

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the annual meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Thursday 28th September 2023 at 19:00 in the Merryoaks Community Hall, Park House Road. Durham. DH1 3QF.

Present: Councillors A Doig (in the Chair), E Ashby, V Ashfield, N Brown, D Freeman, R Friederichsen, C Lattin, G Holland, R Ormerod and S Walker.

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley, Mr Stephen Reed (DCC Planning Development Manager) and 14 members of the public.

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

Apologies were received from Councillors R Hanson and G Nair.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

Councillor E Scott declared an interest in items 4 and 8 on the Agenda as Chair of the Section 106 Working Group. Councillor E Scott took no part in the discussion or vote on item 8.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 27TH JULY 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 27th July 2023 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. DISCUSSION WITH STEPHEN REED ON DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL'S SECTION 106 PROCESS

The Chair took the opportunity to thank Stephen Reed for attending the Full Council meeting today. The Chair highlighted that there was significant interest in the use of Section 106 monies arising from developments in the parish area. The Chair advised that Stephen was attending to answer any procedural questions only in relation to Section 106 funding.

Stephen thanked the Parish Council for the opportunity to speak with them and the public today and highlighted his previous report to the Parish Council some years ago on this topic. Stephen advised that he would be happy to engage in discussions on this through a *question and answer* format.

Mr Jonathan Lovell advised that the public is aware that Section 106 monies are actually a part of the planning application/ process where there is

predicted extra demand on the available provision e.g. extra school places, etc. Mr Lovell asked if this was always the case or are choices and decisions sometimes made later? Stephen Reed advised that, during the consultation process, the planning department will work in collaboration with various public bodies, sometimes internal consultees within the Council (e.g. the education division) to assess each application on its own merits. If, in cases where the development is significant or will necessitate extra future demands on authorities such as education or health, each report on a planning application will set out a certain level of contribution required from developers in order to make the development acceptable. Stephen also highlighted that, should the developer be unwilling to make such a contribution, the planning process can be refused.

Mr Jonathan Lovell also asked if anything was decided ahead of the Section 106 monies received from developers of the many projects in Elvet and Gillesgate, Durham City, over the past ten years? Stephen confirmed that, as with all planning applications, each scheme will be assessed on its own merits and a suitable contribution will be applied to the approval of a scheme depending on its level of impact. In many cases, there have been contributions to core services such as health, education, affordable housing, etc. but in other cases there have been opportunities to gain funding towards open space enhancement and public art, where the Council has deemed it appropriate to attach such a condition.

Mr Jonathan Lovell advised that he felt that the implementation of this planning gain seems to have regional variations between different local authorities and asked if it is usual for there to be varying processes. Stephen advised that each local authority has its own way of dealing with Section 106 schemes. Stephen advised that he certainly felt that Durham operated one of the most transparent and open processes across all local authorities and this included consulting with Parish and Town Councils as well as the various AAPs across the county.

Ms Janet George expressed her concerns that a lot of money seems to be allocated towards projects from Artichoke as opposed to what the local community would like to see. Janet asked what say residents have in the allocation of funding from Section 106. Stephen highlighted that part of the application form for anyone applying for Section 106 needs to demonstrate that there is local community support for the project too. Stephen also advised that there was also a mechanism by which residents could make their views known on any new applications in their area through either their local County Councillors, Parish/ Town Council and/or AAP.

Janet also advised that she was aware of a consultation in another part of the County where residents were being asked to vote for their preferred project for use of Section 106 monies and asked why the same were not the case in the Elvet and Gillesgate division of the county.

Stephen advised that this was a project being run in conjunction with the local County Councillor(s) for that area.

Janet asked who made the final decision on any new applications. Stephen Reed advised that the County Council had established a Section 106 Working Group – made up of Members and Officers – to decide on these applications.

Ms Angela Tracey asked if the monies from Section 106 have to be spent in the electoral division in which the development takes place. Stephen confirmed that this is indeed the case.

Angela highlighted that the residents of Sidegate have had to endure significant developments in their local area for some time, e.g. Milburngate and yet had not seen any of the benefits purported in Section 106 reports to Committees. Angela advised that she felt the time was right for residents to have more say over where funding was allocated.

