



City of Durham Parish Council

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Date of summons: 18th February 2026

SUMMONS

To all Members of the City of Durham Parish Council: Councillors V Ashfield, 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 25th February 2026 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 28TH JANUARY 2026**
- 4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
- 5. COMMITTEE UPDATES**

- **Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from the meetings held on 9th and 23rd January 2026**

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

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

- Proposed response to the consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- Proposal to support the establishment of a 'City of Durham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group'.

- **Environment Committee minutes from the meeting held on 13th January 2026**

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

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

- Report to support the work of the Wear Rivers Trust in tackling invasive non-native species (INNS) along the River Wear catchment area.
- Report on priorities for greening the parish area over 2026-27.

- 6. CHAIR'S UPDATES**

The Chair will provide a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 28TH January 2026.

- 7. PARISH COUNCIL CIVILITY AND RESPECT PLEDGE**

- 8. MOTION BY COUNCILLORS V ASHFIELD AND F ROBINSON RELATING TO ELVET GREEN AND THE RETENTION OF OPEN SPACE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL**

- 9. DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATION ON TACKLING POVERTY IN COUNTY DURHAM**

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

- Report by Councillor S Walker on the most recent meeting of the County Durham Association of Local Council (CDALC).

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.

11. PERSONNEL MATTERS AND STAFF/ MEMBER TRAINING

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Wednesday 28th January 2026 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**), V Ashfield, G Bignardi, R Cornwell, D Freeman, R Handy, E Hopgood, G Holland, C Lattin, P Layton, F Robinson and E Scott

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley and 3 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, L Wilson and T Cleaver.

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 26TH NOVEMBER 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th November 2025 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None received.

5. COMMITTEE UPDATES

• Planning and Licensing Committee

Councillor G Holland presented the Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from the meetings held on 14th and 28th November 2025. There being no queries from Members, Councillor G Holland moved on to Committee reports.

Consultation on enhanced protections for homeowners on freehold estates

Councillor G Holland presented a report on the Government's consultation regarding enhanced protections for homeowners on freehold estates. Members were advised that the consultation seeks to implement Part 5 of the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024, responding to widespread concerns about so-called "fleecehold" arrangements, under which homeowners pay private estate management charges in addition to full council tax, often with limited rights to challenge costs or service standards.

The report noted that the Parish Council had previously lobbied its Member of Parliament on this issue and that the matter had been raised in Parliament,

including calls for local authority adoption to become the default position for new housing estates.

Cllr Holland outlined the nature of freehold estate charges, explaining that on many new or mixed-tenure estates, shared infrastructure such as roads, lighting and open spaces is not adopted by the local authority and is instead managed by private companies, with costs passed directly to residents through legally binding estate charges.

Members were reminded that, unlike leaseholders, freehold homeowners currently have very limited statutory protections, and that recent findings by the Competition and Markets Authority had highlighted significant failings in the private estate management model and recommended stronger consumer protections and greater adoption by local authorities.

The report summarised the key proposals within the consultation, including the introduction of a right for homeowners to challenge the reasonableness of estate management and administration charges at tribunal; time limits on recovering costs for works; standardised demand forms and annual reporting to improve transparency; mandatory consultation on major works; the ability to apply for the appointment of a replacement management company in cases of serious management failure; minimum qualification requirements for estate managers; funded free advice for affected homeowners; and exploration of options to make resident-controlled management the default.

Councillor G Holland advised that the Planning and Licensing Committee had reviewed the consultation in detail and recommended a formal response supporting the overall direction of travel, while emphasising that these measures should be seen as a necessary, but second-best, solution compared with ending the practice entirely.

The proposed response strongly supported the full and undiluted implementation of the reforms, highlighted local examples of escalating and opaque charges, and stressed the importance of enforceable rights, transparency, accountability and accessible redress for residents. It also called for robust secondary legislation, meaningful tribunal processes, and clear routes to resident-controlled management where feasible.

Members unanimously **approved** the Parish Council's proposed response to the consultation.

Report on a proposed Article 4 Direction to protect against the loss of front gardens within the City of Durham parish area

Councillor G Holland presented a report outlining work undertaken following the Council's decision in January 2025 to explore a new Article 4 Direction to remove permitted development rights relating to the creation of hardstanding in front gardens. Members were reminded that current permitted development rights allow the loss of front gardens for parking and associated works, limiting the local planning authority's ability to exercise control.

The report, prepared by Jo-Anne Garrick at a cost of £1,500 (previously agreed within the Council's budget), provides a robust evidence base assessing the cumulative impact of hard surfacing on local character, visual amenity, environmental quality and the street scene across defined areas of the City parish outside the Durham City Conservation Area.

Councillor G Holland summarised the key findings, noting that while much of the parish has retained front gardens and soft landscaping, there are specific streets and clusters where extensive hardstanding has led to the erosion of character, increased visual dominance of vehicles, loss of green infrastructure, and wider impacts such as surface water run-off, reduced biodiversity and urban heat effects.

The report distinguishes between areas where monitoring remains appropriate and a limited number of locations where further incremental change could result in significant and potentially irreversible harm. In these locations, an Article 4 Direction was identified as a proportionate and proactive mechanism to ensure future proposals are assessed through the planning process, with proper consideration of design and landscaping.

Members were advised that the evidence base has been prepared in line with national planning policy, including the National Planning Policy Framework, and is intended to inform discussions with Durham County Council as local planning authority.

Councillor G Holland advised that the Planning and Licensing Committee recommended that the Parish Council now seeks an early meeting with Durham County Council planning and policy officers to present the evidence, discuss its conclusions, refine the potential geographic scope and agree the procedural steps required to progress a targeted Article 4 Direction.

Members **agreed** (by 10 votes in favour and 1 abstention) to reaffirm the Parish Council's commitment to progressing this initiative, and to authorise the Planning and Licensing Committee to pursue discussions with Durham County Council as soon as practicable.

• **Environment Committee**

Councillor C Lattin presented the Environment Committee minutes from the meeting held on 11th November 2025. There were no queries from Members.

Proposed criteria for the establishment of an annual *Durham Student Landlord of the Year* Awards scheme.

The Clerk highlighted that, since the publication of the Agenda, it had become apparent that some Members felt that there is further work to be done on the criteria for this Award. Members noted that this is a great initiative in principle but felt there were some elements of what was being proposed in the report presented which they would appreciate a further chance to discuss in more detail at Committee level once more.

As such, it was **agreed** that this item should be deferred back to the Environment Committee and Councillor C Lattin agreed that the next Environment Committee Agenda would be formulated such as to allow for time for a good discussion on this matter and that the meeting would be in-person.

- **Finance Committee**

Councillor S Walker presented the Finance Committee minutes from the meeting held on 19th November 2025. There being no queries from Members, Councillor S Walker invited Councillor E Scott to present the Committee report on community centre support.

Report from the community centre support working group – including a proposed advert for a bid writer/ fundraiser in order to support a cultural venue within the City

Councillor E Scott presented a report on behalf of the Community Centre Support Working Group, outlining progress following the Parish Council's decision after the May 2025 elections to prioritise support for community centres and facilities during the 2025–2029 term.

Members were reminded that a dedicated annual fund had been agreed and that an Expression of Interest process was launched in October 2025 to gather information from community facilities on governance, aspirations and barriers, in order to inform a structured and sustainable support programme aligned with Parish Council priorities.

Councillor E Scott reported that eight Expressions of Interest had been received, all of a high standard. Following assessment by the Working Group, three organisations—St Giles Church, Waddington Street United Reformed Church and Alington House Community Association—had been selected to progress to the next stage, reflecting the strength of their submissions and their clear focus on long-term sustainability and responses to the climate emergency.

Councillor E Scott advised that these organisations have been invited to submit full applications by 19th February 2026, after which funding will be allocated on a competitive basis. Other applicants were not progressed at this stage but have been notified and signposted to alternative funding opportunities, including the Parish Council's Small Grants Scheme.

Members were advised that the Working Group had also considered the Expression of Interest from the City Theatre. While recognising the quality and ambition of the proposal, the Working Group concluded that the scale of investment required fell outside the scope of the Community Centres Support Fund. Instead, it was proposed that the Parish Council support the City Theatre by funding access to a specialist fundraiser or bid writer to help secure substantial external funding from regional and national sources. The Finance Committee had subsequently agreed that tenders should be sought for this purpose, and a draft advert for a fundraising and bid writing contractor had been prepared.

