council in 1972. He is widely believed to be the first openly gay Councillor elected in England and the first openly gay candidate ever in an election in Great Britain.

Councillor C Lattin advised that Sam was aged 31 at the time of his election to the Crossgate seat. He had stood for election to the Council twice previously. During the campaign he openly identified himself as gay and as a member of the Gay Liberation Front, and in an interview with Gay News he reported that his sexuality had been extensively covered in the press and had attracted negative comments from opponents. He was elected to the seat, ousting an 18-year incumbent councillor.

Councillor C Lattin highlighted that, as one of his actions as a Councillor, he asked for Gay News to be stocked in the city's libraries. Sam retained his seat in the 1973 and 1976 local elections, but did not stand in the 1979 elections (when the seat was incorporated into a larger Crossgate and Framwelgate ward).

Councillors E and J Ashby remarked that they remembered Councillor Green very well from their time in Durham and commented on his extraordinary achievements and exceptional character.

The Clerk advised that he is investigating where Sam lived in Durham during his election as Members agreed that the property Sam lived in when first elected, ought to be the site of the new blue plaque. The Clerk advised that the most likely location for this is 40 The Avenue but he will confirm this by checking the historic electoral roll archives.

Members acknowledged Sam Green's significant contributions to the community and the historic and national significance of his election. However, it was acknowledged from the report presented that there was no information about whether Sam is still alive and/ or if any living relatives are still residing in Durham or elsewhere. As such, whilst agreeing to fund the new blue plaque dedicated to Sam Green, Members unanimously **agreed** to carry out further research, perhaps with additional investigation support, into Sam and his family and report back to a future meeting of the Parish Council's Environment Committee, under whose delegated authority this project would sit.

• **Business Committee**

Councillor R Ormerod presented the minutes of the Business Committee meeting held on 27th September 2024. There were no queries from Members on these minutes.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 24th October 2024 as follows:

The Chair began by congratulating Arthur Lockyear, Dave Cuthbertson, the Clerk, and everyone involved in the organisation of this year's Remembrance Day parade.

The Chair remarked that this year's event was one of the best seen in a long time in Durham, with a phenomenal public turnout. Arthur's very positive report on the event was noted, and the Chair expressed hope that this event would continue to grow in significance.

The Chair advised that she was honoured to lay a wreath on behalf of the Parish Council on both the Sunday and Armistice Day and encouraged all Members to take an active part in this event in future years. The Chair noted some disappointment that only two Members represented the Parish Council on the day.

The Chair thanked everyone involved in the successful unveiling of the blue plaque commemorating the former Women's Hostel at 33 Claypath. Special thanks were extended to Councillors Ashfield, Lattin, and J Ashby for their efforts in making this event memorable. The Chair expressed pride that the Parish Council had funded the plaque, which celebrates the historic beginnings of St Mary's College and its role in advancing higher education for women. This plaque is a tribute to the women who broke barriers and a reminder of the progress made in educational access.

Looking ahead, the Chair reminded Members of the Christmas civic event scheduled for Tuesday 10th December at 6:30pm at Merryoaks Community Hall. This event will provide an opportunity to thank those who have supported the Parish Council over the past year.

The Chair made a non-political request to ensure that any prospective candidates for the forthcoming Parish Council elections in May 2025 are fully informed of the responsibilities and time commitments involved. Emphasis was placed on the importance of candidates committing to the full four-year term, as the costs associated with by-elections are significant.

The Chair highlighted the recent email from the Clerk regarding the Section 106 application for Elvet Park, describing it as a much-anticipated community project. If approved, approximately £83,000 will remain in the Elvet and Gilesgate Section 106 funds. The Chair expressed hope for Member support for the Parish Council's green roof bus shelter project in the Ward and confirmed that the matter had been delegated to the Finance Committee for review.

A reminder was given about Durham County Council's Suicide Prevention conference in February 2025. The Chair expressed deep concern about County Durham's high suicide rates and commended DCC for taking the lead on this important initiative. Members were encouraged to attend, and details for registration had been circulated by the Clerk.

The Chair extended heartfelt thanks to the volunteers who recently planted over 70,000 pollinator-friendly spring bulbs across the parish. The Chair also mentioned the arrival of fruit trees, encouraging volunteers to prepare for planting them soon. Further details would follow.

In closing, the Chair thanked Members for their hard work throughout the year and wished everyone a wonderful Christmas with family and friends.

7. BRINGING THE MAYORALTY BACK TO THE CITY OF DURHAM

Councillor A Doig presented a comprehensive report on the proposal to bring back the mayoralty to the City of Durham, highlighting the historical and democratic

context of the issue. He outlined that the Charter Trust for the City of Durham, established as a temporary measure in 2009 following the abolition of Durham City Council, is now outdated and lacks democratic legitimacy.

Councillor Doig emphasized that the Trust, an unelected body controlled by Durham County Council, currently holds responsibilities that more appropriately align with the City of Durham Parish Council, which has a mandate to represent local residents. The report detailed the historical importance of the mayoralty, ranked fifth among mayoralties in England, and its role in promoting the city locally and nationally.

Key issues raised included the Trust's failure to consult with or involve the Parish Council in its operations, its limited accountability, and the need for a cohesive structure to better serve the City. Councillor Doig proposed the abolition of the Charter Trust and the transfer of its roles and responsibilities, including the mayoralty, to the Parish Council. He also recommended renaming the Parish Council as the City of Durham Town Council to enable it to appoint its own mayor.

The report concluded with a series of recommendations aimed at achieving a unified governance structure for the City of Durham, ensuring the preservation of its civic traditions while enhancing democratic accountability. Councillor Doig invited Members to consider and support these proposals to secure the future of the mayoralty under the Parish Council's stewardship.

A number of Members highlighted that the Charter Trust is not a Committee of the County Council but a separate organisation in its own right. Members also highlighted that the request to abolish the Charter Trust may not in fact be legally possible whilst parts of the former City Council district area – such as upper Gilesgate and Newton Hall – remain unparished.

Councillor G Holland advised that he fully supported the abolishment of the Charter Trust and recommended that Councillor A Doig contacts the Local Member of Parliament about this issue.

Members agreed to note this report for the time being and the Chair thanked Councillor A Doig for his work on this matter.

8. LOCAL GOVERNMENT PAY AWARD FOR 2024/25

At this point in the meeting, the Clerk left the room for this Agenda item.