Councillor V Ashfield advised that public art and open space enhancement were very vague and were not necessarily attributed to specific projects. Councillor V Ashfield advised that she had carried out a lot of proactive work with Residents Association in the Elvet and Gilesgate division and had come up with a plan on projects which do have community support.

Councillor V Ashfield also expressed concern that there are so much Section 106 monies tied to affordable housing for the Neville's Cross division but that these have remained unspent for some time, with no agreed site for this to be delivered on in spite of the desperate need for more affordable housing in the City.

Councillor V Ashfield also highlighted that she had seen no firm plans for the Elvet Park proposal which is being discussed. Stephen advised that he understood that a different team within DCC is presently looking to progress this proposal as soon as possible.

Councillor E Scott highlighted that Section 106 was not a grants scheme and that there are other sources of funding out there, e.g. Lottery funding, Arts Council funding, etc. which could be applied for for other projects.

There being no further queries, the Chair thanked Stephen Reed for attending today and for answering those queries.

At this point, Stephen thanked the Parish Council and left the meeting.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None received.

6. COMMITTEE UPDATES

• Planning and Licensing Committee

Councillor G Holland presented the minutes from Planning and Licensing Committee meetings held on 21st July and 1st September 2023. There being no queries from Members, Councillor G Holland moved on to Committee reports.

Report on the first draft proposals for the Conservation Area boundary as part of the production of the Conservation Area Management Plan.

Councillor G Holland reminded Members that the Parish Council is a funding partner, along with Durham County Council, for the production of a Conservation Area Management Plan.

On 1st September 2023, Councillor G Holland advised that the Planning and Licensing Committee had met with the lead officer for this work to receive an update on progress.

The Clerk advised that the County Council has now completed the character assessment and condition survey works for each street in the Conservation Area and has produced a heat map showing where there are identified issues in each street. Each street now has its own heritage rating as either: optimal, fair, poor or very poor and the reason for this is stated in the report.

The Clerk also advised that the County Council has completed its identification and analysis of key views of the World Heritage Site and scored these based on their perceived importance. These relate to public views as opposed to private views from a particular property.

The Clerk advised that the coverage of the Article 4 Direction (relating to building materials and design, etc) is proposed to be expanded in order to protect surviving features and characters.

The Clerk also advised that another aspect of this work includes a review of the current Conservation Area Sub-Character Areas and their respective boundaries as well as the boundary of the Conservation Area in its entirety.

In late August, the County Council presented its draft proposals on the respective boundaries and these include a number of highlights:

- The Conservation Area will now be extended to take in Durham City South (Hill Colleges) as well as an area East of Old Durham Gardens.
- The Sub-Character Areas are also being increased to form 7 areas (as opposed to the existing 5) with more concise and distinguishable conservation areas based on character and significance, aligning with the historic narrative of the old boroughs, established by 1250 that were independent single street settlements under the ownership of the Bishop.

In welcoming much of the initial draft of these proposals, Members unanimously **agreed** the following response to the draft proposals for the new Conservation Area boundary:

The City of Durham Parish Council writes to formally congratulate and thank you for a terrific set of proposals in respect of the Durham City Conservation Area boundary. We are aware of the enormous amount of work which you and your predecessor Rebecca Taylor have put into this review.

The Parish Council is proud to be a funding partner for the Conservation Area Management Plan and we thank you for your positive and extensive engagement with us throughout the production of this document.

The Parish Council wishes to make the following observations:

- As a general point, the Parish Council wholeheartedly supports the sub-division of the different character areas as proposed within this document. This allows for smaller, more concise and distinguishable conservation areas based on character and significance as well as aligning with the historic narrative of the old boroughs.*
- Moreover, we fully support the inclusion of a number of the University's Hill colleges as part of proposals for the newly formed Durham City South Character Area. This Character Area includes a high number of non-designated heritage assets, including Grey College, St Aidan's College, St Mary's College, Trevelyan College and Van Mildert College. The document sets out clearly the reasons for this inclusion, with particular reference to building form and design as well as their relationship, views and visual connection to the World Heritage Site.*
- Whilst the Parish Council has a relatively neutral view on the removal of the housing estates at the Sands, concerns have been raised with us regarding the protected status of a number of the trees in this area. A number of these trees form part of the wider landscape setting of the area next to the Sands, contributing a strong element to the local skyline. They are an integral part of the area's setting and have substantial amenity value as well as creating a green leafy feel to the area. Has the Council's Trees Officer been consulted on this aspect of the proposals and what advice are they able to provide regarding the ongoing protection for these trees?*
- In addition, we note from your correspondence with the Gilesgate Residents Association (GRA) that the boundary has now been slightly amended so that West View is now re-included. As you have identified, this is an historic terrace of 1915, has its own character and the lane it fronts is shown on the 1st edition OS map c.1860. The Parish Council fully supports this amendment.*

