



City of Durham Parish Council

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Date of summons: 20th November 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 26th November 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 22ND OCTOBER 2025**
- 4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
- 5. COMMITTEE UPDATES**

- **Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from the meetings held on 17th and 31st October 2025**

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

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

- Response to the proposed World Heritage Site Management Plan 2025-2035 consultation.

- **Environment Committee minutes from the meeting held on 14th October 2025**

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

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

- Proposal to support the establishment of an annual Durham Landlord of the Year Awards scheme in collaboration with *Rate Your Landlord*.

- **Finance Committee minutes from the meeting held on 10th September 2025**

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

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

- **Business Committee minutes from the meeting held on 16th September 2025**

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

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

- 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. PARISH COUNCIL STRATEGY 2026/27**

- 8. PARISH COUNCIL BUDGET FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2026/27**

- 9. PARISH COUNCIL PRECEPT REQUEST FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2026/27**

10. COUNTY DURHAM ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCIL'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

11. REPORTS FROM PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- Report by Councillor S Walker on the County Durham Association of Local Council's (CDALC) Annual General Meeting, held on Saturday 25th October 2025

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.

12. NOMINATION FOR A 'FREEDOM OF THE PARISH' AWARD

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Wednesday 22nd October 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**), L Brown, G Bignardi, T Cleaver, R Cornwell, D Freeman, R Handy, G Holland, C Lattin, 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 V Ashfield, E Hopgood and P Layton.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

None received.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 24TH SEPTEMBER 2025

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

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr Matthew Phillips addressed the Parish Council, presenting a statement concerning the ongoing clean air challenges in the Elvet area. Mr Phillips highlighted the long-standing and serious air quality issues affecting Church Street, noting that the street has remained an Air Quality Management Area for over eleven years and continues to experience persistently high nitrogen dioxide levels.

Mr Phillips referred to the evidence that 59% of nitrogen oxide emissions on Church Street arise from bus traffic and emphasised that previous interventions had not delivered meaningful improvements.

Mr Phillips drew Members' attention to the proposals advanced by the Elvet Clean Air Group, including the introduction of zero-emission buses, consideration of a congestion charging zone, and measures to reduce student car usage. He highlighted the health risks associated with current pollution levels, noting the proximity of a primary school and the high volume of pedestrians using Church Street daily.

Mr Phillips further referenced the recent regional investment in zero-emission buses through the ZEBRA 2 programme and reiterated the critical need for Church Street to be prioritised in future allocations.

Mr Phillips urged the Parish Council to take further action and to continue lobbying all relevant bodies, including the North East Mayor, Durham County Council and Durham University, to address the clean air issues in Elvet without delay. He stressed the importance of coordinated and decisive action to safeguard public health and improve the environment for residents, schoolchildren and students. He also encouraged the Parish Council to ensure full consideration of all available measures that could reduce emissions and congestion within the area.

Mr Phillips concluded by expressing the hope that the Parish Council would demonstrate leadership on the matter and work collaboratively with community groups and statutory bodies to secure meaningful improvements in air quality across Elvet.

The Chair thanked Mr Phillips for his statement.

5. COMMITTEE UPDATES

• Planning and Licensing Committee

Councillor G Holland presented the minutes from the Planning Committee meetings held on 8th and 19th September 2025. There were no queries from Members on these minutes.

• Environment Committee

Councillor C Lattin presented the minutes from the Environment Committee meeting held on 9th September 2025. There being no queries from Members, Councillor C Lattin moved on to Committee reports.

Proposal for a new heritage blue plaque dedicated to former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Mo Mowlam at Trevelyan College

Councillor C Lattin presented a report concerning a proposal for the installation of a heritage blue plaque at Trevelyan College, Durham University, in commemoration of The Rt Hon Dr Marjorie "Mo" Mowlam, former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and alumna of the University.

The report, submitted by the Durham Women's Banner Group, sought to recognise Dr Mowlam's distinguished public service and her strong historical associations with the City of Durham. It was noted that the year 2025 marks the twentieth anniversary of Dr Mowlam's passing, thereby meeting the qualifying period for such an honour.

Councillor C Lattin outlined the purpose of the Parish Council's blue plaque initiative, which aims to celebrate individuals who have significantly influenced the city's history, culture, and society, with a particular emphasis on women whose contributions have shaped Durham. Within this context, Dr Mowlam was identified as an exemplary candidate, given her pioneering political achievements, her formative years spent at Trevelyan College, and her enduring legacy both nationally and internationally.

The Council was informed that Dr Mowlam's time at Durham University included studies in Sociology and Anthropology, active involvement in student political life, and early leadership roles which foreshadowed her later career in public service. Trevelyan College already honours her connection through a named room and a commemorative bust displayed within the college.

Councillor C Lattin further reported on Dr Mowlam's national significance, particularly her central role in the Northern Ireland peace process as Secretary of State between 1997 and 1999, culminating in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Her approach to public life, characterised by integrity, empathy, and courage, was highlighted as part of the justification for formal recognition within the Parish Council's heritage programme.