Members noted the content of the report presented and **agreed** to await applications from all eligible organisations by Thursday 19th February 2026,

whereupon each application will be assessed by the Parish Council's Working Group. Members also unanimously **approved** the use of part of the funding towards a fundraiser to support the City Theatre, as set out in the report presented.

Members also unanimously **approved** the content of the proposed advert and **agreed** to advertise this by the end of January 2026.

- **Business Committee**

Councillor E Scott presented the Business Committee minutes from the meeting held on 18th November 2025. There being no queries from Members, Councillor E Scott moved on to Committee reports.

Response to the Government consultation on a proposed visitor levy in England

Councillor E Scott presented a report on the Government consultation concerning the introduction of a discretionary visitor levy on paid overnight stays in England. Members were advised that the consultation seeks views on the framework for a levy that Mayoral Strategic Authorities could choose to implement, with revenues retained locally to support the visitor economy.

Members noted that no authority would be required to introduce a levy and that central government funding would not be reduced for authorities choosing not to do so.

Councillor E Scott outlined the main elements of the proposals, including a preference for a percentage-based charge on accommodation costs, potential exemptions, and the requirement for transparency, public consultation and advance notice prior to any implementation.

Councillor E Scott advised that levy revenues could be used for visitor infrastructure, public realm improvements, cultural activity and skills development, and that the consultation explores whether funding should be shared with constituent local authorities, reflecting localised tourism impacts.

Councillor E Scott highlighted Durham city's strong day-visitor economy but relatively small overnight accommodation base, which has implications for both revenue potential and the impact on local providers.

Councillor E Scott reported that views across the local visitor economy are mixed, with some support for reinvestment benefits and concerns expressed about competitiveness and administrative burdens, particularly for small operators. Reference was also made to regional discussions, including public support expressed by the North East Mayor for a flat-rate levy.

Councillor E Scott advised that the Business Committee had considered the consultation and recommended a draft response supporting the principle of a visitor levy, subject to key conditions. These included minimising administrative burdens, a preference for a per-booking, per-night charging model, fair local distribution of revenues with opportunities for parish councils to access funding, and careful alignment with any national registration scheme for short-term lets.

Members unanimously **approved** the draft response to this consultation.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATES

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 26th November 2025 as follows:

The Chair opened by informing Members of the recent passing of the internationally renowned sculptor Dr Fenwick Lawson, best known locally for The Journey sculpture in Durham City. Members' condolences were extended to Dr Lawson's wife Joan and family, and the Chair advised that the Clerk would inform Members of funeral arrangements when confirmed.

The Chair updated Members on city developments, including confirmation that works at North Road Bus Station are expected to be completed later in the year, with the prolonged scaffolding finally due to be removed. The Chair also reported further communication from the developers of the STACK site on Silver Street, confirming their continued commitment to completing the scheme, and welcomed the interim removal of hoardings while urging progress on site.

The Chair reminded Members that the owners of Prince Bishops Place Shopping Centre will host a public drop-in event on Thursday 5 February at 5:30pm in Unit 10 to present proposed amendments to the previously approved redevelopment scheme.

The Chair formally recorded her sincere thanks to the Durham City Riverscape Community and Durham Paddlesport Club for recovering a fly-tipped fridge/freezer from the River Wear and undertaking a wider litter pick, following the inability of statutory bodies to assist. The Chair commended the volunteers' commitment to protecting the local environment.

The Chair also thanked Councillor G Holland for raising concerns about ongoing parking pressures at University Hospital of North Durham. The Chair advised that correspondence had been sent to the Trust's new Chief Executive suggesting alternative parking solutions, including greater use of Park and Ride and nearby under-used car parks, and that a response was awaited.

The Chair provided an update on preparations for the forthcoming Chinese New Year celebrations, with thanks extended to the Clerk and partner organisations. Members noted the planned celebrations on 21st February and a joint firework display organised by Durham University and the rowing club on 16th February, intended to address previous concerns about uncoordinated fireworks.

The Chair congratulated Councillors V Ashfield and C Lattin on the success of the free fruit tree giveaway event held in November, which was reported to have boosted local trading and supported environmental objectives and expressed hope that the initiative would continue.

Finally, the Chair recorded sincere thanks to Tez Errington of Durham County Council for his long-standing support to the Parish Council, particularly in relation

to Remembrance Sunday arrangements, and wished him well as he leaves the local authority to pursue a new business venture.

7. ELVET GREEN - ASSET OF COMMUNITY VALUE NOMINATION

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council had been consulted by DCC in December regarding a nomination submitted by the Hemp Garden Association to include Elvet Green on the County Council's List of Assets of Community Value under the Localism Act 2011. The Clerk advised that the nomination related to land owned by DCC, including the former public toilet block, and that the Parish Council had been invited to comment as part of the statutory consultation process.

The Clerk outlined that the Hemp Garden Association is a volunteer-led group established in 2017, which maintains and promotes the land as a community green space and that the nomination set out the case for the site's recreational, environmental and community value. The Clerk highlighted that the Association's work in the area is highly commended by local residents.

The Clerk summarised the legal framework for Asset of Community Value listings, including the statutory criteria and the effect of listing, noting that listing does not prevent disposal but triggers a moratorium period should the owner decide to sell. Members were also informed that applicants currently have no statutory right of appeal if a nomination is refused, although potential future changes to legislation are under consideration nationally.

The Clerk highlighted that the request had been received on 22nd December and that the deadline for responding to this was 16th January. As such, the timeframe was outside the usual schedule of meetings and the consultation had therefore been circulated to Members in writing. The Clerk highlighted that the majority of Members had responded to this request asking to note the consultation, albeit some Members wished to support the application. No extraordinary meeting was called to consider this application and, therefore the action taken was in accordance with the Council's scheme of delegation (section 7).

The Clerk advised that this item was being referred to this meeting for a formal ratification of the decision taken over writing.

Councillor V Ashfield expressed strong support for the Association's application and highlighted the excellent maintenance work the Association does in this part of the City. This support was echoed by Councillors F Robinson and R Handy who advised that they felt that this application, and support for a resident-led organisation, ought to merit Parish Council support.

The Chair invited further comments from Members and none were received. Members **agreed** (by 8 votes in favour and 4 against) to formally ratify the decision to note this application without comment.

8. REPORT ON THE PARISH COUNCIL'S INTERNAL CONTROLS

Members unanimously **agreed** to the appointment of Mr Gordon Fletcher as the Parish Council's internal auditor for the financial year 2025/26.

Members unanimously **agreed** the following report on the Parish Council's internal controls:

1. RESPONSIBILITY

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

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

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

2. SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CONTROL

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

The Parish Council has now adopted a risk register and this is under continuing review by the Clerk and any issues arising from risk assessments carried out will be reported to full Council.

The Council

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

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

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

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

Clerk to the Council

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

Payments

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

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

Risk Assessments/Risk Management

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

Internal Audit

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

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

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

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

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

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

External Audit

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

3. REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

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

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

4. EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

The external audit report for 2024-25 was carried out by Mazars and was completed in September 2025. No issues were raised by the external auditors.

5. INTERNAL CONTROL ISSUES

The Auditors did not raise any issues as part of the 2024-25 Audit.

End of report

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

Signed,

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council
(25th February 2026)**

ITEM 5: PROPOSED RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON CHANGES TO THE NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (NPPF)

As Members are aware, the Government has launched a formal consultation entitled "*Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system*".

From the assessment undertaken by the Parish Council's Planning and Licensing Committee, it is felt that what is being proposed represents one of the most extensive revisions of national planning policy since the NPPF was first introduced and certainly adds to the significant changes made in December 2024, as the Government sets out a route to build 1.5million new homes by the end of this Parliament.

The consultation closes on 10th March 2026, after which the Government will consider responses before publishing a revised Framework.

A full copy of the consultation documents can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-framework-proposed-reforms-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system>

In contrast to the December 2024 NPPF, which largely refined and consolidated existing policy, the December 2025 consultation proposes a more fundamental restructuring of national planning policy. The draft Framework is reorganised into two distinct parts: plan-making policies and national decision-making policies. The stated intention is to reduce duplication between local plans and national policy, increase certainty in decision-making, and move towards a more rules-based system. This represents a significant shift from the current approach, where local plans frequently repeat and interpret national policy.

