



City of Durham Parish Council

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Date of summons: 16th October 2025

SUMMONS

To all Members of the City of Durham Parish Council: Councillors V Ashfield, G Bignardi, L Brown, T Cleaver, R Cornwell, D Freeman, R Handy, G Holland, E Hopgood, C Lattin, P Layton, F Robinson, E Scott, S Walker and L Wilson.

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 October 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 MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 24TH SEPTEMBER 2025**
- 4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
- 5. COMMITTEE UPDATES**

- **Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from the meetings held on 8th and 19th September 2025**

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

<https://cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk/meetings/planning-and-licensing-committee/>

- **Environment Committee minutes from the meeting held on 9th September 2025**

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

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

- Proposal for a new heritage blue plaque dedicated to former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Mo Mowlam at Trevelyan College
- Follow-up report from the Elvet Clean Air group on clean air initiatives for the Elvet Area

- 6. CHAIR'S UPDATES**

The Chair will provide a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 22nd October 2025

- 7. COMPLETION OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S EXTERNAL AUDIT 2024/25**
- 8. STANDARDS COMMITTEE PROPOSALS AFFECTING PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS**
- 9. DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2026/27 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2026/27-2029/30**

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 3 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.

- 10. REPORTS FROM PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

- Report by Councillor R Cornwell on the Student Housing Management Group meeting held on 29th September 2025.

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Wednesday 24th September 2025 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**), G Bignardi, T Cleaver, R Cornwell, D Freeman, R Handy, G Holland, C Lattin, P Layton, F Robinson, E Scott and L Wilson.

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 L Brown, V Ashfield and E Hopgood.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

Councillor S. Walker declared an interest in the item concerning the Merryoaks Community Hall Energy Resilience Project and withdrew from the room during its consideration.

Councillor E Scott also declared an interest in item 10 as an existing Board Member of Redhills and took no part in the discussion or vote on this matter.

3. PRESENTATION BY MR ARTHUR LOCKYEAR MBE, VOLUNTEER REMEMBRANCE COORDINATOR, ON THE DURHAM CITY REMEMBRANCE PARADE

Mr Arthur Lockyear MBE, Volunteer Remembrance Coordinator, presented an update on the organisation of the 2025 Durham City Remembrance Parade.

Arthur outlined the coordination work undertaken with partners such as Durham Cathedral, Durham County Council, the Police and event contractors and took the opportunity to particularly thank the Clerk, Chair and Councillor E Scott for their continued support in the delivery of this important event.

Arthur highlighted the significant work undertake in relation to risk assessments, insurance arrangements and close communication with the Lumiere organisers to prevent scheduling conflicts this year.

Arthur advised that he hoped that as many Members as possible would be able to attend the parade this year. Following the showing of a video from last year's parade, Members thanked Arthur for his continued dedication and civic service.

4. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 23RD JULY 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd July 2025 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings and signed by the Chair.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mrs Lucy Szablewska raised the issue of the A1(M) junctions 60-64 improvement works with the Parish Council. Lucy highlighted that residents living along the A167 through Durham have put up with heavy lorry traffic throughout the night since 7th July 2025 and this was supposed to end in mid-September. Lucy asked if the Parish Council could contact the National Highways team about this, in order to understand why this traffic is still being diverted along the A167 instead of allowing traffic to travel one lane of the A1(M) rather than shut off the entire motorway. The Parish Council **agreed** to contact National Highways on this matter.

6. COMMITTEE UPDATES

Planning and Licensing Committee

Councillor G Holland presented the Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from the meetings held on 11th July and 25th July 2025. There being no queries from Members, Councillor G Holland moved on to Committee reports.

Consultation on proposed countywide Article 4 Direction to improve the management of HMOs

Members considered the Durham County Council consultation on a proposed Countywide Article 4 Direction for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).

Members reviewed detailed evidence regarding the existing Article 4 areas within Durham City, Framwellgate Moor, Newton Hall, Pity Me, Mount Oswald, Carville, and Belmont. Members noted that the new proposal sought to extend control over small HMOs (Class C4) throughout County Durham, requiring planning permission for any new conversion from dwelling houses (Class C3).

Members expressed support for extending Article 4 coverage to the Aykley Heads area of Durham City, noting that this remains one of the few urban parts of the Parish not currently covered. However, the Council considered that applying the Direction to the entire County was disproportionate and inadequately evidenced. It was also noted that Policy 16.3 of the County Durham Plan provides clear guidance for Durham City but no equivalent policy exists for other County areas.

The Council further discussed the administrative and legal implications of introducing a Countywide Article 4, noting potential increases in appeals, workload, and cost.

Councillor Cornwell recommended that the Parish Council call for stronger evidence, targeted application and parallel introduction of an additional licensing scheme for small HMOs to enable effective monitoring and this was supported by all Members.

Members unanimously **approved** the submission of the Parish Council's response to Durham County Council as drafted by Councillor R Cornwell.

Proposal to support the consultation and engagement for the Durham Castle and Cathedral UNESCO World Heritage Site Management Plan 2025-2035

Members were informed that all UK World Heritage Sites were required by UNESCO and UK Government policy to have an up-to-date Management Plan. The draft Plan for 2025–2035 provided a strategic framework organised around the themes of conserving, sharing, and regenerating the site and had been developed collaboratively with partners and stakeholders.

The Clerk reported that the Management Plan would be subject to a full public consultation in October 2025, coordinated by Durham County Council through its Let's Talk platform. To ensure accessibility, DCC Design Services had provided a quotation of £1,680 to design, format, and prepare the 109-page document as a fully accessible PDF.

Members noted that the World Heritage Site Coordinator, Dr Anne Allen, had invited the Parish Council to support the hosting of an in-person drop-in consultation event in Durham City. The event would provide residents with the opportunity to view the Plan, ask questions, and provide feedback directly, complementing the online consultation and ensuring inclusivity.

It was also reported that Durham University had committed £1,500 towards the production of a summary prospectus and case-for-support document to accompany the Plan, and that the City of Durham Trust had contributed £100 towards the design costs. This companion publication would present the Plan's key messages in a concise and engaging format, enhancing public understanding and outreach.

Members recognised the Parish Council's custodial role as the elected body for the historic core of Durham City. Members also noted that a total of £7,350 had been agreed as part of the Planning and Licensing Committee's budget for professional planning support, including carry-over funds relating to ongoing work such as the Article 4 report.

An additional £2,000 had been agreed to support the Parish Council's involvement in the County Durham Plan review. It was noted that due to delays in the review timetable, it was unlikely that this allocation would be required in the current financial year.

Members further noted that only £800 of the £7,350 budget had been spent to date, and therefore sufficient funds were available to support the proposed contribution.

Members unanimously **agreed** to contribute £1,580 towards the production of the accessible consultation document for the Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site Management Plan 2025–2035 and also agreed to support the hosting of a drop-in consultation event at Durham Town Hall in November 2025, to be

organised in partnership with the World Heritage Site Coordinator and Durham Cathedral.

Environment Committee

Councillor C Lattin presented the Environment Committee minutes from the meeting held on 8th July 2025. There being no queries from Members, Councillor C Lattin moved on to Committee reports.

Proposal to support the re-siting of the Houghall Boundary Stone between the City of Durham and Shincliffe parish boundaries at Maiden Castle

The Clerk presented a report outlining the historic background and significance of the Houghall Boundary Stone, situated between the City of Durham and Shincliffe Parish boundaries near Maiden Castle, and setting out proposals for its re-siting close to Houghall College on the A177.