The proposed location for the plaque is Trevelyan College, subject to the necessary permissions from both the College and Dr Mowlam's surviving relatives. The Clerk has traced contact details for Dr Mowlam's sister and will make contact should the proposal proceed. It was noted that the plaque wording would be agreed with the family. An unveiling event was proposed for International Women's Day on 8 March 2026, reflecting the wider significance of Dr Mowlam's achievements.

The report set out the financial considerations for the project. The cost of the plaque is £707.09 including VAT, and Trevelyan College would be asked to assume long-term ownership and maintenance responsibilities. The Parish Council would fund a small reception following the unveiling and work with the College on arrangements and potential shared costs.

Councillors D Freeman and F Robinson expressed their support for this proposal and thanked Councillor C Lattin and the Environment Committee for this paper.

Members unanimously **approved** (in principle) the proposal for the blue plaque, subject to successful liaison with Trevelyan College and Dr Mowlam's relatives to secure the necessary permissions

Members also unanimously **agreed** the associated expenditure for both the plaque and the unveiling reception.

Follow-up report from the Elvet Clean Air group on clean air initiatives for the Elvet Area

Councillor C Lattin presented the report from the Elvet Clean Air Group on clean air initiatives for the Elvet area. Councillor C Lattin outlined the long-standing air

quality issues affecting Church Street, which has been designated an Air Quality Management Area for over eleven years and continues to experience persistently high nitrogen dioxide levels, largely attributable to emissions from bus services.

The proposals submitted by the Elvet Clean Air Group were presented to Members, including the prioritisation of zero-emission buses on the Church Street corridor, the creation of a congestion charging zone in Elvet as well as measures aimed at reducing student car usage.

Councillor C. Lattin highlighted that the draft Air Quality Action Plan identifies that 59% of nitrogen oxide emissions on Church Street are caused by bus emissions.

Councillor C Lattin highlighted the previous lobbying undertaken by the Parish Council to the North East Mayor requesting prioritisation of Church Street for zero-emission bus investment, and to the Mayor's response acknowledging the concerns and confirming that this request would be considered in future funding allocations.

Councillor D Freeman advised that he felt that the principal and immediate focus of the Parish Council should continue to be the introduction of zero-emission buses on all routes serving Church Street, recognising this as the most effective intervention within the Council's influence to reduce pollution levels.

Councillor D Freeman advised that he could not support two of the proposals submitted by the Elvet Clean Air Group; namely the introduction of an Elvet congestion charging zone and measures aimed at reducing student car usage through local restrictions.

Members expressed concern that a congestion charging zone could displace traffic onto already congested routes, including the A167, and noted that responsibility for reducing student car use rests primarily with Durham University.

Councillor E Scott also proposed that the Parish Council should write directly to the relevant Cabinet Member at Durham County Council seeking clarity on which actions within the *Climate Emergency Response Plan 2024–2027* are scheduled for imminent progression, with specific reference to measures relating to air quality and sustainable transport.

Members unanimously **agreed** to continue lobbying of the North East Mayor to prioritise the introduction of zero-emission buses on all routes serving Church Street.

Members also unanimously **agreed** to write to the relevant Cabinet Member at Durham County Council seeking clarity on imminent actions within the Climate Emergency Response Plan 2024–2027.

Members also unanimously **agreed** not to progress the proposals for a) an Elvet congestion charging zone and b) student car use reduction measures through local restrictions.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATES

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 22nd October 2025 as follows:

The Chair expressed thanks to the volunteers who have recently worked with the Parish Council to enhance the local environment. The Chair noted that tens of thousands of bulbs have been distributed across the parish and commended the Environment Committee for its efforts. It was further reported that additional fruit trees will be provided across the area in the coming weeks.

The Chair expressed disappointment regarding the announcement that the current year's Durham Lumiere event will be the final one, noting the event's significant cultural and economic contribution to both the City and County. The Chair emphasised the importance of ensuring that investment previously directed to Lumiere is retained for the benefit of the City.

The Chair informed Members that earlier in the month he had addressed the National Association of Local Councils' (NALC) Policy Committee concerning the Parish Council's campaign to amend national legislation so that public health becomes an objective within the Licensing Act 2003. The Chair reported that NALC is supporting the campaign and that Members of Parliament Luke Akehurst and Mary Kelly Foy have agreed to raise the matter with the Deputy Prime Minister.

Members were reminded that the heritage blue plaque unveiling for former Crossgate Councillor Sam Green will take place on 16 November. The Chair encouraged Members to attend and extended thanks to Councillor Roger Cornwell, Jean Rogers, and Professor Simon Forrest for their roles in hosting the event and reception. The Chair highlighted Sam Green's historic achievement as the first openly gay councillor elected in Britain.

The Chair further reminded Members that the annual Remembrance Sunday service and parade will take place on 9 November 2025. Members intending to participate were asked to notify the Clerk and provide height details to assist with robe arrangements. The Chair expressed appreciation to the Clerk, Councillor Elizabeth Scott, and volunteers for their work in preparation for the event.