Strengthening the presumption in favour principle

A major change is the strengthening of the presumption in favour of development in locations considered "appropriate in principle". The draft NPPF places far greater emphasis on intensification within settlements, particularly in urban areas and locations judged to be well connected. Compared with the December 2024 NPPF, the new draft is more explicit in supporting development within existing residential areas, including infill development, redevelopment of plots, and upward extensions, subject to high-level design principles. This has the potential to reduce local discretion in areas where character, heritage and townscape sensitivity are currently key considerations.

National minimum density

The consultation introduces new national minimum density expectations, including specific minimum densities around railway stations and in other well-connected locations. This marks a clear departure from the December 2024 NPPF, which encouraged efficient use of land but did not set nationally defined density benchmarks. The draft proposes that higher densities should be accepted in principle around stations, including in some cases on land currently designated as Green Belt, provided certain criteria are met. This approach has particular

implications for historic cities where transport hubs are closely linked to sensitive heritage settings.

Green Belt

Green Belt policy is also revised. While the fundamental purposes of Green Belt remain, the draft NPPF places greater emphasis on reviewing boundaries through plan-making to support housing delivery, including in station-related locations. The December 2024 NPPF treated Green Belt release as an exceptional measure; the consultation signals a more permissive approach where development objectives, especially housing supply and accessibility, are given increased weight. From what I have seen from the consultation documents, the existing protections around Green Belt which contributes towards historical towns and their settings remain.

Changes to heritage policies

The draft NPPF proposes changes to heritage policy intended to make it “more navigable” and “more positive”. While the Government states that protection of heritage assets remains important, the consultation replaces some detailed policy wording with broader principles and revised weightings. For areas such as Durham, which contain a World Heritage Site, conservation areas, and highly sensitive historic landscapes, there is concern that simplification may reduce the clarity and strength of existing safeguards when compared with the December 2024 Framework.

Developer contributions

Significant changes are also proposed in relation to developer contributions. The consultation strengthens the expectation that infrastructure and affordable housing requirements are fixed at plan stage and limits the scope for renegotiation on viability grounds. It introduces proposals to standardise planning obligations, encourages the use of model Section 106 clauses, and seeks views on allowing cash payments in lieu of on-site affordable housing on certain sites. These proposals go beyond the December 2024 NPPF, which allowed greater flexibility and case-by-case negotiation.

Article 4 Directions

The consultation further introduces new national policies on Article 4 Directions, with the intention of clarifying when and how they should be used. This is particularly relevant in areas experiencing intense pressures from changes of use, such as the conversion of family housing to houses in multiple occupation, an issue of long-standing concern within the Parish area. Given that the Parish Council is presently looking to establish a new Article 4 Direction to safeguard gardens within the city, this will be highly relevant for us.

Responding to the consultation

Given the breadth, technical complexity and sheer volume of questions (no less than 225 in total) in the consultation, the Parish Council’s Planning and Licensing

Committee has agreed not to attempt to respond comprehensively to all aspects of the draft NPPF. Instead, the Committee's response focuses solely on those proposals that are highly relevant to the Parish area, particularly those areas set out above. The proposed responses to each question covering these areas is set out in chronological order below:

16. Do you agree that policy PM12 increases certainty at plan-making stage regarding the contributions expected from development proposals?

Neither agree or disagree

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

We welcome the promotion of greater clarity at the plan-making stage on expected contributions that might help to reduce the need for negotiation at the decision-making stage.

Policy PM12 reflects the introduction of spatial development strategies (SDSs) and acknowledges that contributions may apply at different tiers and across areas. The Parish Council is concerned that the introduction (and future update) of SDSs is unlikely to align with Local Plan preparation so clear guidance should be provided to address any timing issues or any areas of potential conflict / duplication.

17. Do you agree that plans should set out the circumstances in which review mechanisms will be used, or should national policy set clearer expectations?

Neither agree or disagree

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

To avoid unnecessary duplication, it would be sensible for the national policy to provide overarching expectations relating to the circumstances in which review mechanisms should be used. However, if justified, there should be flexibility to allow for Local Plans to include specific mechanisms to address local issues / areas of concern.

25. Do you agree that policy DM5 would prevent unnecessary negotiation of developer contributions, whilst also providing sufficient flexibility for development to proceed?

Partially agree.

Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

Some plans periods can be long, and this will make the viability assessment used at the plan making stage out of date due to inflation for development proposals later in the plan period. Some form of indexing should be provided to provide the flexibility required.

26. Do you have any further comments on the likely impact of policy DM5: Development viability?

Without index linking the use of plan making viability may impact development's ability to come forward in a timely manner. In addition to this it would not provide site specific issues such a remediating contaminated land etc on the viability of a development and therefore such sites if not brought forward at the beginning of the plan period may not come forward due to viability issues.

27. Do you have any views on how the process of modifying planning obligations under S106A, where needed once a section 106 agreement has been entered into, could be improved?

There are instances where planning permission is granted on the basis of a policy compliant level of affordable housing, and then developers are using S106A to reduce the amount of affordable housing. However, this process does provide flexibility. The City of Durham Parish Council believes that, where the variations to the S106 that are significant and material to the application granted, that this should be done via a planning application rather than via S106A.

28. Do you have any views on how the process of modifying planning obligations could be improved in advance of any legislative change, noting the government's commitment to boosting the supply of affordable housing.

Provide model S106 clauses for securing affordable housing.

29. Do you agree with the approach for planning conditions and obligations set out in policy DM6, especially the use of model conditions and obligations?

Strongly agree.

33. Do you agree with the new Article 4 direction policy in policy DM10?

Strongly agree

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

We strongly agree with this proposal. The increased flexibility is welcomed, as is the specific example that an overconcentration of small Houses in Multiple Occupation could be a ground for an Article 4 Direction.

36. Do you agree with the revised approach to the presumption in favour of sustainable development?

Strongly disagree. The change to the definition embeds the approach for edge of settlements (policy S5). As set out in our response to Q38 we have some significant concerns for how this will be applied and the negative impact that it might have in Durham City.

37. Do you agree to the proposed approach to development within settlements?

Partly disagree.

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

Policy S4 would strengthen the presumption in favour of development within settlements. Whilst there is general support for an approach that would deliver an uplift in genuinely sustainable development it is felt that the current wording is too permissive and that the 'checks and balances' should be strengthened. For example, the development must be subject to high quality design and the critical consideration of heritage assets with substantial weight being given to the impact upon them.

38. Do you agree to the proposed approach to development outside settlements?

Strongly disagree.

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

Whilst appropriate development outside of settlements should be encouraged this policy creates too many opportunities for inappropriate or unsustainable development.

Under the current wording of this proposed policy almost all forms of development on the edge of settlements would be considered acceptable and without proper infrastructure these extensions would be wholly unsustainable. Furthermore, these developments could be "stacked" where the approval of one scheme inherently gives permission for the next that would lie beyond the first (and potentially, detached from the settlement boundary), resulting in unsustainable urban sprawl/creep and reducing urban densification and regeneration. To address this, the policy must make clear that developments need to be completed prior to a new development even being proposed as the impact on existing infrastructure needs to be measured.

This policy, when applied, will have an impact on the existing settlement pattern (and potential coalescence). As such it is vital that guidance is provided on settlement identity and how local gap policies are considered against this more permissive policy backdrop.

The majority of development allocated within the County Durham Plan is formed by this type of edge of settlement development that extends the existing built-up area boundary. By allowing this type of development in principle it negates much of the role of the Local Plan. Furthermore, it makes infrastructure planning extremely challenging as delivery would become reactive rather than proactive leading to the potential for insufficient infrastructure provision for the new developments. This will also add further burden upon Development Management teams as they will have to bear the burden of assessing this type of speculative

applications being submitted without adequate infrastructure requirements information thereby relying on officer discretion and consultee comments.

39. Do you have any views on the specific categories of development which the policy would allow to take place outside settlements, and the associated criteria?

Partially disagree

a) Please provide your reasons.

It is not clear what evidence is required in order to demonstrate that development is necessary for rural businesses and services, including tourism as set out in clause 1b? Clarity around expectations would ensure a consistent approach is adopted.

Footnote 26 refers to top 60 Travel to Work Areas in relation to clause 1h. It would be helpful to include a hyperlink to this dataset within the footnote.

Clause 1j makes reference to unmet need, however it is not clear if this is unmet need just of that local authority, or unmet need across a wider area. Clarity is required around this point, as there may be potential for developers to try and justify development outside of settlements if there is a wider unmet need, even if the specific local authority themselves are meeting their need.