The Chair highlighted the agreed pay increase for local government employees, effective from 1st April 2024. The Council unanimously **agreed** to a) accept the 2.50% increase to the Clerk's salary; and b) make the necessary arrangements for arrears to be paid in the November 2024 payroll window.

9. CONSULTATION ON A VISION AND STRATEGIC PLACE PLAN (SPP) FOR DURHAM CITY

The Chair presented the proposed response to Durham County Council's consultation on the Vision and Strategic Place Plan for Durham City, based on the

key points from the City of Durham Neighbourhood Plan and the complementary "Looking Forwards" document.

The Council unanimously **agreed** to approve the proposed response as set out below and to continue engaging positively with DCC and its contractors on this initiative.

Response

The City of Durham Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. In the spirit of not wishing to reinvent the wheel, we would like to draw your attention to the work done in producing the City of Durham Neighbourhood plan and the complementary document "Looking Forwards, the key points of which are summarised below:

"Looking Forwards" complements Durham's Neighbourhood Plan and reflects community aspirations gathered over five years. It focuses on non-statutory initiatives to make Durham a more creative and sustainable city and envisions collaborative efforts among councils, organisations, and the public to enhance Durham's beauty, sustainability, and community engagement.

It builds on the themes outlined in the Neighbourhood Plan

1. A City with a Sustainable Future

- *Promote sustainability awareness and monitor changes via a "State of the City" report.*
- *Enhance cleanliness (streets, riverbanks, waste management) and improve air quality with initiatives like Low Emission Zones.*
- *Collaborate with Durham Energy Institute for community-based energy solutions.*

2. A Beautiful and Historic City

- *Protect and enhance heritage and green assets and restore valued views.*
- *Develop the "Emerald Network" of green spaces and footpaths.*
- *Promote better design quality through a comprehensive Durham Design Guide.*

3. A City with a Diverse and Resilient Economy

- *Engage the public in regeneration projects through "Making Places" initiatives, e.g., North Road redevelopment.*
- *Improve the City Centre with shopfront enhancements, better public spaces, and expanded cultural events.*
- *Explore opportunities to revitalise areas like Fowler's Yard as vibrant, creative hubs.*

4. A City with Attractive and Affordable Places to Live

- *Reconversion of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) into family homes.*
- *Strengthen mechanisms to manage student accommodation, addressing noise, waste, and parking concerns.*

5. A City with a Modern and Sustainable Transport Infrastructure

- *Promote walking and cycling with safer routes, better crossings, and traffic calming measures.*
- *Develop a Sustainable Travel Forum to address issues like bus services and congestion management.*
- *Encourage sustainable transport through initiatives like electric buses and improved travel hubs.*

6. A City with an Enriched Community Life

- *Create a City Centre Hub to serve as an information and event-sharing space.*
- *Develop a Durham Arts and Culture Forum to enhance facilities and promote local creative talent.*
- *Support local sustainable food initiatives through partnerships with organisations like Transition Durham.*

The City of Durham Parish Council would especially like to draw your attention to the key issues highlighted by members of the public in the consultation for the Neighbourhood Plan. These are discussed in depth in chapter 3 of this document.

In brief:

What People Value About Durham City Centre

- *Key positives include the World Heritage Site (Cathedral, Castle, Palace Green), scenic riverbanks, and green wedges.*
- *Other highlights: a powerful sense of community, cultural events, vibrant markets, and excellent public transport links.*
- *The city's compact size, friendly atmosphere, and proximity to the countryside are praised.*

Key Issues Identified

- *Overconcentration of student housing, often poorly maintained, leading to unbalanced communities.*
- *Poor planning decisions and inadequate consideration of local residents' opinions.*
- *Issues with North Road, limited retail diversity, and declining streetscapes.*
- *Problems with traffic congestion, pedestrian safety, and littering.*
- *Inadequate tourist information, public transport facilities, and open spaces.*

What Needs to Change

- *Reduce student accommodation imbalance and prioritise affordable, diverse housing.*
- *Improve planning decisions to better align with residents' views.*
- *Upgrade North Road, diversify retail, and clean public spaces.*
- *Enhance pedestrian infrastructure, tackle anti-social behaviour, and manage traffic and parking better.*
- *Protect green spaces, support cultural facilities, and improve the bus station and other public amenities.*

The City of Durham Parish Council feels that these still reflect our vision for Durham and should carry significant weight in the outcome of your review, given the extensive work and consultation undertaken as part of the Neighbourhood Planning process.

End of report

10. REPORT FROM PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Councillor C Lattin provided a report on the most recent meeting of Durham University's Community Engagement Task Force Lived-Environment sub-group (8th November 2024) as follows:

- *Following David Loudon's retirement, a new director of Estates and Facilities has been appointed. It is Ian Rooney who takes up his post on 1st January 2025.*
- *The Bustiness School as we know, is now complete and fully functioning.*
- *Boldon House is due to complete in January 2025. Staff will move into this new large office space in April 2025. This releases space at Mountjoy for science and research*
- *The preferred bidder for the Hild and Bede development is UTP The Unite site at Rushford Court is nearly completed to house the students, though another 70 students have had to be moved to Ernest Place.*
- *The three buildings at the bottom of Gilesgate, currently mothballed, will be included in the development as will Yorke Cottage.*
- *A decision on the data Centre at Aykley Heads is expected in 2025. There is uncertainty about it now as the government has said there is no longer dedicated funding for such development, which forms part of the Science Transformation Programme.*
- *Roofing works and structural repairs are underway on Palace Green at Pemberton and the Castle. This work is conservation work.*
- *The university is reviewing its portfolio to repurpose its estate. They have legacy issues of maintenance, condition of buildings and also mothballed sites. Some sites are on the market but sales have recently fallen through. They are aware of a need to tighten up security in particular. There have been several instances of trespassers.*
- *So much of the university estate falls within the designated conservation areas. The university is working closely with DCC on their Conservation Management Plan. They also consult and work with the World Heritage Site.*
- *The University submitted their Biodiversity strategy for a Green Gown Award, given by the international Environmental Association for Universities. They were a finalist in the category of sustainable institution of the year and were highly commended.*
- *The University launched a cycling scheme. This promotes cycling to their staff and students and offers the sale of bikes and repairs from*

Maiden Castle, working with Recycle your bike. So far 15 bikes have been sold. They are working with police to inform students on the correct use of lights.