The Chair reported that a joint drop-in consultation event regarding the first phase of the new World Heritage Site Management Plan will be held on 4 November at 6pm in the Town Hall. The Chair encouraged residents to participate, emphasising the importance of the World Heritage Site to the identity and heritage of Durham.

The Chair extended thanks to Councillor Elizabeth Scott for her work with Durham University's estates team in seeking a resolution to ongoing power and water supply issues affecting St Leonard's Boat Club. A positive meeting had been held with the University's Director of Estates and Facilities, and a solution is expected to be progressed. The Chair noted that the Parish Council had previously awarded a grant to support this work.

Finally, the Chair congratulated the Clerk, Adam, on being named a finalist in the County Durham Together Awards in the Public Service Award category. The

awards ceremony will take place on 4th December at Hardwick Hall Hotel, and Members conveyed their best wishes.

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

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

Earlier this year, the Internal Auditor carried out a review of the Parish Council's workings and provided a positive report, as provided to Members. Mazars LLP have now completed their external audit for the year ended 31st March 2025 and have certified the Annual Governance and Accountability Return. The Clerk advised that no issues have been identified in the external audit review. As such, the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 set out what the Parish Council must do at the conclusion of this audit.

Members thanked the Clerk for his work on this audit and unanimously **agreed** to note the conclusion of the external audit for 2024/25 and to instruct the Clerk to take all appropriate action, as set out in the report provided.

8. STANDARDS COMMITTEE PROPOSALS AFFECTING PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

The Chair provided a brief update on Durham County Council's changes to its Procedure for Member Code of Conduct Complaints. Members were informed that the most significant reform is the creation of a Standards Assessment Board (SAB), which would replace the Monitoring Officer as the body responsible for the initial assessment of complaints. This new sub-committee would consist of elected members and operate in private session.

The Chair reported that the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) has expressed concern that shifting decision-making from an independent officer to elected members risks introducing political influence into what has traditionally been an impartial process. The Chair advised that CDALC has invited parish and town councils to indicate whether they support retaining the current system or the proposed transfer of responsibilities, with early indications showing a preference for maintaining the Monitoring Officer's role.

The Chair noted that other procedural amendments include making informal resolution mandatory and refining investigation rules, but emphasised that the central issue is the governance impact of the SAB proposal.

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

The Chair reported that Durham County Council is undertaking a public consultation on its draft budget proposals and financial planning assumptions for the financial year commencing April 2026, together with its medium-term financial outlook to 2029/30. The purpose of the consultation is to align future budget

planning with the Council's priorities and to support openness and engagement with residents and stakeholders in the decision-making process.

The Chair advised that the consultation is open to residents, stakeholders and other interested parties who wish to provide comments, suggestions or concerns regarding the proposals.

The Chair further reminded Members that a special meeting of the Parish Council's Finance Committee had been held earlier in October to consider the proposals, noting that the information provided by the County Council is presented at a high-level and does not include detailed figures for individual budget areas.

Councillor R Cornwell expressed a particular concern relating to the potential withdrawal of 100% Council tax relief for some of County Durham's poorest residents.

Councillor L Wilson also expressed his concerns at the proposal to charge for transport for learning disability day services and highlighted his professional work on this service.

Members carefully considered each of the proposals as part of the County Council's budget for 2026/27 and medium-term financial plan and unanimously **agreed** the following response to this consultation:

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

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 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 were asked to leave the room.

10. REPORTS FROM PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

Members received a part-confidential report from Councillor R Cornwell on the most recent Student Housing Management Group meeting which was held on 29th September 2025.

The main points covered were:

- The Student Housing Survey 2024 had revealed that most students felt that their accommodation did not give good value for money. Worries about housing distracted them from their studies. The existing accreditation framework for student accommodation needs to be comprehensive and set clear quality standards beyond current licensing requirements.
- Additional licensing is needed to drive up standards.
- Housing standards is an ongoing concern for students living in HMOs. About 50% of those living in HMOs reported problems with damp. Councillor Cornwell shared the Parish Council's concerns that when planning applications brought to light properties not complying with HMO standards the Council's Environmental Health Department was not checking that these faults had been rectified.
- The University is working on its Strategy to follow on from the current one that expires in 2027.

- The Renters Rights Bill will change how the housing market operates and this will have a considerable impact on student lettings.

Members were also advised (and - at the time of the publication of these minutes - the University has now disclosed some of the housing statistics that were given in confidence in October, in a response to a planning application for Hopper House:

The updated figures for 24/25 show there were at least 18,834 bedspaces in the DH1 postcode area comprising:

- 8,927 bedspaces in 'off-street' properties (HMO / 1- and 2- bed student lets)
- 9,907 bedspaces in University owned/managed (7,856) and privately provided PBSA (2051)
- total bedspace demand at 95.7% (18,026 bedspaces)

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
(26th November 2025)**

ITEM 5: RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSED WORLD HERITAGE SITE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2025-2035 CONSULTATION

As Members are aware, the draft Management Plan for the World Heritage Site, covering the period 2025 to 2035, is currently being consulted on. The plan sets out a strategic framework to protect, manage and enhance the Outstanding Universal Value of the site in perpetuity.