40. Do you agree with the proposed approach to development around stations, including that it applies only to housing and mixed-use development capable of meeting the density requirements in chapter 12?

Agree.

67. Do you agree that applicants should have discretion to deliver social and affordable housing requirements via cash payments in lieu of on-site delivery on medium sites?

Strongly disagree.

Not all Local Authorities have Housing Companies and therefore use of cash payments can be more challenging in those areas. In addition, this discretion should remain with the Local Planning Authority, not the applicant, albeit there should be an open process of discussion and agreement. If applicants are given this option, they will more than likely choose to not deliver social housing on site, leaving Local Authorities with an increased challenge in finding sites to accommodate units. The unintended consequences could be a lack of mixed communities in the future.

a) If so, would it be desirable to limit the circumstances in which cash contributions in lieu of on-site delivery can be provided – for example, should it not be permitted on land released from the Green Belt where the Golden Rules apply? Please explain your answer.

Should discretion be afforded, this should certainly not be permitted on Green Belt release where the Golden Rules apply.

- b) If you do not believe applicants should have blanket discretion to discharge social and affordable housing requirements through commuted sums, do you think cash contributions in lieu of on-site delivery should be permitted in certain circumstances – for example where it could be evidenced that onsite delivery would prevent a scheme from being delivered? Please explain your answer**

Yes – there should be clear evidence led process, with applicants required to provide evidence to the LPA of the reasons why on-site delivery is unachievable. Many Councils already allow for this cascade approach in their housing policies; what is important is that any such deviation from on-site delivery is fully explained and, where necessary, subjected to independent viability testing.

68. What risks and benefits would you expect this policy to have? Please explain your answer. The government is particularly interested in views on the potential impact on SME housing delivery, overall housing delivery, land values, build out rates, overall social and affordable housing delivery, and Registered Providers (including SME providers).

Overall social and affordable housing delivery – Councils would have more flexibility to use commuted sums.

69. What guidance or wider changes would be needed to enable Local Planning Authorities to spend commuted sums more effectively and more quickly? Please explain your answer.

The ability to financially support sites where s106 affordable housing delivery is showing as unviable but could be delivered on site through 'gap funding'.

Guidance on wording for s106 clauses to give Local Authorities maximum flexibility in using commuted sums.

70. Would further guidance be helpful in supporting authorities to calculate the appropriate value of cash contributions in lieu?

RICS valuation guidance, by region, on the values of various types of social and affordable housing. This data would need to be renewed annually given how quickly housing markets can change. This would provide an invaluable benchmarking service against which commuted sums could be calculated.

71. Do you support proposals to enable off site delivery where affordable housing delivery can be optimised to produce better outcomes in terms of quality or quantity?

Yes, we agree - if an alternative site can be identified during the planning process for the main site, to give some certainty of delivery, potentially including

the ability to link sites through planning conditions and s106 agreements, offsite delivery could be considered as an opportunity to optimise delivery.

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

N/A

88. Do you agree with the proposed changes to policy for planning for town centres?

Partly agree

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

Other aspects of the proposal are beyond our scope.

121. Do you agree policy L3 provides clear guidance on achieving appropriate densities for residential and mixed-use schemes?

a) If not, please explain how guidance could be clearer?

Strongly agree

122. Do you agree with the minimum density requirements set out within policy L3?

Strongly agree, as it sets out a clear definition of what is required and expected.

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

b) Could these minimum density requirements lead to adverse impacts on Gypsies and Travellers and other groups with protected characteristics? Please provide your reasons, including any evidence

Partly disagree, in our experience Gypsies and Travellers do take up residence to train stations and other such travel hubs.

123. Do you agree that using dwellings per hectare is an appropriate metric for setting minimum density requirements? Additionally, is our definition of 'net developable area' within the NPPF suitable for this policy?

Strongly agree, as it sets out a clear definition of what is required and expected of developers.

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

124. Do you agree with the proposed definition of a 'well-connected' station used to help set higher minimum density standards in targeted growth locations? In particular, are the parameters we're using for the number of Travel to Work Areas and service frequency appropriate for defining a 'well-connected' station?

Partially agree, I say this only because when it is not the key times when trains will be running, when people are going to and from work, they may fall below these parameters, but overall, I think this is a good definition.

a) Please provide your reasons and preferred alternatives.

125. Are there other types of location (such as urban core, or other types of public transport node) where minimum density standards should be set nationally?

Yes, brownfield sites would also be a good option.

a) If so, how should these locations be defined in a clear and unambiguous way and what should these density standards be?

We believe 30 to 40 per hectare would be more appropriate in these locations.

126. Should we define a specific range of residential densities for land around stations classified as 'well-connected'?

Yes.

127. If so, what should that range be, and which locations should it apply to?

To keep the use of cars to a minimum, we feel one mile to be appropriate.

128. Do you agree policy L4 provides clear high-level guidance on good design for residential extensions?

Partially disagree, as this part is so much briefer than the other sections and lacks clear definitions.

129. Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

130. Do you agree that policy GB1 provides appropriate criteria for establishing new Green Belts?

We neither agree nor disagree.

131. Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

Although the Council sees no reason for any major disagreement, the bland comment that "Paragraph 144(c) has been amended to require that new Green Belts must not act as a constraint to long-term sustainable growth ambitions for the relevant area, rather than simply demonstrating the consequences for sustainable development," with its change from sustainable development to growth ambitions will automatically leave green belts potential victims of "growth ambitions" by affinity with readily identified and convenient "exceptional circumstances".

132. Do you agree policy GB2 gives sufficient detail on the expected roles spatial development strategies and local plans play in assessing Green belt land?,

We neither agree nor disagree.

The five purposes given in the Preface and outlined in GB 2 remain intact.

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

The notion of 'grey belt' has already been introduced, so the notable change would appear to be the loss of the sentence *"Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period."* The heading to the proposed New Green Belt chapter retains the statement that *"The objective of Green Belt policy, as set out in this chapter, is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The government attaches great importance to Green Belts, the essential features of which are their openness and permanence."* We therefore hope that this provides the actual driver when identifying potential "grey belt" land.

133. Do you agree with proposals to better enable development opportunities around suitable stations to be brought forward?

We partly agree. We recognise the potential for this proposal in terms of both the Durham Railway Station and the potential future regeneration of the Leamside line.

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

We note that the detail on this proposed policy lies in GB7(1h) that "introduces the significant new provision specifying that housing and mixed-use development on Green Belt land is not inappropriate where it is near a well-connected station, of a scale that existing infrastructure can accommodate, does not prejudice long-term development proposals, and complies with the Golden Rules. This development should accord with the density requirements set out in policy L3."

134. Do you agree the expectations set out in policy GB5 are appropriate and deliverable in Local Plans?

We agree.

135. Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

GB4 and 5 appear to be welcome. In particular, they reinstate the requirement to consider compensatory improvements when land is removed from the Green Belt and recommend new provisions requiring consideration of contributions to Local Nature Recovery Strategies and support for objectives relating to the National Forest, community forests, and protected landscapes.

136. Do you agree policies GB6 and GB7 set out appropriate tests for considering development on Green Belt land?

We agree.

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

Not applicable.

137. Do you agree policy GB7(1h) successfully targets appropriate development types and locations in the Green Belt, including that it applies only to housing and mixed-use development capable of meeting the density requirements in chapter 12?

We partly agree

138. Please provide your reasons, including any evidence that this policy would lead to adverse impacts on Gypsies and Travellers.

There are concerns:

GB7(1b): Combines principles on reuse, alteration, extension or replacement of buildings, with a new footnote clarifying how "*original building*" is assessed. The requirement that the reuse of buildings must preserve the openness of the Green Belt and not conflict with the purposes of including land within it has been removed, as it is unduly restrictive. This could lead to an unacceptable loss of protection for Green Belt land.

GB7(1f): Replaces "preserve openness" with restrictions that ensure the impacts on openness is minimised, and there would not be a significant conflict with the Green Belt purposes, reflecting current practice. This adds to a definite weakening of the current green belt protections.

139. Do you agree that site-specific viability assessment should be permitted on development proposals subject to the Golden Rules in these three circumstances?

Disagree

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

140. With regards to previously developed land, are there further changes to policy or guidance that could be made to help ensure site-specific viability assessments are used only for genuinely previously developed land, and not predominantly greenfield sites?

The Golden Rules, being golden, must ensure that development on land within or released from the Green Belt delivers increased tangible benefits for communities which must create higher levels of social and affordable housing, green space, and the necessary infrastructure improvements.