- There is a Travel Plan 2020 – 2025. Next year a travel survey will be launched, looking at travel between sites. The objective is to create a car park management plan and also to find out why students bring their cars to Durham at all. They are intending to install additional EV charging points.*
- PBSA and HMO update: The university conducts a quarterly round up of planning applications for HMOs. They believe that the rate is slowing down but are aware that there are many properties pending. Additional agreements have been reached with Village at the Viaduct (70 rooms) and Ernest Place, which is mostly post grad, New Kepier Court and Chapel Heights (20) to enable the university to meet their offer of accommodation for all undergraduates. They were not able to do this, this year though they did achieve it for post grads. Additionally, 60 rooms at Van Mildert and 90 at Trevelyan are being refurbished.*
- The University aims to reduce the number of empty rooms - currently they estimate 1,000 properties are still available for 2025-6. Students are now urged not to sign leases without viewing the property.*
- There will be 4 students community wardens next year.*
- The university has signed a memorandum of understanding with the 4 FE Colleges in the area*
- The University has achieved Level 3 status as a disability confident employer. This is the highest level.*

End of report

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 were 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 were asked to leave the room.

11. FOLLOW-UP REPORT ON VEXATIOUS BEHAVIOUR

The Parish Council considered a further confidential report on vexatious behaviour from a member of the public following on from a warning letter sent.

Members noted that the matter referred to in the report pre-dated the warning letter being sent and therefore it was **agreed** that a further letter to the resident ought to be sent which highlighted that only those specifically authorised to do so may represent the Parish Council in their communications or discussions.

There being no further business, the Chair thanked Members for their attendance and contributions. In closing the meeting, the Chair advised that the next Full Parish Council meeting would take place on Wednesday 22nd January as opposed to Thursday 23rd January as previously planned.

Signed,

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council
(22nd January 2025)**

ITEM 6: PROPOSAL TO PRODUCE A REPORT IN SUPPORT OF A NEW ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION REMOVING THE PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHT TO TRANSFORM FRONT GARDENS INTO PAVED PARKING AREAS

The Planning and Licensing Committee is concerned at the increased number of planning proposals which involve the loss of front gardens to hardstanding used for off-street parking in the City.

The Durham City Neighbourhood Plan attempted to address this issue through Policy D4 which states that: *"all new housing, and extensions and other alterations to existing housing, should be of high-quality design relating to:*

- a. the character and appearance of the local area; and*
- b. aesthetic qualities; and*
- c. external and internal form and layout; and*
- d. functionality; and*
- e. adaptability; and*
- f. resilience; and*
- g. the improvement of energy efficiency and the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions.*

New residential development should meet the Building for Life 12 standards provided for in County Durham Building for Life Supplementary Planning Document (2019)".

The Building for Life SPD (car parking) also states: *"where parking is positioned to the front of the property, ensure that at least an equal amount of the frontage is allocated to an enclosed, landscaped front garden as it is for parking to reduce vehicle domination."*

However, at present vehicle crossovers and hardstanding for dwellinghouses are permitted development and as a result the local planning authority cannot exercise any control if the works are completed within the provisions of Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 as amended.

As a result, there is a potential for a major change to the character and appearance of the street scene and, as such, the Committee wishes to form an evidence base in favour of an Article 4 Direction to be able to exercise control and manage such development in Durham City in order to preserve the verdant character of our streets both within and without the Conservation Area.

Classes of permitted development which could facilitate parking are, as follows:

- **Hard Surfaces**

A hard surface can be made anywhere within a residential garden. This is subject to a condition that where they are between a front wall of the house and the road, and measure more than 5 square metres, they should either be made of porous or permeable materials, or drain into a permeable area in the garden. It applies to both new surfaces and the repair and replacement of existing surfaces.

- **Hard Surfaces - Vehicular Accesses**

The formation, laying out and construction of means of access to a highway which is not a trunk or classified road, where the access is required in connection with other development which is permitted within the schedules of the General Permitted Development Order.

- **Demolition of Gates, Fences, Walls or other means of enclosure**

Any building operation consisting of the demolition of the whole or any part of any gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure.

As Members will be aware an Article 4 Direction can be adopted to remove permitted development rights. Article 4 Directions should only be exercised in exceptional circumstances where evidence supports the case that the use of permitted development rights harms local amenity or the proper planning of an area. Parts of the City already have an Article 4 Direction in place in relation to design issues and it is hoped that this new Article 4 Direction will strengthen this existing Direction and therefore preserve the character of the area.

All of this landscape loss has given birth to a new phrase from natural urban designers, who describe them as 'Blandscapes'. The cumulative side effects of more hard surfacing include:

- **Flood risk:** simply because rainwater runs off new impermeable hard surfacing faster and stronger instead of being absorbed by soils, grass and planting and released more slowly.

The surge of water run-off from former front gardens piles the pressure on drains and sewers. It also increases the amount of litter, oil and other pollution being washed into drains and local rivers.

- **Temperature:** another side effect of the loss of so many front gardens is temperature, especially in towns. Hard surfaces absorb and store daytime heat. This tends to result in warmer temperatures in towns and cities.

The increased frequency of extreme heat brings health risks as well as causing sleeplessness due to higher night time temperatures.

Studies show how green space and planting helps moderate excessive temperatures in towns, ease what is known as the 'urban heat island' effect, and relieve the pressure on the NHS treating people with health problems exacerbated by higher-than-normal temperatures, not just during heatwaves.

- **Pollution:** the loss of space for planting also means fewer plants play their part either in absorbing carbon dioxide or helping to reduce or deflect some other air pollutants.
- **Wildlife:** the loss of front gardens means less space for nature as fewer spaces exist for wild creatures - from bees, butterflies and birds to hedgehogs - to shelter and feed from the variety of plants.

Planted front gardens look more attractive, add value to a property (as can an off-road parking space), can add to a sense of security and help make the rest of the street scene and neighbourhood more attractive.

Parking pressure

Parking on a former front garden creates a domino effect because installing dropped kerbs removes on-road parking spaces.

A garden lost to parking does not create more space for parking. If anything, more space is lost. The amount of street parking space declines because access is needed in front of the property. Also, the road and pavement are already hard surfaces and the front garden adds to the amount covered with concrete or paving.

Local authorities continue to roll out controlled parking zones (CPZs), paying for which is avoided by parking in the front garden. Government grants for installing home charging points for electric vehicles has also fuelled the desire for off-road parking, often at the cost of a front garden.