Members noted that research undertaken by Steve Bryan, Secretary of the Shincliffe Local History Society, had traced the original location of the boundary stone to the 1870s, with evidence of its subsequent relocation following the construction of Houghall College in the 1930s. Members also noted that the stone was a Grade II listed structure and an important historical landmark marking the boundary responsibilities of the former Durham Urban Sanitary Authority and the Durham and Chester-le-Street Highway Board.

It was reported that consultation would be required with Durham County Council (DCC) regarding the proposed siting and the need to secure a firm foundation for the stone. Members noted advice suggesting that an aluminium rod may be necessary to ensure the internal stability of the stone. Members further noted that, following recent gas works along the A177, reassurances would be sought from DCC that any future works would not impact the stone or accompanying information board once installed.

An estimated total cost of £2,000 was presented for the project, including approximately £379 for the planning application, £700 for the design and production of an information board, £500–£600 for the construction of a suitable base for the stone and board, and provision for a small reception at the unveiling ceremony. Members noted that while the original location was unsuitable, the proposed new location—at the rear of the footway between the path and the Houghall hedge—appeared appropriate, subject to discussions with DCC Highways and Houghall College.

The proposed next steps were outlined as:

- Liaising with Highways to agree the final location and any technical requirements;
- Agreeing the final content for the information board prior to submitting a planning application;
- Submitting the planning application to the Local Planning Authority;
- Commissioning DCC or an approved contractor to undertake installation work following planning approval; and
- Completing the installation and unveiling before March 2026.

Members were reminded that the Parish Council had allocated £5,000 in the current financial year towards heritage projects.

Although this was originally intended for the blue plaque initiative, no expenditure had yet been made from this fund, and the Environment Committee had indicated its willingness to allocate £2,000 from this budget to support the re-siting of the Houghall Boundary Stone.

Following discussion and a proposal by Councillor D Freeman, Members unanimously **agreed** to reach out to colleagues at Shincliffe Parish Council, in order to seek a financial contribution towards this project. Depending on the response, the Parish Council **agreed** to allocate up to £2,000 from the heritage project budget to support the re-siting of the Boundary Stone as outlined in the report.

Proposal to support the Merryoaks Community Hall Energy Resilience Project

At this point in the meeting, Councillor S Walker left the room and Councillor D Freeman took over the chair.

Councillor C Lattin presented a report outlining a proposal for the Parish Council to support the Merryoaks Community Hall Energy Resilience Project. Members were reminded that when the Council had set its budget for the current financial year, a total of £2,500 had been allocated towards a clean air initiative, though no specific project had been designated for this funding at that time.

Councillor C Lattin advised that the Environment Committee had now proposed that this allocation be redirected to the Merryoaks Community Hall project, as it directly supported the Council's objectives of fostering a greener and more climate-resilient community.

Councillor C Lattin reported that the Lowes Barn Community Project (LBCP) had successfully secured a £20,000 grant from the Northern Powergrid Foundation to fund the installation of additional solar panels, battery storage, and a hybrid inverter at Merryoaks Community Hall. The total cost of the project amounted to £24,883.25, leaving a shortfall of approximately £4,883. Members were advised that the Hall itself would contribute £2,383, with the remaining £2,500 sought from the Parish Council to enable the project to proceed without delay.

Members noted that the project aimed to improve the Hall's energy resilience, allowing it to operate independently from the mains electricity supply during power outages. This would enable the Hall to serve as a local resilience hub—providing heat, lighting, hot food and drinks, and charging facilities for phones and medical equipment during prolonged power cuts. The project was expected to be of particular benefit to vulnerable residents, including older people, those with health conditions, individuals living alone, and those experiencing fuel poverty.

In addition to supporting emergency preparedness, Members noted that the project would also reduce the Hall's ongoing energy costs through renewable energy generation and storage. These savings would be reinvested into community services, strengthening the Hall's financial sustainability. The project

would therefore not only support the Council's environmental aims but also contribute to social wellbeing and local resilience.

Members further noted the wider community benefits, including greater energy security during emergencies, reduced fuel poverty, and lower carbon emissions through the increased use of renewable energy. By serving as a safe and powered neighbourhood hub, the project would also enhance community cohesion and mutual support among residents.

Councillor E Scott advised that she felt that this project could be seen as a pilot for the Parish Council's wider aims of supporting community centres and facilities across the parish area. Councillor D Freeman supported this and proposed that, in approving this grant, Merryoak Community Hall should not be invited to submit an Expression of Interest for the proposed wider funding set for 2026-27 to support community centres/ facilities and this was agreed by Members.

Following discussion, Members **agreed** to approve the allocation of £2,500 from the clean air initiative budget towards supporting the Merryoaks Community Hall Energy Resilience Project. This funding would provide the necessary match contribution, secure the external grant already awarded, and enable the timely installation of the infrastructure to deliver lasting benefits for the parish community.

Councillor S Walker returned to the room and resumed the Chair.

Business Committee

Councillor E Scott presented the Business Committee minutes from the meeting held on 10th July 2025. There being no queries from Members, Councillor E Scott moved on to Committee reports.

Proposal to provide further support to the City's ShopWatch initiative

Councillor E Scott presented a report seeking Members' approval for the allocation of £2,000 in additional financial support to the Durham City ShopWatch scheme.

Councillor E Scott reminded Members that this funding would cover the hire of eight further ShopWatch radios for a twelve-month period, with the aim of extending the scheme's coverage to include a number of charity shops and Durham Market traders. The Clerk highlighted that this initiative was intended to strengthen crime prevention measures and enhance community safety throughout the city centre.

Members noted that the ShopWatch scheme had been relaunched in November 2022 by PCSO Michael Ashurst, in partnership with Durham Constabulary and local daytime-economy businesses. The scheme functioned as a business crime reduction partnership, linking retailers, the police, and other stakeholders via a dedicated radio network and the SentrySIS crime reporting platform. This enabled the rapid sharing of information about incidents, improving response times to shoplifting, anti-social behaviour, and suspicious activity.

Councillor E Scott highlighted that ShopWatch had provided a vital communication link between retailers, Durham County Council's CCTV team, and the police, creating a rapid alert system that had led to a tangible reduction in retail crime. Retailers had reported improved safety, fewer incidents of stock loss, and greater confidence among staff and customers. There were currently 65 retailers and venues using the radios, and ShopWatch continued to meet monthly with the police, chaired by the Manager of Next in Durham City.

Councillor E Scott reminded Members that, in September 2023, the Parish Council had provided funding for the hire of fourteen radios for twelve months, supplied free of charge to businesses to demonstrate the scheme's benefits. All fourteen businesses had subsequently chosen to continue their radio contracts independently, citing improved liaison with police, a strong deterrent effect on offenders, and reassurance for staff.

Members **agreed** that the proposed funding for eight additional radios should be allocated in the same way, as a one-year commitment with no ongoing obligation. The additional radios would be distributed to local charity shops and market traders, who were often more vulnerable to theft but lacked the financial means to join the scheme independently. Members noted that this targeted support would help create a more inclusive and cohesive city-centre safety network, ensuring that all sectors of the retail community benefited equally from the initiative.

The Clerk confirmed that the £2,000 cost had already been included in the Parish Council's approved 2025 budget, with no further financial commitment required beyond this period.

Following discussion, Members **agreed** to approve the allocation of £2,000 from the ShopWatch budget to fund the hire of eight additional ShopWatch radios for twelve months.