We must also be alert to the proposal for three circumstances where the use of a site-specific viability assessment may be justified to enable inappropriate development in the Green Belt. For example, the proposed lifting of the current restriction on any site-specific viability assessment on Green Belt land should work in tandem with Policy PM12: Developer contributions and DM5: Development viability and potential policies regarding an "*affordable housing floor*" and Benchmark Land Values. The government has promised to publish updates to the Viability Planning Practice Guidance, to take effect on publication. However, we suspect that this will become yet another convenient clause for inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

141. Do you agree with setting an affordable housing 'floor' for schemes subject to the Golden Rules accompanied by a viability assessment subject to the terms set out?

We agree in the sense that it is reflecting the manifesto commitment

143. Do you agree with local planning authorities testing viability at the plan making stage using a standardised Benchmark Land Values scenario of 10 times Existing Use Value for greenfield, Green Belt land?

We agree in the sense that it is reflecting the manifesto commitment

a) Please explain your answer.

144. Do you have any other comments on the use of nationally standardised Benchmark Land Values for local planning authorities to test viability at the plan-making stage?

We agree in the sense that it is reflecting the manifesto commitment

145. Do you agree that proposed changes to the grey belt definition will improve the operability of the grey belt definition, without undermining the general protections given to other footnote 7 areas?

No comment

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

185. Do you agree the government should implement the additional regard duties under Section 102 of the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act?

Strong agree

a) Please provide your reasons.

Assets should be repurposed without destroying their historic significance. If the rules don't change Heritage Assets will be demolished. Reference planning application DM/25/01287/FPA where The Post Chaise a listed building was allowed to fall into decay, delisted and demolished.

186. Do you have any evidence as to the impact of implementing the additional regard duties for development?

Heritage assets are being allowed to decay so they can be demolished and the site reused. Also reference use of the upper floors of listed buildings in Saddler Street Durham City repurposed as accommodation

187. Do you agree with the approach to plan-making for the historic environment, including the specific requirements for World Heritage Sites and Conservation Areas, set out in policies H1 – H3?

Partly agree

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

A World Heritage Site including views to and from the site and the buildings surrounding it should be sacrosanct. Internal changes should protect historical features of heritage assets and if this is impossible changes should be reversible.

188. Do you agree with the approach to assessing the effects of development on heritage assets set out in policy H5?

Neither agree or disagree.

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

Development can be a good thing. Renewable energy ie Solar panels on listed buildings would decrease running costs and government grants should be available. Heritage buildings by their very nature have higher running costs

189. Do you agree with the approach to considering impacts on designated heritage assets in policy HE6, including the change from "great weight" to "substantial weight", and in particular the interactions between this and the statutory duties?

Disagree

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

Any watering down of heritage protections should be discouraged.

190. Do you agree with the new policies in relation to world heritage, conservation areas and archaeological assets in policies HE8 – HE10?

Agree

a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

Conservation areas, listed structures and their environs and heritage assets need the highest possible protections

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to approve the proposed response by the City of Durham Parish Council to the NPPF consultation.
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ITEM 5: PROPOSAL TO SUPPORT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A 'CITY OF DURHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP'.

The current version of the City of Durham's Neighbourhood Plan came into force on 7th July 2021. It established general planning policies for the development and use of land in the City, within a framework set down in the County Durham Plan which in turn must comply with the overarching National Planning Policy Framework, the NPPF.

The vision of the Neighbourhood Plan is: *Durham City's potential as a beautiful historic City will be realised through policy and action to improve and protect its qualities and by creating a diverse and resilient economy with attractive, healthy and affordable places to live. It will be supported by modern infrastructure, protected by adaptation to climate change and enriched by community engagement in its future.*

In order that the Plan be effective, it is necessary to monitor its operation and modify it in the light of experience and changing circumstances. Chapter 5 of the Neighbourhood Plan said at paragraph 5.5 *The general intention of monitoring will be to present regularly, and possibly annually, a clear qualitative and/or quantitative assessment of progress towards a more sustainable City of Durham.*

This report notes that the DCNP came into force on 7 July 2021 and that 1,798 applications have been determined since then (stats correct as at 20th January 2026).

The Neighbourhood Plan team at DCC has shared a set of data which indicates that, in 990 (55.1%) of those cases, the Policies within the DCNP were either directly relevant or an issue in the determination of the proposal.

From those decisions, the dominant application types are:

- Full planning applications (FPA): 472 (47.7%)
- Trees in Conservation Area (TCA): 221 (22.3%)
- Listed Building consent (LB): 92 (9.3%)
- Advertisement consent (AD): 84 (8.5%)
- Tree Preservation Order (TPO): 69 (7.0%)
- Other (VOC/NMA/PN56/etc.): 52 (5.3%)

Of those 990 cases, 87 applications were refused (since 7th July 2021) by the Local Planning Authority and, as such, the vast majority of proposals tested against the DCNP were found to be compliant with the aims and wording of our Neighbourhood Plan.

The reason(s) for refusal in each of the 87 cases are included in the attached excel file. As Members will see, in 25 of those cases (28.74%) – highlighted in blue – the DCNP formed part of the reason for the application's refusal. The 25 refusals can be broken down further by application type as follows:

- Full planning applications (FPA): 16 refusals

- Advertisement consent (AD): 4 refusals
- Tree Preservation Order (TPO): 3 refusals
- Variation of Condition (VOC): 2 refusals

The report firstly seeks a view on which Policies are considered most effective in combatting inappropriate development.

By some significant margin, DCNP **Policy H2** (protecting the Durham City Conservation Area), is the clear workhorse refusal policy within the Neighbourhood Plan. This is cited in 19 of the 25 cases refused within the Neighbourhood Plan area.

Moreover, significant policies include: DCNP **Policy H1** (Protecting the World Heritage Site – referenced in 3 refusal decisions), **Policy G1** (Protecting and enhancing green and blue infrastructure - referenced in 3 refusal decisions), **Policy T1** (Sustainable Transport Accessibility and Design - referenced in 3 refusal decisions), **Policy S1** (Sustainable Development Requirements of all Development and Re-development Sites Including all New Building, Renovations and Extensions - referenced in 3 refusal decisions) and **Policy E4** (Evening Economy - referenced in 2 refusal decisions).

My research also highlights that, since the DCNP was adopted in July 2021, there have been 41 appeals within our parish area, of which 30 (73.17%) were dismissed and 11 (26.83%) were allowed. Of particular interest is that 23 of those appeal cases included a reference to the DCNP in their decision and 22 of those were dismissed and 1 was allowed.

It is also noteworthy that 23 of the 87 cases (26.44%) refused related to a student accommodation development. Albeit there is no Policy within the DCNP pertaining to student accommodation (proposed Policy D2 having been removed at Examination stage), the Belmont and Gilesgate Neighbourhood Plan is seeking to add to Policy 16 and there are strong indications that the County Durham Plan will be reviewed to strengthen this Policy further.

What is clear from the 990 cases identified, is that the DCNP was clearly relevant and, as we knowing the Independent Examiner's report, consistent with the County Durham Plan and (at the time of adoption) national policy. However, some cases and their reasons for either approval/ refusal are subsumed by County Durham Plan Policies or NPPF reasoning and therefore a DCNP citation seems to be optional rather than essential – we perhaps need to look at this as the Neighbourhood Plan carries equal weight as the starting point for determining applications in our parish as the County Durham Plan does.

Clearly since the adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan, national policy has changed. Although it should be recognised that neighbourhood plans do not become automatically out of date solely because national policy has been updated; rather,

the weight to be given to individual policies depends on the extent of their consistency with the Framework as a whole.

Objective

The City of Durham Parish Council is the qualifying body for the purposes of reviewing the City of Durham Neighbourhood Plan. The objective of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group is to lead this review and produce an effective Neighbourhood Plan document for the City of Durham. Whilst the vision of the Plan shall remain broadly the same as it was upon adoption, the Plan should incorporate updated planning policy priorities that have been identified through an assessment of how effective the Plan has been in supporting appropriate development within the parish area as well as through a further community consultation process, ensuring that the revised Plan is one which is consistent with updated national policy (NPPF expected to be changed in Summer 2026) and which has been community led and as such reflects community aspirations.