The rise in the number of multi-occupier households often means more vehicles demanding off-street parking space.

As such, the Parish Council has approached its planning consultant Jo-Anne Garrick to seek her support in producing such a report to be sent to Durham County Council. Jo-Anne has agreed to carry out this work but has asked for specific examples of this within the City so as to reduce her time and workload and hence associated costs to the Council for this work.

Jo-Anne has quoted £1,300 to £1,600 in order to carry out this work on behalf of the Parish Council.

DECISIONS REQUIRED	1) For Members to support in the production of a list of properties and streets within the parish area where the removal of the front gardens is felt to have adversely impacted on the character of the area. 2) If 1 is agreed and upon completion of this list, to engage the services of Jo-Anne Garrick as set out in the above report to produce this report supporting a new Article 4 Direction.
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ITEM 6: TO CONSIDER THE PROPOSAL TO SEEK SUPPORT FROM THE COUNTY DURHAM ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (CDALC) TO LOBBY GOVERNMENT ON MAKING HEALTH IMPACTS ONE OF THE MAIN LICENSING OBJECTIVES UNDER THE LICENSING ACT.

As Members are aware, the City of Durham Parish Council has a highly active Planning and Licensing Committee and a key part of the Committee's aims is to promote the health and wellbeing of its residents, particularly on issues relating to the licensing aspect of its work. The Committee has consistently lobbied for health to be included as a fifth licensing objective in the Licensing Act 2003.

In its recent response to the County Council's Statement of Licensing Policy consultation, the Parish Council called on the Licensing Authority to continue to press Government on this issue.

Background

Local health bodies became a Responsible Authority for Licensing through the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 which was implemented in 2012. However, health was not made a licensing objective at that time. Any health representation must be made under other licensing objectives, for example public safety or protection of children from harm.

In April 2013 Public Health teams moved from the NHS to the Local Authority as a result of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 which strengthened the relationship between public health and local government.

The Local Government Association (2020) issued advice to public health on how to intervene on licensing issues stating that "whilst public health can contribute against any of the four existing licensing objectives, in practice it can be difficult for them to be heard". In 2014, and again in 2021, the Local Government Association called for a public health licensing objective and an LGA survey (2016) found widespread support amongst Directors of Public Health for a new public health licensing objective. The Association of Directors of Public Health (2023) advocate for a new public health licensing objective as part of the Licensing Act to ensure that public health is placed at the centre of licensing policies.

The Home Office (2023) in their Revised Guidance issued under section 182 of the Licensing Act 2003 (2.8) specifically state that public health should not be considered under the "public safety" licensing objective because "this concerns the safety of people using the relevant premises rather than public health which is addressed in other legislation", although Directors of Public Health are allowed to contribute to the protection of children from harm licensing objective with data on harms to underage drinkers (2.35). The Home Office (2012) dismissed introducing health as a fifth licensing objective "as being disproportionate given the evidence base and anticipated larger costs to business".

Alcohol-related health data from 2022 (OHID,2024) shows that deaths wholly due to alcohol in England continue to rise and those partly due to alcohol follow a similar trend but at this time in 2024 health is still not a licensing objective.

Health as a licensing objective has been something that Licensing Authorities and the LGA have been lobbying for since around 2012.

There was a commitment to investigate this as part of the government's alcohol strategy published in March 2012. Home Office Alcohol Strategy (publishing.service.gov.uk) and the government consulted on the issue in 2012: Impact Assessment - health as a licensing objective (publishing.service.gov.uk). The response states:

"During the recent consultation, the Government sought views on how to introduce health as a licensing objective linked specifically to cumulative impact. This would allow licensing authorities to take wider alcohol-related health harm into account when developing cumulative impact policies. A clear theme from respondents was that, at present, local processes and data collection are insufficient, meaning that it is unclear how this proposal could be implemented in practice. The Government remains interested in this policy in principle, as there is good international evidence that controls on premises density reduce a range of harms from alcohol, including crime and health harms. However more work is required at a local level to put in place processes to underpin it. This will form a key part of work in local alcohol action areas. The Government will ask Public Health England to support local areas in England interested in this work."

This was looked at again in 2017 as part of a House of Lords Select Committee on the Licensing Act. The conclusion the Select Committee came to then was:

"All Governments should adopt policies attempting to reduce the harmful consumption of alcohol. The Government has done so for England and Wales, the Scottish Government for Scotland, and in later chapters we note steps which could be taken within the licensing system to take forward this policy. But putting ourselves in the position of a licensing authority having to decide whether to refuse an application, or to impose conditions, we do not believe that the promotion of public health is capable of relating to specific premises and particular licensing applications. Promotion of health and well-being is a necessary and desirable objective for an alcohol strategy, but we accept that it is not appropriate as a licensing objective."

Again, it's the same argument that health data is too broad to be used in licensing applications. However, Local Authorities and the Local Government Association (LGA) continue to lobby Government on this issue.

What do the stats show in County Durham?

- Alcohol misuse is the biggest risk factor for death, ill-health, and disability among 15–49-year-olds in the UK. It's also the fifth biggest risk factor across all ages and is a causal factor in more than 60 medical conditions. The North East suffers disproportionately from alcohol harm with the highest rates of alcohol-related hospital admissions and alcohol specific deaths in England. Alcohol is estimated to cost North East public services and employers over one billion pounds a year.

- In 2021/22 the rate of hospital admissions for alcohol specific conditions in County Durham was 849.5 per 100,000 population. This was significantly worse than England (626.1/100k) but better than the North East (991.4/100k). The admission episodes for alcohol-specific conditions for under 18's was 52.5 per 100,000 (2019/19-20/21) this was statistically significantly worse than England and statistically similar to the North East.
- The impact of harmful drinking and alcohol dependence is much greater for those in the lowest income bracket and those experiencing the highest levels of deprivation. The highest levels of alcohol-related hospital admissions are registered in Durham City, Blackhall, Gilesgate Moor, Dawdon and Seaham Harbour, Chester-Le-Street West and Pelton Fell, Shildon and Horden. This highlights links between alcohol misuse and deprivation but also indicates how high levels of alcohol intake are also influenced by the night time economy.
- Durham County Council is the licensing authority for the Licensing Act 2003 and administers and enforces the law relating to the sale and supply of alcohol. There are currently 2232 premises licensed under the Licensing Act and in addition, in 23/24, a total of 755 notifications were received for occasional, one-off events. Applications were received for 54 new premises licences.
- 32.5% of people who entered support services successfully completed alcohol treatment in 2022. This is statistically similar to England (35.1%).
- The alcohol-related mortality rate was 47.9 per 100,000. This is statistically significantly worse than England. (39.7) (2022).
- Alcohol-related crime and disorder cost Durham Police approximately £149.8million in 2024.