- *Similarly, we welcome the re-inclusion of Chapel Mews and St. Luke's Mews in this part of the Conservation Area. Whilst the housing is of no special historic significance, the burgage plot pattern is legible and an important part of the historic plan form of Gilesgate and the brick garden walls are an important historical boundary feature.*
- *The Parish Council very much hopes that McNally Place and Green Lane may also be included within the Conservation Area boundary for Gilesgate. Although, we would not support the inclusion of the Esso garage. Historic England make it clear in recent correspondence that conservation areas should be designated where there is "sufficient special architectural or historic interest not to devalue the concept of conservation (NPPF paragraph 186)". The inclusion of the Esso garage and this part of Sunderland Road would certainly seem to meet this criterion.*
- *In addition, the Parish Council objects to the removal of part of St. John's Road as part of these proposals. Firstly, it is unusual to split the boundary in a street. Recent planning applications in this area have also been refused due to their inappropriate harm in this part of the Conservation Area and we would not wish to remove any protections at all to this part of the Conservation Area. Records show that the houses were built sometime in the 19th Century and these form a typical Edwardian terrace that is identified in the Council's adopted Conservation Area Character Appraisal as making a positive contribution to the Conservation Area adding to its architectural richness and character.*
- *Finally, the Parish Council feels it must object to the removal of Farnley Hey Road from the Crossgate Character Area. This area was developed in the Edwardian period and is a straight wide impressive road running north to south at right angles to The Avenue. Large detached Edwardian /Arts and Crafts Villas (Hillcrest, Farnley Hey and The Tower) appeared within the street scene with extensive grounds and outstanding views. The Parish Council believes that this warrants re-inclusion in this part of the Conservation Area and would be concerned at any loss of protection for this street. Moreover, we are concerned at the loss of protection for trees in the Farnley Hey area in our parish too.*

Many thanks for the opportunity to comment on these proposals. We look forward to working with you as this project progresses.

End of response

Proposal to adopt a new protocol for site visits for new planning/ licensing applications in the parish area

Councillor G Holland advised that the Committee had recently discussed the issue of site visits and this had been highlighted with one case in particular. During the discussion on an application within the Neville's Cross division, Councillor E Ashby had queried whether the Committee ought to have a policy on site visits for new planning/ licensing applications in the parish area.

As such, the Clerk advised that he had drafted such a policy for Members' consideration and presented a proposed protocol for approval.

Members unanimously **agreed** that this protocol needed further consideration and agreed to refer this protocol back to the Planning and Licensing Committee for further discussion and adoption at a future Full Council meeting.

• **Environment Committee**

Councillor C Lattin presented the minutes from the Environment Committee meeting held on 11th July 2023. There being no queries from Members, Councillor C Lattin moved on to Committee reports.

Proposal to adopt the new Allotment Policy and Tenancy Agreements in respect of the Council's North End Allotment site

The Clerk reminded Members that the City of Durham Parish Council agreed to take over the ownership of the North End Allotment site at Larches Road in early 2019 from Durham County Council. Other allotment sites in the parish – such as St. Margaret's Allotment site – are privately owned.

In late August, the Clerk advised that the Parish Council's solicitor informed the Council that Land Registry has now formally completed the transfer of the site to the City of Durham Parish Council and the Council is now the owners of this site.

Although this has taken a significant amount of time to finalise, the Clerk highlighted that there had been a significant amount of work and engagement carried out prior to this transfer with the North End Allotment Association to ensure that we have a policy and tenancy agreement all parties are content with. The Clerk advised that these need to be formally agreed by the Parish Council and all new tenancy agreements are to be signed.