Membership

The Steering Group shall comprise the following members:

3 x City of Durham Parish Councillors	(Voting)
1 x Durham County Councillor (from the Plan area)	(Voting)
10 x Mix of members of public, business representatives, Residents Associations, etc.	(Voting)
1 x Officer from the City of Durham Parish Council	(Non-voting)
1 x Planning consultant (as and when required)	(Non-voting)

Meetings will be chaired by an elected Chair or in his/her absence by an elected Vice Chair and, in the unlikely event of both not being available, by a member of the group, who will be selected at the relevant meeting;

The Steering Group membership will be reviewed every May at the annual meeting of the Parish Council. Whilst organisations have nominated representatives, it will be acceptable for an alternative representative to attend meetings as appropriate in their absence.

Representatives will be expected to give unbiased feedback to the organisations that they are representing.

Any member wishing to resign from the Group must inform the Chair in writing and, if possible, provide a reason for leaving the group for monitoring purposes only.

A list of names of potential Members of this Steering Group has been circulated to Members separately.

Meetings

The Steering Group will elect a Chair and Vice-Chair from its membership annually.

A representative from the community will be the Secretary of the Group. The Secretary will prepare meetings and agendas for the meeting.

In the event that Members of the group cannot agree on a meeting date and time the Chair will make the final decision over when the meeting should take place.

Steering Group Meetings will take place as required. A minimum of four members are required to make the Steering Group meeting quorate.

Decisions made by the Steering Group should normally be by consensus at meetings. Where a vote is required each VOTING member shall have one vote. A simple majority will be required to support any motion. In the event of a tied vote the Chair shall have one casting vote.

Named votes are not required; a simple record should be made as follows: e.g. For, Against, Abstain

Accountability

The Steering Group will report to the Planning and Licensing Committee with documentation being presented to the Parish Council for information only.

Remit

- Undertake the review of the City of Durham Neighbourhood Plan;
- Produce policies, minutes, reports and documents relating to the Plan;
- Make a recommendation to the City of Durham Parish Council on an appropriate budget to support this work;
- Liaise with local organisations, Durham County Council and other potential stakeholder organisations on the review of the Neighbourhood Plan including maintaining links with the Local Planning Authority to ensure that the final Plan does not conflict with the new County Durham Plan (expected to be completed in 2028);
- Identify ways of involving the whole community in the Plan, gathering the views and opinions of as many groups, organisations and individuals from the local community as possible;
- Determine the types of consultation and information gathering to be used and be responsible for the analysis of consultation results;
- Manage the gathering of evidence necessary to inform on each of the issues/sections identified within the scope of the plan;
- Keep under review the legislative requirements around Neighbourhood Planning to ensure the Plan meets all requirements;
- Update the City of Durham Parish Council, predominantly via its Planning and Licensing Committee on progress via presentations, etc;
- Present a copy of the revised Draft Neighbourhood Plan document to the Parish Council;
- Once approved by the City of Durham Parish Council, assist the appointed Independent Assessor in arrangements for the Referendum.

The City of Durham Parish Council will approve the Final Draft of the Neighbourhood Plan document prior to its submission to the Local Planning Authority.

Conduct

While there is an expectation that Members as individuals will report back to their parent organisations, the Steering Group as a whole is accountable to the wider community for ensuring that the Neighbourhood Plan reflects their collective expectations. Accordingly, the Steering Group will achieve this by applying the following principles:

- Be accountable for their decisions;
- Not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties;
- Be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that are taken. Reasons should be given for all decisions, and information should only be restricted when the wider public interest demands it;
- Work with mutual trust and respect, and combine expertise;
- Be clear when individual roles or interests are in conflict;
- Members to provide feedback from Steering Group meetings to their parent organisation;
- Members to assist their parent organisation by bringing appropriate ideas and concerns to the attention of the Steering Group;
- Members must inform the Steering Group as soon as possible if they are going to be unable to deliver agreed actions;
- Members must treat everyone with dignity, courtesy, and respect regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability, or religion and belief;
- Members to actively promote equality of access and opportunity.

Conflicts of interest

Steering Group members should declare any real or perceived conflicts of interest at the start of each meeting. These will be recorded by the Secretary.

The Steering Group will take a collective decision on whether there is a conflict (real or perceived) and the appropriate response i.e. whether or not the individual Member should leave the Meeting while the Item is being discussed.

Dissolution

The project is intended to run until a revised Plan has been presented for independent examination. The Steering Group will remain active until at least the independent examiner's report is published. The group will agree the date for any dissolution with a period of 31 days' notice; with formal notification being provided

to City of Durham Parish Council at the next available ordinary Parish Council meeting.

DECISIONS REQUIRED	1) For Members to consider the content of the above report and approve the establishment of the City of Durham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. 1) If 1) is approved, for Members to approve the proposed Terms of Reference for this Steering Group. 2) If 1) and 2) are approved, for Members to agree that the Planning and Licensing Committee shall oversee the work of this Steering Group. 3) If the above is approved, for Members to delegate to the Planning and Licensing Committee responsibility for agreeing the membership of this Steering Group.
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ITEM 5: REPORT TO SUPPORT THE WORK OF THE WEAR RIVERS TRUST IN TACKLING INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES (INNS) ALONG THE RIVER WEAR CATCHMENT AREA.

As Members are aware, the City of Durham Parish Council has identified protecting and enhancing the River Wear as an important strategic objective of the Parish Council over the forthcoming year's programme of work.

The Parish Council cannot undertake this work alone and has therefore partnered with organisations such as the Durham City Riverscape Community group as well as the Wear Rivers Trust, in order to tackle some of the significant issues affecting the River Wear.

In agreeing its budget for 2025-26, Members approved a fund specifically designed to support the work of these groups and there is approximately £6,000 remaining in this funding this financial year (with a further fund agreed for 2026-27 of £2,500).

The Environment Committee recently met with Claire Dodds, an officer from the Wear Rivers Trust to explore how the Parish Council can support their work further. In particular, as Durham County Council has recently granted consent for the Trust to carry out works at Pelaw Woods – this is a significant step forward in the Trust's work and is highly welcome news.

By way of background, the Wear Rivers Trust is an environmental charity established in 2008 to protect, enhance and restore the River Wear and its wider catchment. The Trust was created in response to growing concerns about the long-term ecological health of the river system and the need for a coordinated, catchment-wide approach to river management.

The Trust's remit covers the full length of the River Wear catchment, from upland headwaters through rural and urban landscapes to the estuary. It operates on the understanding that pressures on river systems are interconnected and cumulative, and that effective solutions require partnership working across sectors and disciplines. As such, the Trust works closely with landowners, statutory bodies, local authorities, environmental organisations, community groups and volunteers. Its activities include habitat restoration, water quality improvement, public education and the coordination of the Wear Catchment Partnership, through which strategic priorities for the river are identified and addressed.

One of the most significant ecological challenges faced within the Wear catchment is the spread of invasive non-native species. These species, introduced outside their natural range, can rapidly colonise river corridors and disrupt established ecological processes. Freshwater and riparian environments are particularly vulnerable because rivers act as efficient pathways for dispersal. Invasive non-native species threaten native biodiversity by outcompeting indigenous plants and animals, altering habitat structure, destabilising riverbanks and, in some cases, posing risks to human health and infrastructure. Addressing this issue has therefore become a core component of the Trust's conservation work.

In response, the Wear Rivers Trust has developed a dedicated programme of activity focused on invasive non-native species management across the catchment. This work is sometimes collectively referred to as the Wear Invasive Non-Native Species project and is embedded within the Trust's wider catchment management approach. The project aims to understand the distribution and scale of invasive species through systematic recording and monitoring, enabling the Trust and its partners to prioritise areas for action. By gathering data from professional surveys, partner organisations and trained volunteers, the Trust is able to develop a strategic overview of invasive species pressures within the catchment.

Practical control forms an important part of this work, particularly for invasive plant species that dominate riverbanks and displace native vegetation. Control measures are designed to be proportionate, targeted and sustainable, recognising that successful management often requires repeated intervention over several years. The Trust places strong emphasis on volunteer involvement, providing training and guidance to ensure that control activities are carried out safely, legally and effectively. This approach not only increases the capacity for on-the-ground action but also builds local knowledge and long-term commitment to river stewardship.

Alongside physical control, the Trust places considerable importance on prevention and biosecurity. Public awareness and behaviour change are promoted through education and outreach, particularly around measures that reduce the risk of spreading invasive species between waterbodies. By encouraging river users, land managers and communities to adopt good biosecurity practices, the Trust seeks to limit new introductions and slow the spread of existing invasions, which is widely recognised as the most cost-effective long-term strategy for invasive species management.