What can we do about this issue?

There are limitations to the actions Durham County Council is currently able to take to address alcohol-related health harms on a local level. The County Council uses its existing powers well for example introducing a Public Spaces Protection Order against street drinking in Durham City and, in response to government guidance, a new Combating Drugs and Alcohol Partnership (CDAP) working across County Durham and Darlington was initiated to coordinate the work of the police, local authority, NHS, probation, social care and the community and voluntary sector to deliver a local plan for action.

However, the Planning and Licensing Committee believes that, in order to address the alcohol related harm in the longer term, national policies are required, such as minimum unit price alongside a public health licensing objective.

Local public health teams are given the responsibility to address alcohol-related health harms and have been specified as a responsible authority to do so but

without the tools or legitimacy to make meaningful representations. This makes it hard to justify the expenditure of public health resources in making representations to licensing applications and attending the subsequent hearings where the outcome is uncertain and potentially limited to the application of conditions.

Public health as a licensing objective and minimum unit pricing are important cogs within a complex machine and the Committee acknowledges that health as a licensing objective is not a panacea for all alcohol-related harms.

A fifth licensing objective of health and wellbeing would allow the public health team to use other health data without being restricted to the four licensing objectives. For example, liver health data, mortality rates in specific areas, etc. This information is not used in licensing decisions as it does not relate to one of the licensing objectives, however one of the causative factors of a reduced life expectancy is alcohol use. In the main, a fifth licensing objective would strengthen the representations from Public Health.

The proposal to make health a fifth licensing objective would directly impact on health and wellbeing. It would provide Public Health with a stronger voice when objecting to licence applications and would allow health data to be used to directly address health harms in Durham County Council's Statement of Licensing Policy.

The Local Government Association has lobbied Government on health as a licensing objective several times over the last ten years. Similarly, this matter has been addressed when the Local Government Association has responded to Government consultations on this matter. The Parish Council's Planning and Licensing Committee is seeking CDALC's support in joining the Local Government Association in their efforts to lobby for this additional licensing objective.

Timeline – Alcohol Licensing and Public Health

2003	Local Authorities (the licensing authority) have responsibility for the issue of licenses for the sale or supply of alcohol
2009 (Scotland)	The Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 (implemented in 2009) makes public health boards responsible authorities includes "protecting and improving public health" as a fifth licensing objective.
2011 (2012)	Local health bodies become Responsible Authorities for licensing but there is no health licensing objective
2012 (2013)	Local public health teams move from the NHS into the local authority
2014	Local Government Association (LGA) calls for a public health licensing objective
2021	Local Government Association (LGA) calls for a public health licensing objective
2022	Deaths wholly due to alcohol in England continue to rise. There are 7,912 alcohol-specific deaths (wholly due to alcohol) in England, an increase of 56.7% from 5,050 deaths in 2006 and a 4.7% increase since 2021. The trends in alcohol-related deaths (deaths wholly or partly due to

2023	alcohol) and deaths from chronic liver disease are similar (OHID, 2024). Association of Directors of Public Health advocate for a new public health licensing objective as part of the Licensing Act to ensure that public health is placed at the centre of licensing policies.
2024/ 2025	Health is still not a licensing objective in England

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to support the City of Durham Parish Council's efforts in calling on CDALC to join with the LGA and lobby Government to introduce health as the fifth licensing objective within the Licensing Act 2003.
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ITEM 8: PARISH COUNCIL STRATEGY 2025/26

The aim of the Parish Council's strategy is to give local residents, Councillors and Officers a clear understanding of what the council is trying to achieve and how it intends to deliver its aims and objectives. The strategy sets out what the areas of development or change the Council intends to focus on over the next year outlining those areas of service that are identified as priority aims and objectives.

As part of this, all Parish Council Committees were asked to agree their priorities for the forthcoming financial year so that this can feed into the Parish Council's budget agreement.

The purpose of this report is to set out the aims and objectives of each Committee of the Parish Council under these five key priorities. Councillors will also be considering budget proposals as part of the report into the Parish Council's budget for 2025/26.

The Finance Committee and Personnel Committee are not included in this as they are Committees which support the day-to-day management of the Parish Council as opposed to delivering projects for the community.

Members have agreed that the five overarching priorities for the Parish Council are:

1. Being an ambitious voice for the city
2. Enhancing the physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish
3. Upholding the Neighbourhood Plan and representing the parish on planning matters
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.

Looking Forwards

The 'Looking Forwards' document has also been included as part of this work. 'Looking Forwards' is a companion document to the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan and has been developed by the City of Durham Parish Council Neighbourhood Plan Working Party. It is built on the aspirations and views as expressed by local people for their City during the five years of preparation of the Plan. It looks forward to greater involvement of the community in making Durham a more creative and sustainable City.

Committee priorities

The priorities for each Committee in 2025/26 are set out below:

Planning and Licensing Committee

Council priorities 2025/26	Planning priorities 2025/26	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
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1. Being an ambitious voice for the city	Representing the Parish as a consultee on planning matters	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 4: A City With Attractive And Affordable Places To Live
	Consulting the Parish on planning matters	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future
2. Enhancing physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish	Ensuring schemes deliver the required levels of affordable housing and adapted housing for the disabled and elderly.	Theme 4. A City With Attractive And Affordable Places To Live
	Protect existing Rights of Way and promoting the creation and adoption of new Public Rights of Way and ensuring that they are accessible to all.	Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 5: A City With A Modern And Sustainable Transport Infrastructure
	Protecting our green infrastructure and assets within our parish boundary and ensuring that they are used to the best possible public benefit.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
3. Upholding the neighbourhood plan and representing the	Upholding the development plans for the area i.e.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future

parish on planning matters.	Neighbourhood Plan and County Durham Plan.	Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 4: A City With Attractive And Affordable Places To Live
	To maintain and develop an evidence-base to update the Neighbourhood Plan and comment on planning applications.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 4: A City With Attractive And Affordable Places To Live
	Protecting our World Heritage Site, Conservation Areas and designated and non-designated heritage assets.	Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
	Delivering a Conservation Area Management Plan	Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
	Protecting against overdevelopment	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 4: A City With Attractive And Affordable Places To Live