Members further **agreed** that the direct beneficiaries of this support would be local charity shops and Durham Market traders, thereby extending the benefits of the scheme to smaller and independent businesses and further strengthening crime prevention efforts across the city centre.

Finance Committee

Councillor S Walker presented the Finance Committee minutes from the meeting held on 20th June 2025. There were no queries from Members on these minutes.

7. CHAIR'S UPDATES

The Chair opened the meeting by extending a warm welcome to all Members, expressing the hope that everyone had enjoyed a pleasant summer break and had returned well rested and ready to resume Parish Council activities.

The Chair reported the significant news that Durham University had been named the UK's top university by The Times and The Sunday Times, surpassing Oxbridge for the first time. The Chair confirmed that a letter of congratulations had been sent to the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Karen O'Brien, conveying the Parish Council's warmest congratulations and gratitude for the outstanding work of the University and its staff in achieving this honour.

Turning again to the University, the Chair extended best wishes to all new students arriving in Durham for Orientation Week, welcoming them to the City and wishing them success in their forthcoming studies.

The Chair congratulated all those involved in organising the annual Christmas Festival, noting with pride that Travel and Tour World had named the Durham Christmas Festival the UK's "Top Hidden Gem" for the year. The Chair emphasised that it was the shared responsibility of the Parish Council and its partners to ensure that the Festival continued to grow in visibility and attract visitors from across the world.

The Chair expressed appreciation to the Parish Council's Business Committee and Councillor Elizabeth Scott for their work on the Business Events Grants initiative. The Chair reported delight at the publicity already generated by events such as Durham Wine Week, the Elysium Theatre, and the Jazz Festival, describing the programme as a tremendous initiative by the Committee.

The Chair also offered best wishes to Dan, Donna, and their team following the launch of their new venture, Veenoo, at Riverwalk. The Chair had been pleased to attend the official opening of the venue alongside the Mayor, Councillor Gary Hutchinson, and wished the team every success with this, their sixth restaurant in the chain.

The Chair extended sincere thanks to Arthur and his team, members of the Remembrance Organising Group, for their exceptional work in preparing this year's Remembrance events. The Chair recognised the importance of this period in the City's calendar as a time to honour those who have served, and continue to serve, in the armed and civilian services in the pursuit of peace.

Finally, the Chair reminded Members of a forthcoming special meeting of the Parish Council's Finance Committee. The purpose of the meeting would be to review Durham County Council's budget consultation for 2026/27 and the associated Medium-Term Financial Plan.

The Chair observed that the consultation document and the County Council's financial position made for sobering reading. It was noted that the current Administration had prioritised a freeze on Council Tax, and Members were encouraged to give the consultation the serious consideration it deserved, given the significant impact of the Council's decisions on the wider community.

8. SUPPORTING COMMUNITY CENTRES/FACILITIES AS A KEY STRATEGIC AIM OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

The Clerk presented a report outlining a proposal for the establishment of a new initiative to support community centres and facilities across the City of Durham parish area. Members were reminded that this initiative reflected one of the Council's key strategic commitments, made through earlier strategy sessions, to place support for community facilities at the heart of its work during the current Council term to May 2029.

Members noted that community centres and facilities provided essential spaces for residents of all ages and backgrounds, supporting social cohesion, inclusion, education, safety and wellbeing. Many such facilities were managed by volunteers and community groups, and they faced increasing pressures in maintaining services and premises.

The report proposed the creation of an annual funding stream to support these facilities, to be made available each year between 2026–2030. Funding would be awarded on a competitive basis, with the aim that at least one centre would receive support in each financial year. The fund could be used flexibly to address a range of needs including building improvements, accessibility works, or service expansion, with applications welcomed from both secular and faith-based organisations, provided the activity was of a non-religious community benefit.

Members also considered the draft Expression of Interest letter (Appendix A), a list of proposed community facilities to be contacted (Appendix B), and draft application questions (Appendix C), as prepared by the Clerk. The report sought approval for these documents and for the approach to engagement with local community facilities.

During the discussion, Members expressed support for the principle of engaging directly with community centres but did not approve the documents as presented. Instead, Members agreed that a Working Group be established to review the documents in more detail and oversee the next steps of the initiative.

It was **agreed** that the Working Group would comprise Councillors E. Scott, C. Lattin, R. Handy, F. Robinson, and G. Holland, who would be delegated authority to review the documentation and write to each community centre and facility on behalf of the Parish Council.

Following a proposal by Councillor E. Scott, Members **agreed** that the Parish Council should not specify a funding amount at this stage, but instead seek further information from community centres and facilities about their own development plans and to identify potential barriers they faced in maintaining or improving their operations.

It was therefore **agreed** that the Working Group would report back to the Parish Council in due course with recommendations for the development of this initiative, informed by the feedback received from local community organisations.

9. MID-YEAR REVIEW OF THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

The Chair presented a report reminding Members that, when the Parish Council agreed the membership of each of its Committees at the Annual Meeting in May 2025, it had also been agreed that a mid-year review of Committee membership would take place in September 2025.

It was reported that, following a review of Committee Terms of Reference, in July 2025, the number of Members on each Committee had remained the same, with the exception of the Personnel Committee, which had been increased to six Members.

During the discussion, Councillor S Walker advised the meeting that she wished to step down from the Planning and Licensing Committee. Following this, Members discussed the future composition of the Committee. After a vote was held, Members **agreed** (6 in favour, 3 against, and 3 abstentions) that the Planning and Licensing Committee should be reduced to a six-member Committee.

It was also agreed that Councillor Tony Cleaver would join the Personnel Committee to fill the remaining vacancy.

Following consideration of the report and discussion of the proposed adjustments, Members agreed the revised membership of each Committee for the remainder of the municipal year. It was further agreed that Committee memberships would be reviewed again at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May 2026.

The Committee Membership therefore **agreed** was as follows:

Planning and Licensing Committee (6 Members) Grenville Holland Liz Brown Carole Lattin Roger Cornwell Philip Layton Rory Handy	Environment Committee (6 Members) Carole Lattin Victoria Ashfield Tony Cleaver Giuseppe Bignardi Grenville Holland Fred Robinson
Personnel Committee (5 Members) Susan Walker David Freeman Roger Cornwell Giuseppe Bignardi Victoria Ashfield Tony Cleaver	Business Committee (6 Members) Philip Layton David Freeman Elizabeth Scott Ellie Hopgood Rory Handy Les Wilson
Finance Committee (6 Members) Susan Walker Liz Brown Ellie Hopgood Elizabeth Scott Victoria Ashfield Les Wilson	

10. PROPOSED RELOCATION OF THE CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL OFFICE

The Clerk presented a report setting out options for the possible relocation of the Parish Council office. Members were reminded that Office 3 within Clayport Library had been the registered Parish Council office since 2019 and was currently held on a rolling lease with Durham County Council (DCC), which could be terminated by either party with one month's notice.

Members noted that the current office provided several advantages, including a central and secure location, low rent (£370 per month / £4,440 per year) inclusive of utilities and internet, and access to an adjoining meeting space for up to fifteen people at no additional cost. However, Members also acknowledged a number of challenges associated with the current premises, including limited vehicular access for deliveries, the uncertain future of the Clayport Library building, the fragility of the lease arrangement, and the fact that the office—originally a windowless

storage area—did not comply with Health and Safety Executive ventilation requirements and must be vacated by 7pm each evening.