The invasive non-native species work undertaken by the Wear Rivers Trust is closely integrated with broader river restoration and catchment resilience objectives. Invasive species management supports improvements in habitat quality, bank stability and biodiversity, and enhances the effectiveness of other interventions such as tree planting, wetland creation and fish passage restoration. The Trust also contributes to regional collaboration on invasive species issues, recognising that river catchments do not exist in isolation and that coordinated action across neighbouring catchments is essential for lasting impact.

At the last Environment Committee, Claire Dodds proposed a funding bid to the Parish Council to further enhance the Trust's work and this is set out for Members' consideration below:

Funding proposal

Funding period: 2026-27

Project lead: Claire Dodds

Project area: Durham Peninsula (Shincliffe Bridge - Barkers Haugh Sewage Treatment Works)

Acronyms: INNS = Invasive Non-Native Species; DP = Durham Peninsula; WRT = Wear Rivers Trust; CDPC = City of Durham Parish Council; JK = Japanese Knotweed; HB = Himalayan Balsam; GH = Giant Hogweed Funding breakdown

Funding Breakdown

Activity		Materials/ Training Course/Training Course	Mileage	Staff delivery	Total Costs
Water Quality Testing	3 testing kits at £160 each Training (1 day to prepare and deliver training session)	£480	£20	£284.59	£784.59
Spraying Training	Costs for PA1 and PA6W Spraying Certificate for WRT Staff Member	£550	£30	£284.59	£864.59
Spraying Training	Costs for PA1 and PA6W Spraying Certificate for 3 Volunteers	£1650			£1650
Cost of Gylosphate	2 containers at £69.96	£139.92			£139.92
WRT Spraying of Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam	4 days: 2 staff for 2 days		£40	£1138.36	£1178.36
Volunteer Recruitment	1 days		£10	£284.59	£294.59
Volunteer Events	3 days		£30	£853.77	£883.77

	Total Costs	£5795.82
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- Full Cost Recovery Rate £284.59

Water Quality Testing

Concerns have been raised by residents of the City of Durham Parish at the quality of water in the River Wear at Durham City, and local tributaries. The proposal is for 3 existing volunteer groups within Durham City to be trained in Water Quality Testing, how to record data on an app and be provided with the necessary testing equipment. I propose to provide the Friends of Kepier, Durham City Riverscapes and Durham Amateur Rowing Club with the three kits. Durham City Riverscapes and Friends of Kepier have already confirmed they will test the Water Quality.

The three established volunteer groups are distributed to allow the collection of Water Quality Data within Durham Peninsula and downstream of Barker Haugh Wastewater Treatment Works. The data collected will provide evidence of Water Quality. If a breach is detected during the Water Quality Testing this would be escalated with the appropriate body, Environment Agency or Northumbria Water, for investigation. Water Quality Testing will be completed monthly. Data will be stored on an app. The training will explain how to download and input into the app. This provides a base line of data, and necessary evidence of concerns with the River Wear and its tributaries, which is needed to apply for funding in the future.

Spray Training

In 2025 WRT did not have the capacity to spray Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed extensively in the Wear Catchment, this included The Sands in Durham City. Previous staff and volunteers trained to spray INNS are no longer available. A PA1 and PA6 Spray Training Course is being delivered locally in March 2026. Paying for one person to be trained in PA1 and PA6W Spraying Qualification will provide increased the capacity to spray invasives within Durham Peninsula. WRT have permissions to complete work in Pelaw Woodland, Flass Vale and Aykley/Hopper Wood. An area of Himalayan Balsam has been identified in Pelaw Wood that would benefit from spraying: this is the Wood and Watson spoil near the Silverlink Bridge, the bank is unstable and unsuitable for hand picking. There is Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed in Durham Peninsula which needs treating. Durham Amateur Rowing Club and Durham Cathedral have previously funded WRT to spray JK. Staff time for the two days training will be in kind, by Wear Rivers Trust.

Training for three volunteers will provide extra capacity to treat invasive species in Durham Peninsula.

Spraying INNS

Spraying accessible Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed within areas WRT have approved permissions.

Adam Shanley to provide contact details of Manakeet. Access to GH needed via Fire Escape.

Spraying a patch of HB in Pelaw Wood. This area is an unstable bank, full of glass bottles from the old Wood and Watson Factory.

Spraying needs to be repeated each year for at least 3 years to have success.

Walkover of Akley/Hopper Wood

Identify the extent of HB on DCC land, which WRT have permissions to remove. Attempt to engage with the landowner of Hoppers Wood to remove HB.

Volunteer Recruitment

Engage with Durham University and Colleges, Durham Cathedral, Durham Amateur Rowing Club, Durham City Riverscapes, Houghall College to recruit volunteers, Friends of Groups in Durham Peninsula to recruit volunteers.

Engage with Scouting Movement and local schools to complete Balsam Bashing Events. Two members of WRT are needed with groups of children (WRT Safeguarding Policy)

Volunteer Events

Lead Volunteer Events in Pelaw Woods. This will include Strimming the HB as well as hand picking.

Lead Volunteer Events in Blais Wood. This is an isolated patch of HB, that needs to be targeted to prevent the spread to High Wood.

Lead Volunteer Events in Aykley/Hoppers Wood, if sufficient HB or second day at Pelaw or Blais Wood.

Wear Rivers Trust will attend the Ecofest on Sunday 21st June.

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to consider the above report and approve the funding request from the Wear Rivers Trust, as set out above.
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ITEM 5: REPORT ON PRIORITIES FOR GREENING THE PARISH AREA OVER 2026-27

The City of Durham Parish Council has resolved to allocate a total fund of £20,000 to support greening initiatives across the parish during the 2026–27 financial year. This report sets out the proposed planting priorities intended to guide the effective and responsible use of this funding.

The overarching aim of this funding is to enhance the quality of the parish area, increase biodiversity and address the climate crisis, whilst also delivering clear environmental, social and visual benefits for residents and visitors.

The headline priorities for the Committee’s planting plan are as follows:

City planting plan	Budget
Spring bulbs (parish wide)	£4,000
Fruit trees (Market Day in November)	£4,000
Viaduct planters (adopted planters)	£1,000
Hanging baskets (street gables) – Viaduct Area only	£2,500
Hanging baskets (main shopping streets)	£8,000

The delivery of both the Spring bulbs and fruit trees priorities will take place in the Autumn of 2026 and these have become regular fixtures in the Parish Council’s planting priorities. The fruit tree giveaway was trialled for the first time in November 2025 and was identified as a significant success and the Environment Committee is hoping to replicate this this year in November 2026. Both the Spring bulbs and fruit trees allow the Parish Council to engage positively with local residents and stakeholders and ensure a parish-wide spread of new pollinator-friendly plants and trees.

With great appreciation to Councillor Victoria Ashfield for her work on this priority, the Committee also agreed that the Viaduct Planters at the Colpitts pub, Mistletoe Street and Allergate should be retained and these planters are being well maintained by the pub and local volunteers.

In addition, Viaduct planters at Holly Street and Mitchell Street have been removed without our approval and it is further proposed that the planters at Lawson Terrace (1), Laburnum Avenue (2), Atherton Street (1), New Street (2) and at the junction of New Street and East Atherton Street (1), be offered to local groups who will maintain or make use of these planters.

The Environment Committee would also like to remove the following 3-tier planters:

- 2 at North Road (1 of which has already been removed);

- 1 at the entrance to St. John's Road;
- 2 at Freeman's Quay near to the passport office and Durham Sixth Form Centre; and
- 1 outside Clayport library on Lower Claypath

Unfortunately, these planters are not being planted in the way which we had envisaged through our work with Durham County Council and it has therefore been agreed to remove these.

In their place, the Environment Committee is proposing the installation of Summer floral hanging baskets (installed by the Parish Council at the agreement of the property owner but maintained by DCC between June-October) at a cost of £97 per basket (£7 for the bracket and £90 (includes watering) for the floral basket) at residential streets at: Hawthorn Terrace, May Street, Sutton Street, Atherton Street and Mitchell Street.

In addition, the Environment Committee is also hoping to fund the installation of the same hanging baskets to the front of shop premises at North Road, Saddler Street, Silver Street, Back Silver Street, Lower Claypath and Elvet Bridge. A number of businesses have already accepted this offer from the Parish Council and the order needs to be submitted by the end of February. This is a significant investment from the Parish Council with the aims of improving the street scene within the town centre boundary and has been warmly welcomed by local businesses. Please note that these baskets will not be installed at premises which are Listed and which do not currently have their own existing brackets, as it is likely that Listed building consent will be required for each bracket and this is not viable for the Parish Council.