By inviting public views, it is hoped that the plan's ambitions are grounded in local perspectives and priorities, and that stakeholders—including residents, visitors, community groups and the heritage sector—can contribute to shaping how the site is managed over the coming decade.

The Parish Council recently supported the World Heritage Site Coordinator and Durham Cathedral with a public consultation event in the Town Hall in November and responses to date have been positive.

Key objectives of the plan include safeguarding the site's architectural and historic fabric, preserving its setting and views, guiding sustainable development and visitor management, and linking the site's heritage value to broader benefits such as education, community identity and the local economy.

The draft Management Plan establishes the site's significance by explaining what makes it special locally and internationally, how it is currently protected and managed, and which pressures and opportunities it faces. The new plan is designed to be a material consideration in planning policy and development management, to support investment in the site, and to underpin future documents such as the County Durham Plan and the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan.

Additionally, the plan aims to align with the wider visitor-economy agenda and to enhance the vibrancy, pride of place and inward investment potential of the heritage site.

The consultation is open until Thursday 4 December 2025.

The Parish Council's Planning and Licensing Committee recently met to discuss this and wishes to propose the following response to this important consultation:

The City of Durham Parish Council very much welcomes this opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site Management Plan 2025-2035 and, in doing so, placing on record its unreserved support for this new Management Plan.

Durham Castle and Cathedral are not just iconic buildings — they are living heritage. They stand at the heart of our city, visible from nearly every approach, representing a thousand years of worship, learning and community life. They are places that continue to inspire awe, welcome pilgrims, educate students, support research, and bring people together. They are what make Durham Durham.

This Management Plan is far more than a policy document. It is a shared vision for stewardship - a commitment to conserve, to share and to regenerate this unique site for future generations. It sets out how the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site will be protected, how access and interpretation can improve, how different communities can be involved and how this place can remain relevant, inclusive and vibrant over the next decade.

As a City, we are incredibly fortunate to have such a comprehensive, thoughtful and people-centred plan to guide that future. The Parish Council wishes to commend the World Heritage Site Partnership Board for working so tirelessly with partners, experts and our community to bring this plan to life. This commitment to collaboration and community engagement has ensured that this document reflects not only the technical requirements of UNESCO, but also the voices, values and aspirations of the people of Durham.

In that regard, the City of Durham Parish Council strongly supports the Plan's emphasis on improving accessibility, interpretation and public engagement. The actions associated with the "Share" theme are excellent and reflect a serious commitment to ensuring that the World Heritage Site is experienced by a diversity of audiences.

We are particularly pleased to see the focus on increasing access to stories, spaces and experiences that were historically less visible. In addition, we reaffirm our longstanding view that the Fulling Mill should be brought back into meaningful public use. The Fulling Mill has the potential to serve as a valuable interpretative and engagement asset and could make a significant contribution to deepening the local and visitor understanding of the WHS. The Parish Council was pleased to hear further about such a direction for the Fulling Mill at the public engagement event we co-hosted on 4th November 2025 at Durham Town Hall.

A prominent theme within the public consultation responses we have seen to date is a strong desire to see improved access to the World Heritage Site, both in physical terms and in the quality of interpretation offered to visitors and residents. Respondents expressed the wish for greater access to spaces which are currently restricted or difficult to reach, as well as better storytelling about the site's social history and clearer, more intuitive wayfinding.

As such, the Parish Council very much welcomes the progress already being made during the lifetime of the current Management Plan period, including: the extension of the Cathedral bus service to operate on Sundays; the installation of new wayfinding signage around the World Heritage Site; and the provision of a fully accessible toilet within Fellows' Garden; the works being done to the Deanery Garden to create an Open Centre for Pilgrimage as well as a forthcoming Riverbanks Management Plan and potential capital works to a number of Public Rights of Ways (PRoWs), leading to and across the site. The Parish Council strongly supports the continuation and expansion of this work in this Management Plan.

Corrections within the WHS Management Plan

The Parish Council has identified a small number of factual inaccuracies and points requiring clarification within the draft Plan. We offer these observations

constructively and with the intention of ensuring that the final published version is as accurate and robust as possible.

First, the Plan states that "Durham Castle and Cathedral was the first UK cultural property to be inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1986" (Chapter 1, p.7). In fact, 1986 saw multiple UK cultural inscriptions, including Ironbridge Gorge, Stonehenge and Avebury, Studley Royal Park with the Ruins of Fountains Abbey and the four castles of Beaumaris, Conwy, Caernarfon and Harlech. Durham was among the first, but not the first, and a more accurate phrasing should reflect that Durham was one of the earliest UK cultural properties inscribed.