Members were advised that, following the closure of the Customer Access Point at Clayport Library and informal indications that the library service might relocate as part of wider DCC cost-saving measures, the Clerk had been asked to investigate alternative accommodation options. The Clerk currently worked on a hybrid basis, being in Durham approximately three days a week, and working remotely the remainder of the time.

It was noted that affordable, long-term office accommodation within the city centre was limited. However, the Clerk had identified two potential options for Members' consideration:

Option A – Redhills (Viaduct Area)

Members noted that office space within the former Enginemen's Secretary's Office at Redhills was available at a cost of £6,055 per annum, inclusive of all utilities and internet. The office offered 16.1m² (173 sq ft) of space, included some storage, and was located in a secure site with free parking for tenants. The lease would require a minimum six-month commitment and could be terminated with one month's notice. Members further noted that the office was fully accessible, suitable for meetings of around six people, and that larger meeting rooms within Redhills could be booked when needed. The Clerk confirmed that the building was owned and managed by a charitable organisation, not politically funded, and that the owners were keen to host community-based tenants such as the Parish Council.

Option B – Harrison House (Hawthorn Terrace)

Members were informed that office accommodation at Harrison House offered 37m² (400 sq ft) of space at a cost of £9,600 per annum, including utilities and service charges. The site was secure, provided shared WC and kitchen facilities, and included car parking to the rear for tenants on a first-come basis, along with nearby public parking. The lease required a minimum twelve-month commitment, and a separate broadband/telephone contract would need to be arranged. The space was considered sufficient to accommodate a small meeting area.

In both cases, Members noted the proximity to the rail and bus stations, providing good accessibility for staff and visitors.

The Clerk also reminded Members that no formal notice to vacate had been received from DCC, meaning that remaining at Clayport Library remained a viable Option C. Other potential premises, such as Merryoaks Community Hall and shared accommodation with Durham BID/Citrus Group, had been reviewed and discounted as unsuitable.

Following consideration, Members unanimously **agreed** that the Parish Council should relocate its office to Redhills and asked the Clerk to make arrangements for this to happen as soon as possible.

11. COMPLETION OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S EXTERNAL AUDIT 2024/25

This item was deferred as the Parish Council had not yet received notice of completion of the external audit for financial year 2024/25.

12. REPORT ON PLANNING FOR THE REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 2025 EVENT

The Clerk presented a report updating Members on preparations for the Remembrance Sunday 2025 event, to be held on Sunday 9th November 2025. Members were reminded that the Parish Council had civic responsibility for organising the event, which formed a key part of the Council's annual calendar, and that funding for it had been included in the 2025–26 events budget.

Members noted that the Clerk was progressing arrangements for the road closure order, which was being processed by Durham County Council (DCC) free of charge in accordance with their policy for Remembrance Sunday. Alternative public transport routes were also being coordinated through DCC to ensure minimal disruption to services. It was reported that DCC Highways would provide traffic management support on the day, including signage and supervision of road closures, at no cost to the Parish Council.

Members were informed that road closures would be in place between 9:00am and 2:00pm, affecting Framwellgate Bridge, North Bailey, Claypath at Providence Row, and sections of the A690 near the Library and Prince Bishops roundabout. The Clerk reported that permission was being sought from Durham University for the temporary use of Palace Green and the Market Place for the event, with both the University and DCC having already been made aware of the plans. The Parish Council would be arranging for the dais for dignitaries to be installed on the day.

Members noted that the event was covered by the Parish Council's public liability insurance and that the Clerk had completed a risk assessment. The police would also carry out a security assessment (SECCO) to determine the level of Hostile Vehicle Mitigation (HVM) required, with DCC agreeing to fund the necessary installations. The Clerk was arranging for Showsec, DCC's preferred supplier, to provide crowd management, and had also contracted Nerams Ltd for medical provision on the day. Police officers would be present to manage any incidents or anti-social behaviour.

The Clerk and the designated Safety Officer would attend on the day to conduct a pre-event inspection and walkthrough. It was confirmed that the Town Hall would once again be used as a meeting point for any missing persons. The Clerk had also liaised closely with Artichoke, organisers of the Lumiere Festival, to ensure that Lumiere infrastructure would not be installed until 2:30pm on Sunday 9th November, allowing the Remembrance event to proceed without obstruction.

Members were advised that Durham County Council was organising a Spitfire display at Millennium Place for the day of the event. Following discussions with the police, it was agreed that this display would not be located in the Market Place due to safety concerns. DCC would take full responsibility and liability for the display, and the Parish Council's insurers had requested that a formal agreement be drawn up between both parties clarifying responsibilities. At the request of the police, an additional hour had been added to the road closure period.

The Clerk confirmed that local traders in the affected areas would be informed of the arrangements and that details of the event would be publicised on the Parish Council's website and social media. A letter drop to all affected businesses would take place on 2nd November.

Members noted that the service at Durham Cathedral would be managed entirely by the Cathedral Clergy. The Clerk would liaise regarding the seating of Parish Councillors, and the Chair of the Council would lay a wreath on behalf of the Council during the ceremony. Parish Councillors would also take part in the official procession from the Cathedral to the Market Place, with final positions to be confirmed following a meeting between the Cathedral, the military, and the Clerk scheduled for 30th September.

Members were informed that Parade Volunteer Arthur Lockyear continued to support the event through fundraising and coordination with the Council, including efforts to secure funding for four bands and post-event catering. The Parish Council would again support these associated costs. It was also confirmed that the Council would support the Festival of Remembrance on Saturday 8th November 2025.

Following consideration, Members noted the report and **agreed** to delegate all organisational and budgetary responsibility for the Remembrance Sunday 2025 event to the Parish Clerk.

In closing this particular item, the Chair strongly encouraged all Members to attend this year's event as it was such an important occasion.

13. REPORTS FROM PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

Councillor C Lattin presented the following report on the most recent meeting of Durham University's Community Engagement Task Force Lived Environment Sub-Group:

This was a really positive meeting, thanks to the new chair, Ian Rooney., the new Director of Estates at the University. It was also very brief – over in three quarters of an hour.

He began by asking what issues those members of the committee were experiencing.

I reported:

The dilapidated state of buildings, particularly the Swimming Baths, owned by the university all over the city which cause distress to us and our residents.

Ian has had commissioned structural surveys of condition appraisal of the University estate. Their portfolio of buildings is 274. He reported that things are very serious on Palace Green and that the Castle needs much work – a full survey of that is about to take place. He acknowledges the significance of the condition

of all buildings in an important civic area. The Bailey is also under consideration with work about to commence on replacing the windows in the Department of History. The university is planning to reduce its portfolio 'to reduce the university footprint 'and to sell buildings and return them e.g. in Old Elvet, to residential use. Many of the older buildings are not fit for purpose. He assured us that the swimming baths was at the top of his priorities and promised action of some sort within 6 months. There are to be repairs at Dunelm House and repair the roof. There are concerns about Kingsgate Bridge.

The issue of illegal riders of electric and motorbikes over the university playing fields

The University is aware of these and some damage has been done, especially to a new cricket area. They are currently working to identify points of entry and are putting in measures hopefully to deter the bikers. University security and the police are aware of the issue but this is a great problem.

The spigot mortar gun emplacement

This is an ongoing issue for us as the university was alerted 4 years ago to the fact that they had this historic relic on their land. They cleared undergrowth around it and promised to erect an information board which has not happened. Matthew Wrght has been charged with delivering this board by the end of October.

Swift boxes.