In February 2019, the Clerk highlighted that the Parish Council agreed to mirror DCC's policy on allotments which was adopted by Cabinet earlier this year. However, this policy includes allowing livestock and beekeeping on their sites as well as other issues - something the Allotment Association is unhappy with for this particular site given its location within a Local Nature Reserve.

The Clerk advised that the Parish Council's Environment Committee met with representatives of the Association at its meeting in September to consider the draft proposed changes. Although there was some question over a proposed ban of chemical pesticides and herbicides on the site, the Clerk advised that this has now been dealt with as set out in this policy and tenancy agreement.

The Clerk advised that the site is extremely well-maintained and remains a hugely positive feature in the community of North End.

The Parish Council recently funded a sedum-roofed shelter and water butts for the Association and these have brought significant benefits to the site.

Members unanimously **agreed** to note that the formal transfer of the land has now been completed and the City of Durham Parish Council is the official owners of the site.

Members also unanimously **approved** the content of the new Allotment policy and tenancy agreements and instructed the Clerk to arrange for all new tenancy agreements to be signed forthwith.

Proposal to produce a mural on the wall at East Atherton Street as part of a project to celebrate women's history in Durham City

Councillor C Lattin highlighted that the Durham Women's Banner Group is organising a special 40th Anniversary of the Miners' Strike 'Women Against Pit Closures' event in March 2024.

The event will commence with a special service in Durham Cathedral and will then be followed by a procession with banners down to the Town Hall.

Councillor C Lattin highlighted that the promotion of women's history in Durham City is a priority for the Parish Council and the Council has worked positively with the Women's Banner Group on several other initiatives such as: the restoration of the Ruth First mural, the blue plaques for the first 3 female graduates of Durham University as well as the plaque for the renowned photographer Daisy Edis.

Running alongside this project, the Environment Committee has been making efforts to improve the wall at East Atherton Street. The wall is of very poor quality and has a detrimental impact upon the street scene in this part of the City. Previous efforts to plant hanging plants above the wall in the rear private garden above have not been progressed due to health and safety issues.

At its latest meeting, the Parish Council's Environment Committee agreed to support the painting of a mural on this wall.

The Clerk has investigated whether a planning application would be required to paint the wall and has had it confirmed that, so long as it is clearly not an advert, this would be Permitted Development under Schedule 2, Part 2, Class C which relates to the painting of a building and therefore does not require planning permission.

From a conservation point of view, as part of the Conservation Area Management Plan survey work in this area, the Conservation Officer has identified this section of poorly render brick wall as being a visually stark/harsh boundary and out of keeping as a connection between the 2 Victorian former mine workers terraces.

Conservation has also expressed the view that they would prefer for the mural to have a mining-related theme to its design so that it directly relates to the heritage

of this part of the city. Conservation has also confirmed that any works to this wall may give the street an upgraded heritage value in the Management Plan.

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council has previously funded the work of Lewis Hobson, a local artist from Durham Spray Paints, at St. Oswald's play park. Lewis is keen to do more projects to promote women's history in the City and the Women's Banner Group are keen to progress this project further.

Lewis has indicated that the total cost for design, rendering and paint works will be approximately £1,000 in total. If approved by Members, it was proposed that the Environment Committee and representatives of the Durham Women's Banner Group be delegated responsibility to agree the design.

Prior to commencing this work, Councillor V Ashfield also advised that the Environment Committee hopes to carry out a consultation with the residents of East Atherton Street.

Councillor V Ashfield advised that the Committee had previously investigated adding some planting/ greenery from the top of the wall but there were practical difficulties with this.

Councillor D Freeman advised that he had previously proposed that the wall should be painted with some sort of mural on but that he disagreed with Conservation that the theme should necessarily be focused on the mining history of Durham.

Councillor V Ashfield expressed concerns at the condition of the wall and advised that she felt that the Council should firstly check on the structural soundness of the wall. The Clerk advised that he would look into this.

Members **agreed** (9 votes in favour and 2 abstention votes) in principle to fund the work of Durham Spray Paints for a mural on the wall at East Atherton Street, subject to the outcome of a public consultation with residents on this street.