4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish	Supporting accommodation above retail units in the City centre.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 4: A City With Attractive And Affordable Places To Live
	Supporting tourist attractions and transport infrastructure for the visitor economy	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.	Putting green future at the heart of planning considerations	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
	Resisting schemes which do not deliver net zero by 2030 and supporting those which do.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future

Council priorities 2025/26	Licensing priorities 2025/26	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
1. Being an ambitious voice for the city	Representing the Parish on licensing matters	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
2. Enhancing physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish	Ensuring that all new licensing applications and existing premises promote the four licensing objectives. Lobbying central Government on ensuring that health impacts become the fifth licensing objectives.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
	Empowering our residents to make informed	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future

	representations on licensing matters.	Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
	Supporting a cumulative impact policy for the parish Supporting a late night-levy on licensed premises in the parish.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
	Making licensing as open as possible by supporting DCC's new online licensing portal	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
	Making the City more accessible to all by representing the needs of all users in relation to pavement and outdoor seating applications.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
3. Upholding the neighbourhood plan and representing the parish on planning matters.	Ensuring that the objectives of licensing and planning are aligned.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish	Promoting the early evening economy to families and tourists	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City

		Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.	To encourage all new taxi licenses granted by DCC to be for low emissions/ electrical vehicles only.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future

Environment Committee

Council priorities 2025/26	Environment priorities 2025/26	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
1. Being an ambitious voice for the city	Engaging with and responding to residents of all ages and backgrounds in environment-related work Mobilise Volunteer groups Work with young people and respond to their concerns	Theme 6: A City with an enriched community life.
2. Enhancing physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish	Promote cleaner air, a cleaner river, green spaces, and streets for living across the city. Reduction in light pollution. Reduction in night time noise. Sustainable travel Supporting the creation of a Community Emergency Plan	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 5: A City With A Modern And Sustainable Transport Infrastructure
3. Upholding the neighbourhood plan and representing the parish on planning matters.	Work with all relevant committees to ensure the climate and ecological emergencies are considered in all planning matters. Sustainable housing	Theme 4: A City with attractive and affordable places to live
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish	Improve and protect the appearance of the city and its heritage.	Theme 2: A Beautiful and Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy

5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.	Be proactive and collaborate with all partners (including Parish Council committees, Durham County Council, residents, developers, landlords, and other businesses) to coordinate our impact on the climate and ecological emergencies and increase community resilience. Encourage sustainable Travel Increased awareness and action on climate change. Tackle the ecological emergency	Theme 1: A City with A Sustainable Future Theme 5: A City With A Modern And Sustainable Transport Infrastructure
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Business Committee

Council priorities 2025/26	Business priorities 2025/26	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
1. Being an ambitious voice for the city	Engaging with local businesses, including improving the visitor economy	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
2. Enhancing physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish	Promoting responsible and environmentally sound businesses	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
3. Upholding the neighbourhood plan and representing the parish on planning matters.	Supporting new businesses and attempting to fill empty units across the City and promoting the overnight stay economy/ businesses across the city	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish	Marketing Durham as a place to visit, particularly the overnight stay sector	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy Theme 5: A City with a modern and sustainable transport infrastructure

	Contracting professional support for local businesses in the city	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
	Promoting footfall in the city centre and encouraging a variety of businesses to ensure wide range of choice for visitors	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.	Reducing food miles by encouraging the use of local suppliers and emerging green technologies and services	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy Theme 6: A City with an enriched community life

DECISION REQUIRED	Members are asked to approve the Parish Council Strategy for 2025/26 as set out above.
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ITEM 9: CONSIDERATION OF BUDGETS FROM COMMITTEES

As Members are aware, there is a need for the Parish Council to have agreed its budget and to submit its precept request for the forthcoming Financial Year by the end of January 2025.

In order to support this work, all of the Parish Council's Committees met last year and have submitted the following budget proposals for their work from April 2025.

In mid-January, the Parish Council's Finance Committee met to consider these proposals and agreed to recommend the following budget for the Parish Council's Full Council to agree in January 2025.

Planning and Licensing Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Representing the parish on planning and licensing matters	
Professional support in responding to planning applications and licensing hearings	£5,000.00
Review of County Durham Plan policies	£5,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Improving the licensed economy	
Enhanced drug searching scheme with Durham Police	£600.00
Deployable noise monitoring equipment	£0.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2025-26 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£10,600.00

Environment Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Additional policing and safety for the parish area	
Enhanced SLA with Durham Police for late night policing	£40,000.00
Safety of Women at Night Hub	£10,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Noise abatement	
Building on the <i>Shhh...11pm to 7am</i> campaign	£2,000.00
PRIORITY 3: Clean Air, Clean and Green City	
Planting budget	£15,000.00
Supporting local climate groups	£2,000.00
PRIORITY 4: Engaging the youth in the work of the Parish Council	
Project working with young people (clean air and climate change)	£2,500.00
PRIORITY 5: Improving the appearance of our City	
Neighbourhood Warden SLA	£12,000.00
PRIORITY 6: Promoting the heritage of our parish area	
Introduction of new blue plaques	£5,000.00
PRIORITY 7: Enhancing the River Wear	
Supporting the work of the Wear Rivers Trust (Education and INNs)	£5,000.00
PRIORITY 8: Emergency planning	
Supporting our community in preparing for emergency events	£2,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2025-26 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£95,500.00

Business Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Supporting Independent businesses	
Professional support for independent businesses in Durham	£3,600.00
PRIORITY 2: Increasing footfall through events	
Hosting events in Durham City (Remembrance Sunday, Christmas events, D-Day Anniversary, miscellaneous).	£30,000.00
Sponsoring community events with local businesses – a specific focus on improving the early evening economy	£5,000.00
PRIORITY 3: Tackling shoplifting and anti-social behaviour	
Funding new radios and other initiatives as part of Shopwatch	£2,000.00
PRIORITY 4: Improving shop frontages in the City	
Christmas Frontage Awards (previously under Environment Committee)	£1,500.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2025-26 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£42,100.00