Walia raised, on behalf of DURF, the promised swift boxes which had been agreed, for Waterside building. We were assured that the Bio-diversity team are in the process of putting them in and they will be in place by the end of October. Ian is introducing an action log, and will closely monitor the achievement of actions.

End of report

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

Signed,

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

ITEM 5: PROPOSAL FOR A NEW HERITAGE BLUE PLAQUE DEDICATED TO FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND MO MOWLAM AT TREVELYAN COLLEGE

This report sets out a proposal for the installation of a heritage blue plaque at Trevelyan College, Durham University, in honour of The Rt Hon Dr Marjorie “Mo” Mowlam (1949–2005) — former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and a distinguished alumna of Durham University.

The proposal has been formally submitted by the Durham Women’s Banner Group, in recognition of Mo Mowlam’s significant contributions both to public life and to the history of Durham. This comes as 2025 marks the 20th anniversary of Mo’s passing and therefore she will qualify for such an honour.

The City of Durham Parish Council’s blue plaque initiative celebrates individuals who have made a lasting impact on Durham’s history, culture, and society, with a particular focus on highlighting the achievements of women associated with the city.

Within this context, Mo Mowlam stands out as a particularly fitting candidate for commemoration. Her links to Durham, her pioneering political achievements, and her enduring public legacy embody the values that this initiative seeks to honour.

Mo Mowlam began her higher education journey at Durham University, where she studied Sociology and Anthropology at Trevelyan College. During her time as a student, she demonstrated the leadership, determination, and compassion that would later define her political career.

- Mo joined the Labour Party in her first year at Durham, marking the beginning of a lifelong commitment to public service and social justice.
- She became Secretary of the Durham Union Society in 1969, actively participating in student debate and political discourse.
- She went on to serve as Vice-President of the Durham Students’ Union, where she championed student representation and engagement.

Her formative years in Durham were instrumental in shaping her political and ethical outlook. Trevelyan College remains proud of its connection to Mo Mowlam, with a college room named in her honour and a bust of her head displayed in the college reception area as a tribute to her enduring legacy.

Mo Mowlam’s national and international significance stems from her outstanding political career and her crucial role in the Northern Ireland peace process.

As Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1997–1999), Mo was a central figure in the negotiations that led to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 — a landmark achievement in British and Irish political history. Her empathetic, forthright, and inclusive approach helped to bridge divides between communities and political leaders.

She was widely admired for her humanity, courage, and honesty, qualities that made her one of the most respected politicians of her generation. Mo's commitment to peace and reconciliation continues to serve as an inspiration to future generations of political leaders and activists.

There is already a plaque dedicated to Mo Mowlam in Newcastle, recognising her contribution to the wider North East region. Installing a blue plaque in Durham, at the site of her alma mater, would complement this recognition and firmly situate Mo's formative years within the narrative of Durham's educational and social history.

The proposed site for the plaque is Trevelyan College, Durham University, where Mo lived and studied.

Installation of the plaque would be subject to permission from Trevelyan College (Durham University) and Mo Mowlam's surviving relatives. Our Clerk has managed to trace Mo's sister and will make contact depending on the outcome of this report. The exact wording of the plaque will be determined by Mo's relatives if they are agreeable to this.

Both approvals would be sought before any installation proceeds.

It has been proposed that the plaque unveiling take place on International Women's Day (8 March) 2026. This date would symbolically align the event with global celebrations of women's achievements and would reinforce the Parish Council's commitment to recognising women who have shaped Durham's history and beyond.

The installation of a blue plaque dedicated to Mo Mowlam directly supports the Parish Council's ongoing work to highlight the contributions of women of historical and civic importance associated with Durham and promote heritage education and public engagement with local history.

Mo Mowlam's achievements, her Durham roots, and her enduring legacy make her an exemplary subject for inclusion in this initiative.

A blue plaque in honour of Mo Mowlam at Trevelyan College would serve as a powerful tribute to one of Durham University's most distinguished alumnae and one of Britain's most remarkable public figures.

Her life and work exemplify courage, compassion, and commitment to peace — values deeply resonant with the ethos of both Durham City and its Parish Council's heritage initiatives.

The Durham Women's Banner Group respectfully requests that the Parish Council give its full consideration and support to this proposal.

As Members are aware, in agreeing its budget for this current financial year, the Parish Council agreed a total fund of £5,000 towards heritage projects and £2,000 of this has already been allocated towards the Shincliffe Boundary Stone project.

The total cost of a blue plaque would be £707.09 (including VAT) and there would be a request that Trevelyan College assumes ownership and maintenance responsibility for the plaque. The Parish Council will also assume responsibility for a small reception immediately after the plaque's unveiling and will work with Trevelyan College on hosting and potentially part-funding this.

DECISIONS REQUIRED	1. For Members to approve in principle the proposal for a heritage blue plaque dedicated to Mo Mowlam at Trevelyan College, subject to liaison efforts with Trevelyan College and Mo Mowlam's relatives, in order to secure necessary permissions. 2. If 1) is approved, for Members to agree to fund the cost of the plaque at £707.09 as well as any costs (whether part-funded or otherwise) associated with the reception immediately after the unveiling event.
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ITEM 5: FOLLOW-UP REPORT FROM THE ELVET CLEAN AIR GROUP ON CLEAN AIR INITIATIVES FOR THE ELVET AREA

Background:

Over the past four years, the City of Durham Parish Council has worked with residents, schools and representatives from Durham County Council and the North East Combined Authority (NECA) to raise awareness of air pollution in Durham City and to support and encourage the strongest possible action by the various actors.

The Elvet Clean Air group has specifically asked that the following solutions be explored by the Council.

Electric buses in Durham City

In September 2023, the Department for Transport (DfT) announced a programme to support the introduction of zero emission buses and associated infrastructure through the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA 2) programme. NECA was successful in its bid, receiving £7.4million in ZEBRA 2 award funding, which, alongside earlier investment from the Levelling Up Fund, will allow for an additional 95 zero emission buses to be delivered across the region and we understand these are expected to enter service by December 2025.

In spite of this investment however, the urgent need for us to collectively address the serious air quality issues in Durham City, in particular the Church Street area of Elvet remains a top priority.

Church Street has been designated as an Air Quality Management Area and yet remains one of the busiest walkways and one of the most polluted in Durham City. We have levels of pollution similar to those which resulted in the death of the 9-year-old child in London several years ago, yet we have a Primary School in the street and thousands of students walk down the road each day during term time. This level of air pollution has been consistently high for the past 11 years (apart from during lockdown and when New Elvet Bridge was closed). As such, interventions carried out to reduce pollution in Elvet have not worked.

Durham County Council's draft Air Quality Action Plan 2021-2026¹, published in February 2024, identifies that 59% of NO_x emissions in Church Street are due to emissions from buses alone.