Members also **agreed** (10 votes in favour and 1 abstention vote) to delegate responsibility to the Environment Committee for the delivery of this project but with a further amendment by Councillor E Ashby that the final design sign-off of the mural be taken at a future Full Council meeting.

• Business Committee

Councillor R Ormerod presented the minutes from the Business Committee meeting held on 18th July 2023. There being no queries from Members, Councillor R Ormerod moved on to Committee reports.

Proposal to support the Uniformed Services Fun Day and Youth Market events during the Autumn half-term holidays.

The Clerk reminded Members that, in agreeing its budget for financial year 2023/24, Members approved an allocation of £25,000 towards the hosting of events in the City.

Hosting events in the City is identified as one of the key aspects of the Parish Council's work – through the Business Committee – to increase footfall into the City centre.

To date, the Clerk reported that the Parish Council has delivered a series of Coronation events, supported Durham Pride, the National Youth Market competition, the Children's Book Festival 2023 and planning for the Remembrance Day parade is well under way.

The Clerk advised that the Autumn half-term holidays will run between Friday 27th October to Monday 6th November 2023. This has generally been a relatively quiet period for events in the City. In light of this, the Clerk advised that he has been working with partners the Durham Markets Company to host the following series of events over the week:

Youth Market - October 30th

An outdoor market to promote and celebrate local young entrepreneurs aged 16-30 and provide a supportive space to test ideas as well as the opportunity to sell in front of a buying public with minimal overheads (the gazebos will be provided free of charge). Working in conjunction with the Northern Lass Lounge who will be promoting their Lounge Generation programme to provide support for girls aged 16-17 who would like to run their own business. DMC will also be advertising this opportunity to Durham University and local colleges.

Free family entertainment such as face painting, arts and crafts and a family treasure trail will be provided during both events to encourage families to visit the city centre for a fun and affordable day out.

Uniformed Services Fun Day - November 1st

An opportunity for blue light services to engage with members of the public in a fun, free family setting.

The Clerk advised that DMC has asked for a total of £1,300 towards support for entertainment, advertising and other miscellaneous expenses for these events.

The Clerk also highlighted that, in agreeing its events budget for 2023/24, the Parish Council's Business Committee specifically allocated £2,500 towards the Autumn half-term holidays for events so there is more than sufficient funding available for this.

Members unanimously **agreed** to provide £1,300 towards these events, as set out in the report provided.

Report on planning for the Remembrance Sunday 2023 event

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

The Clerk highlighted that he is working with partners to once again ensure that the Parish Council hosted a successful Remembrance weekend this year.

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

Proposal to produce and distribute a leaflet to support local independent businesses

Councillor R Ormerod reminded Members that one of the Parish Council's key aims is to support local independent businesses in Durham City.

As part of this priority, Councillor R Ormerod proposed the production of a leaflet, to be distributed around the City of Durham parish area (as well as the unparished part of Gilesgate) to try and encourage more usage of the great variety of local independents Durham City has to offer.

The focus of this leaflet is around supporting retail businesses as opposed to other uses such as food and drink/ hospitality businesses and to try and alter consumer habits away from online shopping/ retail and more towards using existing premises within the City.

Councillor R Ormerod highlighted that the messaging of this campaign comes directly from the Totally Locally campaign which has also provided stats specific to Durham. The intention of the messaging is to be as direct as possible in a positive way but the general message of 'use them or lose them' is clear from the leaflet. Councillor R Ormerod thanked the Clerk and Committee Members for their work in helping to re-design this page of the leaflet.

Page 2 of the leaflet seeks to inform the public of a number of funding and training opportunities which are presently available through the County Council's economic development and regeneration teams, in a bid to improve existing services and premises as well as attract more uses for the City. Councillor R Ormerod highlighted that its content has been provided by Durham County Council and Members of the Business Committee were also able to approve this at their most recent meeting.

The Clerk highlighted that the printing costs referenced in the report provided of £485 are out of date and the printing costs are now £245 for 10,000 leaflets. The delivery costs remain the same at £38/1,000 leaflets. The Clerk highlighted that the cost for the delivery has been reduced by £60/1000 leaflets as he has timed its production and distribution at the same time as the delivery of the "What to do if you have a local issue in Durham..." leaflet.