Full Council

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Administration of Parish Council	
(Office rent, room hire, audit, insurance, printing and postage, newsletters, website and other expenditure)	£19,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Training of staff and Councillors	
Training budget	£3,000.00
PRIORITY 3: supporting local community and voluntary organisations	
Grants budget	£15,000.00
PRIORITY 4: Staffing costs	
Clerk salary (including salary, pension, NI on costs)	£85,000.00
PRIORITY 5: Paying for elections	
Parish contribution towards the cost of all-out elections	£20,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2025-26 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£142,000.00

General reserves	£45,000.00
Contingencies	£15,000.00
Election reserve	£5,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2024-25 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£65,000.00

Committee	Cost (£)
Planning and Licensing Committee	£10,600.00
Environment Committee	£95,500.00
Business Committee	£42,100.00
Full Council	£142,000.00
Contingencies and election reserves (to be added)	£20,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2025/26 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£310,200.00

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to agree a budget for financial year 2025/26 from the report set out above.
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ITEM 10: PRECEPT REQUEST 2025/26

Budget

Please refer to Item 9 for consideration of budget priorities for 2025/2026.

Information on Council Tax base

Council Tax base is calculated by taking the number of houses in the City of Durham Parish Council area, allocating a weight to them based on their council tax banding and adding up the total of the weighted households. For example, higher council tax band properties carry a higher weighting and lower council tax base properties carry a lower council tax weighting. The Council Tax Base can therefore fluctuate from year to year based on the number of properties in each area. For example, council tax base will increase if any new houses have been built and the occupants have started to pay council tax but may decrease if for example any houses have been demolished in an area or have changed their use from Use Class C3 to Use Class C4 or sui generis (non-tax paying Use Classes).

The 2025/26 Tax Base is 4,622.9. The 2024/25 City of Durham Parish Council Tax Base was calculated at 4,450.1. Our Tax Base has therefore increased by 172.8.

Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Grant

The LCTRS grant payable to the City of Durham for 2025/26 will be £0.00. In 2024/25, the Parish Council received £8,436.00 from the LCTRS grant owing to an increase in the number of Council tax exempt properties in the current financial year.

Precept request

The precept request must be submitted to Durham County Council by the end of January 2022.

The Parish Council's precept charge for Band D currently sits at £61.60. Although the City of Durham Parish Council area has a high population, its tax income is lower than areas of similar size due to the significant number of properties exempt from Council tax because of their use as student accommodation.

The Band D charge in the City of Durham parish area remains one of the lowest in County Durham.

Precept options

Option 1 (freeze the precept) - Should the Parish Council wish to freeze the precept at £61.60. This will generate a total income of £284,770.64.

Option 2 (raise the precept in line with inflation) - As of November 2024, the UK's inflation rate was 2.6%, which is higher than the previous month's 2.3% but lower than the long-term average of 2.82%. Should the Parish Council wish to increase the precept in line with inflation at 2.6%, this will equate to a Band D charge of £63.20 and generate a total income of £292,167.28.

Option 3 (raise the precept in line with the Finance Committee's recommended budget) – this will result in an increase of £5.50 on to the Band D precept charge from £61.60 to £67.10 – an increase of 8.55%.

DECISION REQUIRED	Councillors are asked to consider the above information and approve an appropriate precept option for 2025/26
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ITEM 11: REQUEST FOR THE PARISH COUNCIL TO ENDORSE THE FOSSIL FUEL NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY

Report by Councillor V Ashfield

We are in a climate emergency and fossil fuels are responsible for the bulk of CO2 emissions worldwide.

Support for the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty is gaining momentum worldwide. Many local and subnational decision-makers are supporting the call. One hundred cities and subnational governments – including the US state of California, London, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Barcelona, Vancouver, Sydney, Los Angeles and Toronto – have endorsed the treaty. An ever-growing bloc of national governments has joined them - including Colombia, which is economically dependent on fossil fuels. The support of local councils around the world is key for building the pressure to get more national governments on board and ready to start the treaty process.

We need to accelerate a globally just transition away from coal, oil and gas and towards a zero carbon world, and local councils are an essential element in making this happen. Citizens, businesses, public services and others in every local authority area are responsible for the consumption of energy and emissions of greenhouse gases globally. But local authorities are also on the vanguard of climate solutions, stopping fossil fuel projects, developing sustainable energy alternatives, retrofitting buildings and dropping fossil fuel financing.

Without addressing the production of fossil fuels at source we risk hugely overshooting our climate targets. The UN Environment Programme's most recent Production Gap report found that: *"Governments, in aggregate, still plan to produce more than double the amount of fossil fuels in 2030 than would be consistent with limiting warming to 1.5°C."*[\[1\]](#)

The International Energy Agency has highlighted that international cooperation will be vital to keeping 1.5 alive.[\[2\]](#) Now is the time to put the question of managing an equitable transition away from fossil fuels on the international agenda and devise a process for negotiating this globally as quickly as possible.

The three pillars of action proposed by the Fossil Fuel Treaty are:

- Non-Proliferation - preventing new coal, oil, or gas developments
- Equitable Phase Out of existing fossil fuel production plans
- Just Transition so that no community, country or worker is left behind

What the Parish Council can achieve on its own is small so I believe we should call upon the County Council to support this treaty. DCC is doing good work towards achieving carbon neutral in the County, mainly through their Climate Emergency Plan 3, and the targets are ambitious. A motion from DCC to endorse the Fossil Fuel Treaty would put additional pressure on the UK Government to endorse this important treaty.

A MOTION AFFIRMING CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL'S ONGOING COMMITMENT TO ADDRESSING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND ITS ENDORSEMENT OF THE FOSSIL FUEL NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY

This Council notes that:

- 1. The scientific consensus is clear that fossil fuels are primarily responsible for accelerating global climate change, and that the climate crisis now represents one of the preeminent threats to global lives and livelihoods.*
- 2. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report states that it is unequivocal that climate change has already disrupted human and natural systems and that societal choices and actions implemented in the next decade determine the extent to which medium- and long-term pathways will deliver higher or lower climate resilient development.*
- 3. The International Energy Agency stated in its May 2021 report "Net Zero by 2050" that in order to reach that goal there should be no new oil or gas fields, or new coal mines, as of that moment.*
- 4. The Paris Climate Agreement is silent on coal, oil and gas, an omission with respect to the supply and production of fossil fuels (the largest source of GHGs) that needs to be collectively addressed by other means; and that global governments and the fossil fuel industry are currently planning to produce more than double the amount of coal, oil and gas by 2030 than can be burned if the world is to limit warming to 1.5°C and avert catastrophic climate disruption, and such plans risk undoing the work of our Council to reduce GHG emissions.*
- 5. A new global initiative is underway calling for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty that would plan the end of new fossil fuel exploration and expansion, phase out existing production in line with the global commitment to limit warming to 1.5°C and accelerate equitable transition plans globally.*
- 6. Our entire global community will be impacted by the climate crisis. Vulnerable communities, and those who have contributed the least to climate change, however, will often be impacted most acutely.*