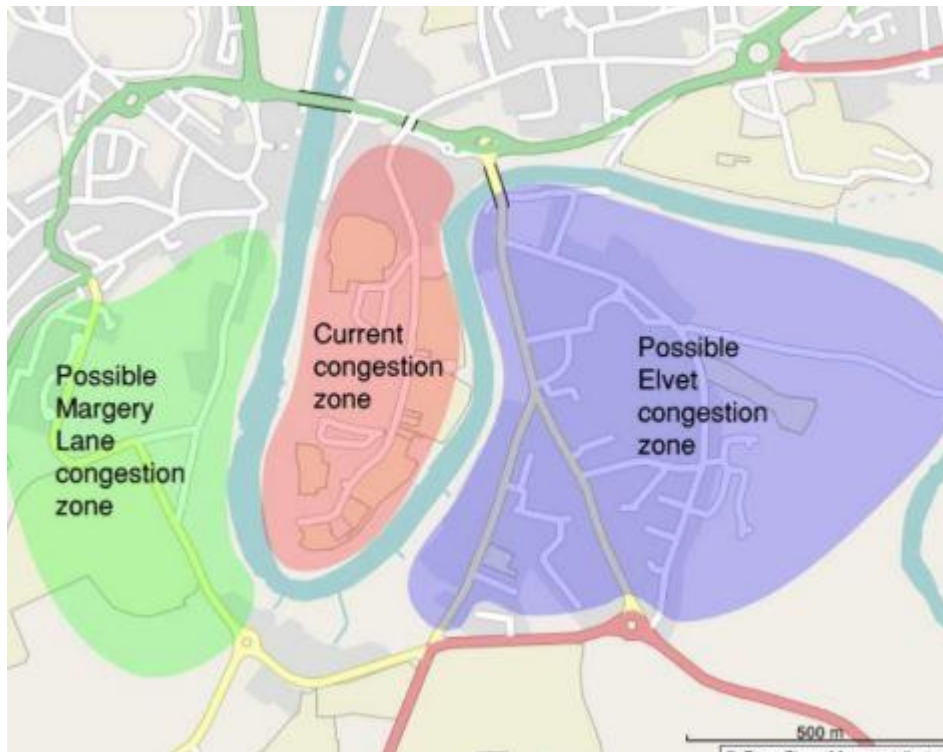
Based on recent NO₂ concentrations in this area, the Parish Council has urged the North East Mayor – and is asked to continue to urge the Mayor - to prioritise

¹ <https://durham.gov.uk/media/44427/Draft-Air-Quality-Action-Plan/pdf/DraftAirQualityActionPlan.pdf?m=1712843686050>

Church Street bus routes for the rollout of zero emissions buses in any further upcoming transport initiatives.

Local congestion charging zone expansion to include Elvet

A congestion zone (at the location identified via the map below) would be free to low emission buses, electric taxis, emergency vehicles and residents, with other vehicles paying a fee to enter. A congestion charging system currently operates in a neighbouring area on the Bailey:



Benefits

Reducing the number of vehicles passing through Elvet and prompting people to adopt cleaner vehicles. Reducing air pollution. Low price intervention requiring four cameras. These should ideally be self-funding providing charges are targeted at the right level. Using a congestion zone rather than a low emissions zone gives more flexibility over which vehicles are charged.

Risks

- Possible objections from businesses in the area, and from parents dropping off at St Oswald's School. A variation might be to only charge vehicles which pass right through the zone in a certain timeframe, so that if you entered and exited via the Whitechurch junction, for example to drop off a child, there would be no charge. Or if you entered via New Elvet Bridge and exited

half an hour (or some time period to be decided) later after a visit to a local business, no charge would apply.

- Displacement of traffic into other parts of the city a similar zone for the Margery Lane area may be needed.
- Motorists attacking traffic cameras.
- Politicising congestion charges by claiming these 'demonise the working classes'. It should be noted that lower-income areas have persistently higher levels of pollution than wealthier areas e.g. See - [Associations between air pollution and socioeconomic characteristics, ethnicity and age profile of neighbourhoods in England and the Netherlands](#)

Reducing student car usage

University staff currently have free annual parking permits in the University's car parks, but students are generally barred from parking within the University unless they have a medical need or require transport for their studies (e.g. teaching practice). During the University term there is much higher demand for parking spaces in Elvet, with the number of parked cars doubling during term time, suggesting that students without university permits are the main cause of the increased congestion. In principle, if students have a valid need to drive to the University, the University should accommodate them on-site rather than taking scarce public parking areas.

There is currently no time limit on car parking. Having many or all of the spaces restricted to a shorter period, such as two hours, for non-residents would make the area much less attractive to student car drivers and other people spending a long period in the city centre. As Church Street is on a Park and Ride route, the parking spaces should primarily be serving people who have a need to drive to access businesses, amenities, and properties on the street itself.

Aside from medical or educational needs, there are potentially valid reasons for students to use a car, such as if they are living at home elsewhere in County Durham and cannot access public transport, or if they need to drive to access employment to help pay for their studies. The university should consider widening the eligibility criteria for student permits, to remove these uses from the public roads. It would then be open to the County Council to discourage unnecessary student car use by better management of the on-street spaces near to the university and restricting residential permits issued to HMO properties.

While the university terms see a dramatic increase in cars on streets near the university and on residential streets in student areas, the number of students using a car to travel to the university has been steady at around 5% in successive travel surveys. Thus, a small minority of students have a big impact, not only on permanent residents of the city but also on their peers who prefer to use sustainable transport modes.

Risks

- May not dramatically reduce congestion nor pollution, therefore additional interventions are required.
- May lead to more parking of cars outside the Controlled Parking Zone, such as at Mount Oswald. Extending the CPZ may be necessary.
- Pushback from student representative bodies. This is why reviewing eligibility for university parking is a key component of the plan, to ensure fairness, along with highlighting the dangers to the majority of students of the poor air quality.

At the April 2025 meeting of Full Council, Members approved the following motion in relation to this item:

"Given the long-standing, unacceptably high levels of air pollution across various parts of Durham city and their significant negative health and environmental impacts, the City of Durham Parish Council hopes that the next Council is aware of the request to continue the work to improve the City's air quality. We hope that the new Council reflects on the priorities listed above for the benefit of the city as a whole whilst continuing to support the most affected residents."

Members are now being asked to consider this report's content and to decide what further actions can be taken in relation to clean air.

At its most recent meeting, the Parish Council's Environment Committee agreed that it only wishes to pursue the matter of electric buses to service Church Street. The bus services servicing Church Street are set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

In October 2024, the City of Durham Parish Council formally wrote to the North East Mayor and urged the Mayor to prioritise Church Street bus routes for the rollout of zero emissions buses in any further upcoming transport initiatives and to assist these bus routes to have all electric buses as soon as possible, so that generations of children, young people and adults can breathe clean air when walking down this street in our City.

We received the below response from the Mayor's office:

Thank you very much for your letter on behalf of the City of Durham Parish Council highlighting the challenges faced on Church Street.

I share the Parish Council's concerns over poor air quality on Church Street caused by vehicle emissions and I hope that in the longer term my plans to have a fully zero-emission bus fleet by 2035 and to bring our bus network back under public control will help to alleviate the situation.

I acknowledge your aspiration for buses running along Durham's Church Street to be prioritised and I will ask my officers to take your request into account when discussing the allocation of future funding for zero emission buses. As you are aware, we do this in partnership with the bus operators who own and operate the vehicles, and highways authorities who determine the use of roads and streets, and inevitably there are many more requests for zero-emission buses than allowed for by the available funding. There is unfortunately a long way to go from our current funded plan of decarbonising 10% of the region's bus fleet by March 2026, to achieving our ultimate aim of a fully zero-emission bus fleet by 2035.