Secondly, the Plan describes Durham as "one of four cathedral/abbey World Heritage Sites in the UK alongside Canterbury Cathedral, the Palace of Westminster and Bath Abbey" (p.7). This is incorrect in several respects. Bath is not inscribed as "Bath Abbey" and its correct World Heritage Site designation is "City of Bath" (also part of the transnational WHS "The Great Spas of Europe"). Additionally, the UK list contains "Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey including Saint Margaret's Church," not simply "Palace of Westminster." Furthermore, the list omits "Studley Royal Park including the Ruins of Fountains Abbey," which is an abbey-related World Heritage Site. The Parish Council would suggest that the text is revised to reflect the correct UNESCO titles and the full number of relevant sites.

Finally, in Chapter 1.1, p.8, the name of UNESCO is incorrectly given as "United Nations Education and Cultural Organisation." The correct name is United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

These matters are minor and do not detract from the overall quality or ambition of the Plan. They are submitted in the interests of accuracy and to ensure full alignment with UNESCO terminology and UK governmental naming conventions.

Buffer zone

The Parish Council wishes to express its disappointment that the current review has not resulted in a proposal to extend the World Heritage Site boundary or to establish a formal UNESCO buffer zone. The Parish Council has long supported the principle of pursuing such measures where they could strengthen the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the World Heritage Site. However, having considered the detailed explanation provided in the Management Plan—particularly the findings of Decision 44 COM 8B.59, the Parish Council accepts the reasoning that a buffer zone would not, at present, deliver additional protection.

The Plan makes clear that both the current WHS boundary and the possibility of a buffer zone were rigorously evaluated, and concludes that introducing a formal buffer zone would not add to the protection to the property. The Parish Council acknowledges that this conclusion aligns with UNESCO's emphasis—reinforced through recent World Heritage Committee documentation—on ensuring that boundary or buffer changes demonstrably improve management effectiveness and clarity, rather than layering additional terminology without added benefit to protection or monitoring.

In place of a buffer zone, the Parish Council welcomes and has actively supported the alternative measures set out in the Plan: namely, the clearer definition of the setting of the WHS and its contribution to OUV, the strengthening of planning controls through the Durham City Conservation Area Management Plan, the systematic use of Heritage Impact Assessments for development proposals affecting the site and the creation of a technical planning document on WHS setting to be embedded within the revised County Durham Plan. These actions represent a more precise and enforceable approach than a buffer zone designation alone, and—critically—will ensure the Site’s protection through statutory planning mechanisms.

Conclusion

The City of Durham Parish Council warmly endorses the Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site Management Plan 2025–2035. We applaud the leadership of the WHS Coordinator, the Partnership Board, Durham Cathedral, Durham University and all partners involved. We are proud to continue as an active partner in the future stewardship of the site and look forward to supporting the successful delivery of the projects and aspirations within this Plan.

End of response

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to consider the above information and approve the draft response to the WHS Management Plan consultation.
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ITEM 5: PROPOSAL TO SUPPORT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ANNUAL DURHAM LANDLORD OF THE YEAR AWARDS SCHEME IN COLLABORATION WITH RATE YOUR LANDLORD.

This report proposes that the City of Durham Parish Council supports the establishment of an annual *Durham Landlord of the Year* awards scheme, delivered in collaboration with the independent housing review platform Rate Your Landlord.

The purpose of the scheme is to recognise high-performing landlords operating in the Durham area, celebrate best practice in property management, and help encourage higher standards within the private rented sector, particularly in areas with a high concentration of student accommodation.

Rate Your Landlord is an online review platform designed to allow student tenants to share detailed feedback on their landlords or letting agents. The service is run in partnership with Unipol Student Homes and local student unions and provides an accessible, transparent means for students to record their experiences in private rented housing. In Durham, the platform was introduced in September 2025 following an agreement between Durham University and the Durham Students' Union. Its launch has already begun to create a public record of landlord performance, helping students make informed decisions while encouraging landlords to maintain higher standards.

<https://www.rateyourlandlord.org.uk/landlord-rankings/durham-rankings/>

The University and colleges are also listed as a landlord as part of the scheme as one of the major student accommodation providers in our City.

The Rate Your Landlord platform assesses landlords across several structured criteria intended to capture the full renting experience. These criteria include: the quality of the signing and letting process; customer service provided by the landlord; efficiency in dealing with repairs; the overall safety and security of the property; the value for money of the accommodation; how much the property felt like a home; the quality of the moving-out process; and the fairness with which deposits were handled. Only tenants who rented the property in the relevant academic year are permitted to submit reviews, ensuring that ratings reflect recent and direct experience.

The proposed *Durham Landlord of the Year* award would be based on a combination of Rate Your Landlord scores together with qualitative assessment by the Parish Council's Neighbourhood Wardens. The Wardens' perspectives—gained through their direct engagement with landlords, tenants, and neighbourhood issues—would provide a crucial layer of insight not captured in online reviews alone. Their feedback would cover matters such as routine property upkeep, responsiveness to community concerns, cooperation in resolving incidents of anti-social behaviour, and general standards of property management within the City.