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to consider the above report and approve the above planting plan for 2026-27, delegating responsibility for its delivery to the Parish Council's Environment Committee.
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ITEM 7: PARISH COUNCIL CIVILITY AND RESPECT PLEDGE

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

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

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

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

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

NALC is inviting all Councils to take the Civility and Respect Pledge and those that do can legitimately showcase this logo on their website and all literature as a sign of the Parish Council's commitment to this area of our sector.

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

Statement	Tick to agree
Our council has agreed that it will treat all councillors, clerk and all employees, members of the public, representatives of partner organisations, and volunteers, with civility and respect in their role.	
Our council has put in place a training programme for councillors and staff	
Our council has signed up to Code of Conduct for Councillors	
Our council has good governance arrangements in place including, staff contracts, and a dignity at work policy.	
Our council will commit to seeking professional help in the early stages should civility and respect issues arise.	

Our council will commit to calling out bullying and harassment when if and when it happens.	
Our council will continue to learn from best practice in the sector and aspire to being a role model/champion council e.g., via the Local Council Award Scheme	
Our council supports the continued lobbying for the change in legislation to support the Civility and Respect Pledge, including sanctions for elected members where appropriate.	

NALC'S CIVILITY AND RESPECT MISSION STATEMENT

Civility and respect should be at the heart of public life, and good governance is fundamental to ensuring an effective and well-functioning democracy at all levels.

The intimidation, abuse, bullying and harassment of councillors, clerks and council staff, in person or online, is unacceptable, whether by councillors, clerks, council staff, or public members.

This can prevent councils from functioning effectively, councillors from representing local people, discourage people from getting involved, including standing for election, and undermine public confidence and trust in local democracy.

NALC, county associations and OVW, as the membership organisations representing the first tier of local government in England and Wales, and the SLCC, as the professional body for clerks, are committed to working together to promote civility and respect in public life, good governance, positive debate and supporting the well-being of councillors, professional officers and staff.

To that end, the Civility and Respect Working Group will be working to deliver tangible resources, actions and interventions in four main areas: providing councils with the tools to support good governance; lobbying to strengthen the standards regime and encouraging more people to get involved; training; and processes to intervene to provide support to struggling councils.

DECISIONS REQUIRED	1) For Members to agree to sign the Civility and Respect Pledge, as set out in the above report. 2) If 1) is agreed, for Members to honour the commitments required as part of this Pledge and listed in the above report.
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**ITEM 8: MOTION BY COUNCILLORS V ASHFIELD AND F ROBINSON
RELATING TO ELVET GREEN AND THE RETENTION OF OPEN SPACE
ACCESSIBLE TO ALL**

Councillors V Ashfield and F Robinson wish to propose (and second) the following motion to the Parish Council in relation to the future of Elvet Green:

The motion:

"At the time of the university selling this land to DCC it was covenanted: "for the perpetual enjoyment of the residents of the city". The recent DCC consultation on its future use has indicated how dear this space is to the current residents (and via the Pointers to visitors too). While the former toilet block is the matter of a sale to become a cafe, which we support, we would like DCC to assure us that the adjacent green space will remain green, open and freely accessible to all who enjoy the riverbanks."

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to agree to the above motion.
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ITEM 9: DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATION ON TACKLING POVERTY IN COUNTY DURHAM

Durham County Council is currently consulting residents and stakeholders, as part of its work to develop a refreshed countywide strategy covering the period 2026 to 2030.

Full details about this consultation can be found here:

<https://letstalkcountydurham.co.uk/en-GB/folders/tackling-poverty-in-county-durham>

As Members are likely aware, Durham County Council has operated a Poverty Strategy since 2012, with the current strategy running from 2022 to 2026. In accordance with the agreed timetable, the Council has undertaken a comprehensive review and evaluation of the existing strategy to assess progress, identify gaps and respond to significant changes in the social and economic context.

This review has been overseen by the Poverty Action Steering Group, a cross-council senior officer group working closely with elected members, statutory partners and voluntary and community sector organisations. The outcome of this work is a proposed refreshed strategic approach, which is now subject to public consultation prior to final adoption.

The consultation has been formally approved by Durham County Council's Cabinet and is being delivered through the Let's Talk County Durham engagement platform. It seeks views from residents, community organisations, partners and local councils on the proposed vision, priorities and structure of the new strategy, as well as on how effectively it reflects lived experience and local need. The consultation period runs from January to March 2026, after which responses will be analysed and used to inform the final strategy and a supporting action plan, with a view to adoption later in 2026.

The evidence underpinning the refreshed strategy demonstrates that poverty and financial insecurity remain significant and persistent challenges across County Durham. Latest data shows that over 112,000 residents, representing approximately 21.3 per cent of the population, are living in absolute poverty after housing costs. Child poverty remains a particular concern, with more than 31,000 children, over one in four, living in relative poverty. These figures highlight the scale of financial hardship experienced by families and the long-term implications for health, education and life chances.

Fuel poverty continues to affect a substantial number of households, with an estimated 26,600 to 27,500 homes, around 11.5 per cent of the total housing stock, struggling to afford adequate heating and energy. This is compounded by the age and condition of housing in many parts of the county, including a high proportion of older, energy-inefficient terraced properties, as well as by off-gas

rural areas where energy costs are typically higher. Fuel poverty is closely linked to poorer physical and mental health outcomes, particularly among older residents and those with long-term health conditions.

Employment and income data further illustrate the complexity of poverty in County Durham. While overall unemployment levels are relatively low, in-work poverty has increased markedly. The number of residents in employment who are claiming Universal Credit has more than doubled since March 2020, rising from around 9,500 to almost 20,000 by late 2023. This reflects the growth of low-paid, insecure and part-time work, alongside rising living costs that erode household incomes. Economic inactivity also remains high, with around one quarter of working-age residents not in the labour market, often due to long-term illness, disability or caring responsibilities.

County Durham is ranked among the more deprived upper-tier local authorities in England, currently placed around 40th out of 153 on national deprivation measures. Income deprivation and employment deprivation rankings similarly indicate entrenched disadvantage across many communities. These challenges are not evenly distributed and are shaped by place-based factors, including rural isolation, limited access to services and transport, digital exclusion, and local labour market conditions. Nearly half of the county's population lives in rural areas, where these barriers can intensify the experience of financial insecurity.

The pressures facing households have been intensified in recent years by a combination of factors, including the long-term effects of the coronavirus pandemic, sustained inflation in food, energy and housing costs, global economic uncertainty, and domestic policy changes. In particular, the ongoing managed migration from legacy benefits to Universal Credit is expected to continue through 2025 and into 2026, bringing further risk of financial disruption for some households. At the same time, reductions in national funding and increasing statutory pressures limit the resources available to local authorities, reinforcing the importance of targeted, preventative and partnership-led approaches.

In response to these challenges, Durham County Council has delivered a wide range of interventions under the current Poverty Strategy, including the distribution of over £30 million through the Household Support Fund since 2022, targeted benefit take-up campaigns, crisis grants, food and fuel support, employability programmes and digital inclusion initiatives. While these actions have provided essential support, the Council's review recognises the need to move further upstream, reducing reliance on crisis responses and strengthening pathways out of poverty.

The refreshed strategy therefore proposes a framework built around five strategic pillars: prevention, protection, pathways, participation and partnerships. This approach combines short-term support for households in immediate difficulty with longer-term action to improve skills, access to good quality employment, affordable housing, financial capability and community resilience. The strategy

also places a strong emphasis on co-production, lived experience and collaboration with partners across the public, voluntary and community sectors.

As part of the consultation, Durham County Council is also seeking views on the potential renaming of the strategy. This reflects evidence that the term “poverty” can carry stigma and may discourage engagement from some residents. A working title focused on financial resilience and opportunity has been proposed, with the final decision to be informed by consultation feedback.

Town and parish councils are recognised within the consultation framework as important partners in both engagement and delivery. It is therefore proposed that the City of Durham Parish Council engages positively with the County Durham consultation on tackling poverty and financial insecurity and responds accordingly to this consultation.

The deadline for responding to this consultation is the end of March 2026.

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to consider the content of the above report and agree to engage positively with this consultation.
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