Work has begun to progress my commitment to bring buses back under public control. This will take some time to achieve but it has the potential to accelerate the introduction of zero emission vehicles, and I continue to push for funding for the region to achieve this and other regional aims. I would encourage you to read and respond to the consultation into my new Local Transport Plan which you will be able to find at <https://www.northeast-ca.gov.uk/localtransportplan>

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to consider the above report and proposals from the Elvet Clean Air Group and determine what follow-up actions to take on clean air in our parish.
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Appendix 1 - bus services in Church Street

- **6** Durham - Cockfield - Barnard Castle Arriva North East
- **X12** Middlesbrough - Durham - Newcastle Arriva North East
- **N21** Newcastle - Durham University College via Gateshead, Low Fell, Harlow Green, Birtley, Chester-le-Street, Framwellgate Moor, Durham Go North East
- **41** Durham University Science Park - Durham Railway Station Gateshead Central Taxis
- **42** Durham Railway Station - Mount Oswald Gateshead Central Taxis
- **56** Durham - Bishop Auckland Arriva North East
- **58** Bus Station - Interchange Arriva North East
- **59** Hartlepool Interchange - Durham, Bus Station via Trimdon and Kelloe Stagecoach North East
- **PR2** Howlands Park & Ride - Millburngate Gateshead Central Taxis

ITEM 8: STANDARDS COMMITTEE PROPOSALS AFFECTING PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on proposed changes to Durham County Council's (DCC) *Procedure for Member Code of Conduct Complaints*

The new Procedure for Member Code of Conduct Complaints, as presented to DCC's Standards Committee on 15 October 2025, introduces significant governance reforms, most notably the creation of a Standards Assessment Board (SAB). This sub-committee will assume responsibility for assessing complaints where the Member Code of Conduct is engaged—cases where a councillor is alleged to have acted, or appeared to act, in an official capacity.

Under the current arrangements, this role rests with the Monitoring Officer, who conducts the initial assessment and determines whether further action, informal resolution, or investigation is required.

The revised system therefore shifts key decision-making power from an independent officer to a politically balanced committee composed of elected members of the Standards Committee. Each SAB meeting will involve three members (including the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee) and will meet regularly, initially twice a month, in private session.

The stated purpose of this reform is to "increase transparency and assurance" in the handling of Code of Conduct complaints. However, CDALC (County Durham Association of Local Councils) has expressed concern that this change could have the opposite effect, introducing an element of political influence into what has traditionally been an administrative and impartial process. In correspondence circulated among parish and town councils, CDALC's Executive Officer summarised the issue by noting that the proposals effectively make DCC councillors the arbiters of whether a councillor has breached their own council's Code of Conduct and of any subsequent recommendations or sanctions.

CDALC members were therefore invited to indicate whether they support retaining the current system, in which the Monitoring Officer holds delegated authority, or the proposed transfer of responsibility to the new Standards Assessment Board. The consensus emerging within the association appears to favour maintaining the Monitoring Officer's existing powers, as this arrangement provides greater independence and insulation from political pressures.

Beyond the formation of the SAB, the revised procedure introduces several other noteworthy amendments. Informal resolution will now be mandatory before any complaint proceeds to formal investigation or hearing, with measures such as apologies, mediation, or training recommended as first steps.

The rules governing investigations have also been refined, including shortening the timeframe for disregarding previously investigated complaints from three years to twelve months and clarifying that if a complainant withdraws a complaint, no further action will be taken. Hearing procedures have been reorganised for clarity, with some powers—such as the ability to remove members from committees—explicitly excluded, as these are deemed political matters within

party group control. The overall framework aims to streamline complaint handling, enhance procedural clarity, and ensure compliance with legislative obligations under the Localism Act 2011.

From a governance perspective, these changes represent a fundamental shift in accountability and oversight. While the introduction of the SAB aligns with local government trends toward member-led ethical governance, the risk identified by CDALC—that decision-making may become politicised—should not be overlooked. It will be particularly important for parish and town council representatives on the Standards Committee to ensure that the voices of the local council sector are heard and that independence, fairness and transparency remain paramount in how ethical complaints are managed.

Councillor Susan Walker has been appointed to serve as one of CDALC's nominated parish and town council representatives on the DCC Standards Committee, alongside Councillor John Hirst from Brandon and Byshottles Parish Council.

In conclusion, whilst DCC's Administration is free to progress this change to the Standards Committee, there remains legitimate concern among parish and town councils regarding the potential erosion of impartiality in the complaint process.

The City of Durham Parish Council may therefore wish to endorse CDALC's position in advocating for the Monitoring Officer to retain delegated powers in the initial stages of Code of Conduct complaints or to seek robust safeguards ensuring that the new Standards Assessment Board operates independently and objectively, free from political bias.

ITEM 9: DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2026/27 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2026/27-2029/30

Durham County Council is seeking public input on its draft budget proposals and financial planning assumptions for the year beginning April 2026 as well as its medium-term outlook through to 2029/30. The stated aim of this consultation is to align fiscal planning with the Council's priorities and to ensure transparency and stakeholder involvement in decision-making.

The consultation is open to residents, stakeholders, and interested parties to submit feedback, suggestions, and concerns about the proposals.

As Members are aware, a special meeting of the Parish Council's Finance Committee took place earlier in October to review all of the proposals which are presented at a high-level without setting out specific figures in each area.

The proposed response to this consultation is as follows:

In present circumstance, this is clearly a difficult consultation to undertake. The City of Durham Parish Council recognises that the factors which have led to this consultation are largely beyond the control of the County Council which include the increasing demand pressures in statutory social care, significant cuts to local Government funding from Central Government and increasing costs to deliver these services.

The outcome of this consultation remains uncertain given recent public commitments by the present Administration with the introduction of the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and the obscure nature of their involvement with the Medium-Term Financial Plan. There is currently no publicly available information about who this organisation is or its source, what their track record is, or the specific scope and timeframe of their work in auditing the books and delivering the Administration's desired efficiencies. Furthermore, it is unclear how DOGE intends to access and handle highly confidential financial and organisational information held by the County Council. This lack of transparency raises legitimate concerns about governance, accountability and data security within this Medium-Term Financial Plan.

We will address each aspect of this consultation in turn.

Central Government funding

The fact that Durham County Council has had to achieve £288 million in savings since 2010, whilst also maintaining frontline statutory services, which for too many of our residents are life and death services, is astonishing and it is to the enormous credit of every member of Durham County Council's workforce that our frontline services have been retained so effectively and with such dedication to date.

In that context, the City of Durham Parish Council also applauds the Government's ambition through the Fair Funding Review 2.0 to modernise the approach to distributing central

Government funding to local authorities, most notably by reducing the number of Relative Needs Formulae from 15 to 9, introducing a robust Area Cost Adjustment (ACA) to account for labour, property, accessibility and remoteness costs as well as applying a “notional” or assumed Council Tax level to equalise resource capacity across authorities.

Crucially, the Government proposals appear to suggest that deprivation (via the Index of Multiple Deprivation) would be embedded as a key driver in the Foundation Formula, ensuring that areas with concentrated social and economic disadvantage have their needs better recognised.

County Durham already includes some of the most deprived communities in England, with their higher demand for social care, children’s services, homelessness support, and home-to-school transport subsidy. As such, we join with you in recognising how essential it will be that any new funding regime fully reflects these pressures rather than assuming a uniform “average” service demand.

Accordingly, we want to reassure Durham County Council colleagues that the City of Durham Parish Council is a proactive and collaborative partner in lobbying central Government for a fairer settlement, due to be announced in December 2025. We believe that it is essential that these new funding formulas and cost adjustments recognise County Durham’s high levels of deprivation and service demand.

Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) for working age people

Durham County Council has long 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.