The selection process would occur annually, using Rate Your Landlord data. A shortlist of the top-rated landlords would be reviewed jointly by the Environment Committee, drawing additional information from Neighbourhood Wardens to ensure that the award reflects both tenant experience and the wider community impact of each landlord's practices. The Committee would determine the final winner.

Introducing an annual *Durham Landlord of the Year* award would offer clear benefits to students, residents, landlords, and the Council alike. For students, the award would reinforce the importance of informed housing choices and highlight those landlords who offer safe and supportive living environments. For the wider community, it would promote responsible property management, contributing to better neighbourhood relations and improved standards of accommodation.

For landlords, the award would provide public recognition of good practice; enhancing their reputation and encouraging higher professional standards across the sector. For the Parish Council, the initiative would support its ongoing commitment to improving housing quality and neighbourhood wellbeing, using an evidence-based and collaborative model.

As part of its budget request for Financial Year 2026-27, the Environment Committee has requested £500 towards the establishment of this Award. If approved, it is proposed that this Award is presented on an annual basis at the Parish Council's annual meeting of the parish in May 2026.

It is recommended that the Parish Council endorses this annual award and works in partnership with colleagues to launch the scheme in 2026. Establishing the *Durham Landlord of the Year* award will demonstrate a proactive commitment to supporting high-quality private renting and promoting positive landlord-tenant-community relationships across the parish area.

DECISIONS REQUIRED	1) For Members to approved the establishment of the <i>Durham Landlord of the Year</i> awards scheme, as set out in the above report. 2) If 1) is approved, for Members to agree to delegate responsibility for determining the winner of such an award to the Parish Council's Environment Committee. 3) If 1) is approved, for Members to agree to present this award each year at the annual meeting of the parish.
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ITEM 7: PARISH COUNCIL STRATEGY 2026/ 2027

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.

The City of Durham Parish Council has five overarching priorities for our area:

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 (excluding Finance and Personnel Committees) in 2026/27 are set out below:

Planning and Licensing Committee

Council priorities 2026/27	Planning priorities 2026/27	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
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. Ensuring that all accommodation, including that for students, is safe and of a suitable standard.	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 parish on planning matters.	Upholding the development plans for the area i.e. Neighbourhood Plan and County Durham Plan. Representing our residents during the review of the County Durham Plan	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
	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	Supporting accommodation above retail units in the City centre.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future

to improve prosperity of parish		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 2026/27	Licensing priorities 2026/27	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 representations on licensing matters.	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
	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
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Environment Committee

Council priorities 2026/27	Environment priorities 2026/27	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 2026/27	Business priorities 2026/27	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

	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 2026/27 as set out above.
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ITEM 8: PARISH COUNCIL BUDGET FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2026/27

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 2026.

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

Members began the process of reviewing the City of Durham Parish Council's medium-term plan earlier this year. Following an online questionnaire together with an informal strategy session in July 2025 as well as a Members' Away Day in September 2025, Members have set out a number of key priorities for the Council moving forward

Members agreed as follows:

- There is a need for the Parish Council to prioritise more of the 'bread and butter' issues in the delivery of its work. Namely – organising and supporting events which help to drive footfall and improve the vitality of our city centre, more focus on keeping the parish area clean and green and supporting community centres/ facilities.
- All expenditure requests must have a specific and deliverable project attached to it ahead of being proposed during the budget setting process.
- Whilst the Parish Council will maintain a contingency fund for any unforeseen expenditure during the year (in accordance with best practice), the Parish Council should not deviate from its agreed programme of work with new projects during the year or allow "mission creep" to set in.
- The precept should only rise in line with inflation over this term of the Parish Council, unless an emergency issue occurs.

Projects to be discontinued

Whilst there is an ongoing commitment to continue with the vast majority of the Parish Council's initiatives, there is now broad agreement that the following projects should come to a close at the end of the current financial year:

- The Service Level Agreement for an enhanced Police service for the City of Durham Parish Council (£40,000 in FY 25/26).
- The professional support to help fill empty units delivered by Canny Insights (£3,600 in FY 25/26).
- The Parish Council's contribution to the all-out elections (£25,000 in FY 25/26) will clearly not be a budget item for the next few financial years,

albeit the Parish Council shall continue to build up (at a rate of £5,000 per year presently) an election reserve in the event of a by-election.

Projects to prioritise in future

There is also broad agreement on the following further priorities being delivered over this term of the Parish Council:

- Following an audit of community facilities/ centres within the parish, to establish a rolling programme of financial support where a specific need/ area of improvement has been identified.
- More funding allocated towards the Parish Council's planting budget which allows for greater coverage and maintenance of planters/ trees, etc.
- More funding allocated towards events within the City of Durham parish area, including events identified + Business Events Grant fund.
- More funding allocated towards the small grants scheme for local community and voluntary organisations within the parish.