This Council believes that:

- 7. New fossil fuel infrastructure and expanded reliance on fossil fuels exposes communities to untenable risks to public health and safety at the local and global levels; and that the economic opportunities presented by a clean energy transition far outweigh the opportunities presented by an economy supported by expanding fossil fuel use and extraction.*

This Council resolves to:

- 8. Formally endorse the call for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty and make that endorsement public.*

9. *Call on Durham County Council to endorse the call for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty and to call on the UK government to do likewise.*
10. *Reaffirm our commitment to rapidly decarbonising our economy at a local and national level.*
11. *Write to the Local Government Association and raise the need for a planned phase out of fossil fuels, and to call on it to promote the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty among its members.*

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to agree the motion as set out in the above report.
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ITEM 12: REPORT ON PARISH COUNCIL INTERNAL CONTROLS

REPORT TO COUNCIL: 22nd JANUARY 2025

1. RESPONSIBILITY

Regulation 4 of the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2011 requires Councils to carry out a review of their internal controls annually before the end of the financial year.

The City of Durham Parish Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for.

In discharging this responsibility, the Council is also responsible for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of the Council's functions and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

2. SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CONTROL

The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them effectively, efficiently and economically.

The Parish Council has adopted a risk register and this is under continuing review by the Clerk and the Chair/ Chairs of Committees and any issues arising from risk assessments carried out will be reported to Full Council.

The assessment of the risk attached to any and all of the Council's actions and responsibilities forms an essential part of all Council decisions. Risk mitigation (the reduction in the level of risk where it is deemed to be too high) is integral to many of the Council's policies but it also forms an important part of the detailed Standing Orders which govern the way in which the Council carries out its business.

A copy of this risk register has been circulated to Members and this includes a table identifying risk mitigation/ contingencies. This is kept under annual review and Members are asked to approve the risk register and any associated mitigation actions identified through this review.

The Council

The Council has elected a Chair who is responsible for the smooth running of meetings and together with the Clerk for ensuring that all Council decisions are lawful.

The Council reviews its obligations and objectives and approves budgets for the following year at its January full Council meeting each year. The January meeting of the Council also approves the level of precept for the following financial year.

The Full Council meets at least 10 times per year. The Parish Council does not usually meet in August or in December.

A budget report is prepared and submitted to all of the Parish Council's Finance Committee meetings showing income and expenditure together with a budget update for all Committee spends. Any budget revision reports are also reported for information and these set out any changes to the budget as per Council decisions or any known budget over or underspends.

Clerk to the Council

The Council has appointed a Clerk to the Council who acts as the Council's advisor and administrator. The Clerk is the Council's Responsible Financial Officer and is responsible for administering the Council's finances. The Clerk is responsible for the day-to-day compliance with laws and regulations and advises the Council on managing risks. The Clerk also ensures that the Council's procedures, control systems and policies are adhered to. The Clerk also manages projects agreed by full Council and works with all suppliers and contractors agreed by full Council to carry out functions on behalf of the Council.

Payments

All payments made are reported to all Finance Committee meetings. The Parish Council now makes all payments via electronic banking. Two Members of the Council from the current list of five authorised signatories (excluding the Clerk who acts as administrator) must authorise every payment against invoices before authorising the payment using their own login details provided by the bank.

There is a facility for making urgent payments out of meeting if necessary. Such payments are also reported to the Parish Council's Finance Committee meeting and all decisions to spend funds as urgent action are ratified at the next Full Council meetings and minuted as such.

Risk Assessments/Risk Management

The Council carries out regular risk assessments in respect of actions. The Clerk makes an annual risk management report to the Council. A review of financial management risks is included as part of the review report.

Internal Audit

Last year, the Council appointed an independent Internal Auditor, Mr Gordon Fletcher, who reports to the Council on the adequacy of its:

- Records
- Procedures
- Systems
- Internal control
- Regulations
- Risk management
- Reviews
- Insurance cover

A review of internal audit must be carried out before the end of each financial year.

Gordon Fletcher has indicated that he is willing to carry out an audit of the Parish Council again next year. The cost of this service is £175.

Gordon was previously the Audit Manager at Easington District Council before retiring when the Unitary Council was formed and set up his own business by providing an internal audit service for Town and Parish Councils. This has grown to a current portfolio of 7 local Town Councils and 24 local Parish Councils.

Gordon is C.M.I.I.A. (Chartered Member of the Institute of Internal Auditors) qualified and has his own professional indemnity insurance.

External Audit

The Council's External Auditors are Mazars, appointed by the Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments (SAAA). They submit an annual Certificate of Audit, which is presented to the Council, together with a copy of their report listing any issues to be raised. At the end of the Audit the Council must display the Notice of Conclusion of Audit for 14 days and must make the Annual Governance and Audit Return (AGAR) and Final Accounts available on request. These are also displayed on the Parish Council's website.

4. REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

The Council has a responsibility for conducting an annual review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control. The review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control is informed by the work of:

- The Full Council
- The Clerk to the Council who has responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control environment and managing risks
- The independent Internal Auditor who reviews the Council's systems of internal control
- Mazars, the Council's external auditors, who make the final check using the AGAR, which is completed and signed by the Responsible Financial Officer, the Chairman and the Internal Auditor.

5. EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

The external audit report for 2023-24 was carried out by Mazars and was completed in September 2024. No issues were raised by the external auditors.

6. INTERNAL CONTROL ISSUES

The Auditors did not raise any issues as part of the 2023-24 Audit.

DECISIONS REQUIRED	1) Councillors are requested to approve the report. 2) Councillors are asked to approve the risk register and any associated mitigation actions identified through the annual review.
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	3) Councillors are asked to agree to the appointment of Mr Gordon Fletcher as the Parish Council's internal auditor for the financial year 2024/25.
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