Earlier this year, Durham County Council consulted on proposed changes to the LCTRS and it remains our firmly held position that Option 1A (the introduction of a simplified, income-banded LCTRS that retains the availability of up to 100 per cent support for eligible working-age residents), as proposed in that consultation is our preferred option. The Parish Council would not support any other changes to this support.

Whilst the financial modelling showed that Option 1A is effectively cost neutral in terms of overall scheme expenditure, it would still deliver an estimated £131,000+ in administrative savings through reduced recalculations and a reduced staffing requirement.

The Parish Council is particularly mindful of the local context that the consultation specifically highlighted in the Equality Impact Assessment that 44.7 per cent of current claimants have a disability or are part of a household where disability-related benefits are in payment, and over 62 per cent of claimants are women. Option 1a provides these residents with that continuity of support and removes the risk of regressive changes that could disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups. Similarly, it is noted that the largest proportion of LCTR claims in the

County are located in areas of high deprivation and therefore any reduction in support would be felt most acutely in those communities already facing entrenched disadvantage.

Increases to Council tax / changes to Council tax base/ Council tax premium

The level of financial risk to which Durham County Council is presently exposed is deeply concerning. The Local Authority approved its 2025/26 budget on 19th February 2025 and used £3.503 million from reserves to balance the budget in 2025/26 and now begins the budget planning for 2026/27 with a £3.503 million deficit to address.

As the consultation highlights, the County Council also faces a £71.019 million funding gap between 2026-2030 without council tax increases.

Moreover, the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP 16) assumes general inflation at 3% in 2026/27 and 2.1% in subsequent years, with pay awards forecast at 3% then 2% per annum, and the National Living Wage rising by 5% in 2026/27 and 4% annually thereafter. These are prudent assumptions. Yet even they are likely to prove conservative if current CPI trends (3.8% as of July 2025) persist. In this context, proposing or maintaining a Council Tax freeze would be highly irresponsible and financially unsustainable. A freeze would erode the Council's real-term spending power just as inflation, wage growth, and social care demand intensifies, forcing deeper cuts to essential and statutory services or the depletion of reserves that are already under strain.

Whilst the City of Durham Parish Council supports efforts to minimise the tax burden on residents during this cost-of-living crisis, it also recognises that a realistic and sustainable fiscal strategy, supported by fairer national funding, is vital to protect frontline services and the most vulnerable communities across our County. We therefore cannot see how the proposed Council tax freeze is in any way responsible or deliverable in this current climate.

The MTFP 16 also assumes that the Council Tax base will increase by approximately 0.5% per year over the plan period which is equivalent to an additional revenue of around £2 million in 2026/27 and £1.5 million in each of the following years. However, it is unclear whether this assumed growth is based on current Local Plan housing targets, the actual rate at which homes are being built in County Durham or on new housing targets announced by the Government earlier this year.

The City of Durham Parish Council fully supports Durham County Council's approach to applying and strengthening the Council Tax premiums on empty and second homes. These measures are both fair and necessary, encouraging the better use of existing housing stock while generating modest but valuable revenue at a time of acute financial pressure.

The introduction of a 100% premium on second homes from April 2025 and the earlier application of empty property premiums after 12 months of vacancy are consistent with national policy and help to reduce the number of properties standing empty.

The planned review of the discretionary relief scheme is also welcome, provided that genuine cases, such as homes in probate or under active renovation, continue to receive appropriate flexibility.

Raising additional income

The City of Durham Parish Council is very concerned about the proposed introduction of a £2.00 per journey (£4.00 return) charge for transport for learning disability day services. This is expected to generate a mere £13,500 in annual savings from 2026/27 and cannot be supported.

Whilst the stated aim of harmonising charging arrangements across adult social care transport services is understood, this measure would deliver only a marginal financial benefit within a broader savings requirement exceeding (in the event of no Council tax increase) £70 million, yet could have a disproportionate impact on some of the county's most vulnerable residents. The absence of a detailed Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) at this stage is particularly worrying, as there is a clear need to evaluate the affordability of such charges and their potential impact on service access, independence and inclusion for adults with learning disabilities and their carers.

We therefore urge the County Council to pause implementation of this proposal until a full EIA is undertaken and published and to ensure that any future charging policy for Learning Disability Transport is founded on fairness, affordability and genuine consultation with affected service users.

Whilst the Parish Council broadly supports all of the proposed other income raising measures detailed within this consultation, 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 and that absence must be remedied.

The City of Durham Parish Council notes that, whereas the MTFP 16 references the Council's extensive property portfolio and identifies limited savings from office accommodation changes, it does not present a coherent or transparent strategy for managing or rationalising the Council's 850-plus building assets across County Durham. This should be an urgent priority for this new Administration to identify an opportunity for 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).

It is simply not acceptable to have assets in our parish alone such as Hopper House (albeit this is currently showing as now under offer), the CAP and other office space at Clayport library, the former toilet block at Elvet Waterside or the units at Fowler's Yard sitting vacant for extended periods of time, with seemingly no plan for what to do with these buildings.

It is therefore essential that the County Council has a clear, evidence-based asset management plan to ensure that every building is being used efficiently, maintained sustainably, and aligned with the Council's own service priorities. Without such a strategy, there is a risk that valuable assets may remain underutilised or that future maintenance liabilities will continue to grow unchecked. The Parish Council would therefore urge Durham County Council to publish, alongside the next iteration of the MTFP, a comprehensive estates and asset management strategy setting out how and where the Council intends to review, retain, dispose of, or repurpose its property assets in support of long-term financial resilience.

Savings and income generation

County Durham residents will note that the MTFP provides a one-off £1.5 million uplift to the energy budget in 2026/27 to absorb higher utility costs for Council buildings. This is listed as a budget pressure within the overall forecast of £117.8 million in cost increases over the MTFP period and no further growth in energy budgets is assumed in later years, implying an expectation that energy prices will stabilise after 2026/27 — though this is noted as a risk assumption.

However, the City of Durham Parish Council is concerned at the lack of any detailed long-term energy or carbon management strategy within the MTFP and the apparent lack of any forward plan for further investment in energy efficiency or renewable energy generation across the Council's estate.

This short-term approach is fiscally and environmentally irresponsible, with the Local Authority effectively turning its back on the climate crisis at a time when sustainable investment could deliver both long-term savings and new income streams.

Durham County Council has already demonstrated the value of such investment: the Morrison Busty Depot, a flagship low-carbon site, showcases how renewable power, electric vehicle infrastructure and heat-pump technology can reduce costs as well saving approximately 500 tonnes of carbon emissions annually.

Similarly, the Council's own Climate Emergency Response Plan 2024–2027 highlights that its renewable energy installations generated over two and a half million kWh of electricity in the past year—cutting bills and providing over £200,000 in income for the Council.

Moreover, the Council's Street Light LED Replacement Programme has already saved over £5.5 million in avoided energy costs and will continue to deliver significant annual savings.

The Parish Council therefore urges this Administration to reinstate a clear programme of investment in green technology and estate decarbonisation, recognising this not as a discretionary environmental initiative or something which is “bankrupting County Durham” but as a sound financial strategy that reduces our exposure to volatile energy markets and secures lasting and ongoing revenue benefits for County Durham.

Thank you for your consideration of our response to this important consultation.

End of response

The closing date for responses is Friday 14 November 2025. The Cabinet will then review consultation responses and may modify the proposals before finalising the budget.

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to approve the City of Durham Parish Council's response to this consultation on Durham County Council's budget proposals for 2026/27 and medium-term financial plan 2026/27-2029/30
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