Strategy and budget setting process

- Members were asked to consider each Committee's strategic priorities and expenditure requests in October/ November, in order that the budget and precept for FY 26/27 can be agreed at the November Full Council meeting on 26th November 2025.
- The Councillors' Away Day(s) will continue each year.

Budget for 2026/27 (expenditure only)

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	£2,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Improving the licensed economy	
Enhanced drug searching scheme with Durham Police	£600.00
PRIORITY 3: Tackling shoplifting and anti-social behaviour	
Best Bar None	£2,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2026-27 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£9,600.00

Environment Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Noise abatement	
<i>What to do if you have a local issue in Durham leaflet...</i>	£2,000.00

PRIORITY 2: Clean Air, Clean and Green City	
Planting budget	£20,000.00
PRIORITY 3: Emergency plan	
Community emergency plan – emergency boxes	£2,000.00
PRIORITY 4: Improving the appearance of our City	
Neighbourhood Warden SLA	£13,000.00
PRIORITY 5: Promoting the heritage of our parish area	
Heritage project	£5,000.00
PRIORITY 6: Enhancing the River Wear	
Supporting the work of the Wear Rivers Trust (Education and INNs)	£2,500.00
PRIORITY 7: Improving housing standards for students	
Rate Your Landlord annual awards scheme	£500.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2026-27 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£45,000.00

Business Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Increasing footfall through events	
Hosting events in Durham City (Remembrance Sunday, Christmas events, D-Day Anniversary, miscellaneous).	£45,000.00
Sponsoring community events with local businesses – a specific focus on improving the early evening economy	£15,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Improving shop frontages in the City	
Christmas Frontage Awards (previously under Environment Committee)	£1,500.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2026-27 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£61,500.00

Finance Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Improving community facilities	
Community centres/ facilities fund	£40,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2026-27 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£40,000.00

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)	£22,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Training of staff and Councillors	
Training budget	£2,000.00
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)	£90,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2026-27 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£129,000.00

Contingencies	£15,000.00
Election reserve	£5,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2026-27 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£20,000.00

Committee	Cost (£)
Planning and Licensing Committee	£9,600.00
Environment Committee	£45,000.00
Business Committee	£61,500.00
Finance Committee	£40,000.00
Full Council	£129,000.00
Contingencies and election reserves (to be added)	£20,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2025/26 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£305,100.00

DECISION REQUIRED	Councillors are asked to consider the above report and agree an appropriate budget for financial year 2026/27.
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ITEM 9: PARISH COUNCIL PRECEPT REQUEST FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2026/27

Budget

Details of the proposed expenditure by Committees are set out under Item 8 of this Agenda.

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 2026/27 Tax Base is 4688.8. The 2025/26 City of Durham Parish Council Tax Base was calculated at 4,622.9. Our Tax Base has therefore increased by 65.9.

Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Grant

The LCTRS grant payable to the City of Durham for 2026/27 will be £0.00. In 2025/26, the Parish Council also received £0.00 from the LCTRS grant. DCC now proposes to cease payment of this grant to Parish/ Town Councils from 2026/27.

Precept request

The precept request must be submitted to Durham County Council by the end of January 2026.

The Parish Council's precept charge for Band D currently sits at £63.20. 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.

The Parish Council's Finance Committee met on 19th November 2025 and unanimously agreed to increase the precept in line with the current inflation rate. As such, the Band D charge would increase by £2.41 and would therefore become £65.61. This would generate a total precept of £307,632.168 and would provide a slight surplus (based on the proposed budget in Item 8) of £2,532.17.

DECISION REQUIRED	Councillors are asked to consider the above information and approve the precept request for financial year 2026/27.
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ITEM 10: COUNTY DURHAM ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCIL'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

Members are reminded that the City of Durham Parish Council is a Member Council for the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC).

CDALC is now seeking nominations for all positions on its Executive Committee, following the structural changes agreed at the recent CDALC Annual General Meeting (AGM).

CDALC is the representative body for parish and town councils within County Durham, providing a collective voice at county and national level. Its Executive Committee acts as CDALC's governing and strategic decision-making body. The Committee oversees CDALC's operational work, coordinates representation on behalf of member councils, responds to national and local consultations, and nominates representatives to various county and national bodies. The Committee also plays a key role in supporting the Executive Officer and contributing to wider local governance initiatives.

In practice, the Executive Committee meets quarterly, typically in March, June, September and December, with meetings held in person but with remote attendance available where required. Members are also expected to attend their relevant Forum meetings during the year. In addition to its scheduled meetings, the Committee may convene additional sessions when required to respond to consultations or external requests, or to undertake other governance responsibilities.

Following appointment at the AGM, the Committee must elect a Chair and Vice-Chair, as well as appoint representatives to the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) National Assembly and to the NALC AGM.

At the latest CDALC AGM, member councils agreed to adopt a revised structure for the Executive Committee. This change provides clearer representation across larger and smaller councils and across designated council areas. The new structure is designed to ensure wider participation, strengthen governance capacity, and reflect the diversity of member councils. A full summary of the revised composition is provided below.

The revised Executive Committee consists of 21 positions, of which 19 hold voting rights. The composition is as follows:

- **President (1 seat)** – normally a local Member of Parliament; elected at the AGM for a two-year term; non-voting.
- **Honorary Auditor (1 seat)** – elected at the AGM for a two-year term; non-voting.
- **Larger Council Representatives (8 seats)** – elected at the AGM for a two-year term; voting.

- **Smaller Council Representatives (8 seats)** – elected at the AGM for a two-year term; voting.

Area Representatives

- Darlington Borough Area (1 seat) – elected by the area and reported to the AGM; tenure determined locally; voting.
- Gateshead Council Area (1 seat) – elected by the area and reported to the AGM; tenure determined locally; voting.
- City of Sunderland Area (1 seat) – elected by the area and reported to the AGM; tenure determined locally; voting.

The two-year appointments arising from the current nomination round will run until the 2027 AGM, anticipated in October 2027, after which biennial elections will continue.

Nomination Process

Member councils are invited to submit nominations for the following positions by 31 January 2026:

- President
- Honorary Auditor
- Larger Council Representative (where the nominating council meets the criteria of an electorate above 6,000 and/or a budget exceeding £250,000)
- Smaller Council Representative
- Area positions for Darlington, Gateshead and Sunderland (to be confirmed by email and ratified at the Special General Meeting)

All nominations must be submitted by the Clerk, using the designated online nomination form. Email submissions will not be accepted.

For the positions of President and Honorary Auditor, the existing post-holders have indicated their intention to stand again and therefore must be formally nominated to be considered.

Nominees for Larger or Smaller Council representative positions must additionally provide a 200-word supporting statement, submitted separately using the required online form. Statements exceeding 200 words will be truncated for inclusion with meeting papers. Both the clerk's nomination and the nominee's separate statement must be received for an application to be valid.

All Executive Committee appointments will be confirmed at the Special General Meeting (SGM), provisionally scheduled for **Saturday 7 March 2026** at a venue to be confirmed. Where the number of valid nominees exceeds the available positions, elections will be held at the SGM. Nominee statements will be circulated in advance within the meeting papers.

Executive Committee members are expected to:

- Attend quarterly meetings, with 2026 meeting dates set for 18 March, 17 June, 16 September and 2 December.
- Attend their relevant Forum meetings, with 2026 dates scheduled for 19 February, 21 May, 16 July and 19 November.
- Contribute to additional work as required, such as responding to government consultations, participating in focus groups, supporting standards processes, and assisting with training and peer review engagements.
- Support the Executive Officer in representing CDALC within county and national governance structures.
- Participate in the appointment of representatives to NALC bodies.

These responsibilities reflect the broader, ongoing commitment expected of Executive Committee members beyond attendance at scheduled meetings.

The City of Durham Parish Council is invited to consider whether it wishes to nominate candidates for any of the available positions on the CDALC Executive Committee.

The revised structure offers enhanced opportunities for representation and engagement in the governance of local councils across County Durham. Members are asked to note the nomination deadline of 31 January 2026 and the requirement for both a formal clerk submission and a supporting statement where applicable.

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to consider the above report and agree any nominations for the CDALC Executive Committee ahead of 31 st January 2026.
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ITEM 11: Report by Councillor S Walker on the County Durham Association of Local Council's (CDALC) Annual General Meeting, held on Saturday 25th October 2025

Membership Fees 2026/27

- CDALC fee: to rise by 3.3%, from 15p to 15.5p per elector. NALC fee: proposed at 8.6p per elector, subject to ratification at the
- NALC AGM on 13 November 2025. This gives a combined total of 24.1p per elector for 2026/27.

The increases are in line with inflation and designed to maintain a balanced budget.

Executive Committee reform

Following the abolition of the County Council's Area Action Partnerships, CDALC agreed to move to a new structure for its Executive Committee based on council size (larger/smaller) rather than geography.

- Nominations will open in November 2025, closing end of January 2026
- A Special General Meeting will be held in late February or early March 2026 to elect the new Executive Committee and approve related constitutional amendments.
- Existing Executive members will continue until the new structure is in place.

Future Meetings (2026)

- Forum meetings: 19 Feb, 21 May, 16 Jul, 19 Nov
- Executive Committee: 18 Mar, 17 Jun, 16 Sep, 2 Dec
- AGM: 24 Oct

North East Combined Authority Presentation

Tracey Elvin, Assistant Director of People and Transformation at NECA, gave a presentation outlining the Authority's achievements in its first year, including:

- £70m NE Investment Fund for small businesses
- £800m transport investment (including Metro expansion, zero-emission buses, and new cycling routes)
- Programmes for skills, housing, and child poverty reduction

Councillors raised questions about communication between NECA and local councils, to which Ms Elvin committed to improving dialogue and returning with future updates.

Health and Well Being as a Statutory Licensing objectives

- CDALC will continue to lobby for health and wellbeing to become a statutory licensing objective.
- Parish councils were encouraged to respond to the current government consultation on licensing reform.