The total cost for this project being £625, Members unanimously **agreed** the production and distribution of this leaflet.

7. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 27th July 2023.

The Chair expressed his sincere thanks to all those Councillors involved in the recent meeting of the Central and East Area County Planning Committee which saw 3 highly controversial schemes rejected against a recommendation for the Committee to approve these. The Chair remarked that the Council's success was further cemented this week when Councillor Holland successfully argued another case in the Neville's Cross part of the parish. The Chair advised that the Parish Council has received a lot of appreciative messages from residents for our efforts in this regard. In all cases, the Chair advised that, had the Parish Council not called in these applications, all of the proposals would have been approved. The Chair remarked that residents have come to regard the Parish Council highly in protecting our City from inappropriate development.

The Chair thanked colleagues involved in the Clerk's recent formal appraisal. The Chair highlighted that this was one area of improvement recommended by the Inspectors when awarding the Council a national quality award. The Chair remarked that this was a positive exercise on all accounts and that he hoped this will feed into a follow-up bid for Quality Gold award next year.

The Chair took the opportunity to welcome the new Durham Chief Constable Rachel Bacon to her post. The Chair advised that Rachel was confirmed in this new role at a recent meeting of the Durham Police and Crime panel on Monday. The Chair advised that Rachel joins Durham from her previous role as Deputy Chief Constable of South Wales Police and the UK police lead for mental health. The Chair wished Rachel every success in this new role and expressed his desire at working closely with her to keep the public safe in our City.

The Chair also took the opportunity to welcome our new student residents to our City this year. No matter what their background or programme of study, the Chair advised that students attending the University can be sure of a warm welcome from their Parish Council. The Chair expressed the hope that students will enjoy all that Durham City has to offer them and that they will take every opportunity to be part of City life in Durham. The Chair wished all students every success in their academic careers this year and into the future. The Chair advised that he was pleased to see Councillor Lattin do a welcome video for new students and all will soon be receiving our *"What to do if you have a local issue in Durham..."* leaflet.

The Chair expressed his thoughts to the parents, pupils, teachers and many others caught up in the RAAC-saga at St. Leonard's School in the parish. The Chair advised that he was pleased that MP Mary Foy and others have been working with the school and the Department for Education to ensure that this issue is resolved as speedily as possible. The Chair advised that nothing is more important than the safety of our young people and this disruption to their education is something none of us wish to see.

The Chair advised that he was pleased that the Parish Council's ongoing efforts to resist the closure of the Durham Ticket Office at Durham Railway station continue to attract press attention. The Chair advised that the plans have rightly been met with a groundswell of opposition, with the consultation amassing an unprecedented 680,000 responses. The outcome of the consultation was originally timetabled for assessment by 6th October, however both Transport Focus and London Travelwatch are understood to have requested an extension due to the

sheer volume of feedback. The Chair advised that, in a government concession, they now have until the end of October to complete their evaluation.

The Chair expressed a huge congratulations to all those involved in this year's successful Durham In Bloom competition. Yet again, Durham City won Gold for best small City. The Chair advised that he felt it was truly wonderful to see the work that Andrew Jackson started continue in this way. The Chair remarked that the City – particularly the displays at North Road and Leazes Road roundabouts – looked particularly lovely this year. The Chair advised that he was delighted to continue as a partner in this initiative.

The Chair also offered his congratulations to the organisers of Durham Fringe. Ticket sales this year were up 82% from last year with over 5,000 sold and most of the events sold out. The Chair advised that he hoped to work more closely with the organisers to ensure that we all capture this opportunity to grow and build on this successful, family-fun event.

The Chair put on record his personal thanks to Colin Wilkes, the Managing Director of Durham Markets Company, for all he has done over a 30-year career in our City. The Chair remarked that Colin is deservedly regarded as a powerhouse in Durham and we are all delighted that he ends his career on such a high; a mere 2 years since Her Majesty the Queen awarded Colin an MBE for services to small businesses in Durham.

Finally, the Chair reminded Members that the Council is coming up to that stage in the year when Members discuss our strategy and budget for next year. The Chair advised that he would like to arrange a further Councillors' Away Day ahead of November.

8. SECTION 106 FUNDS - DRAFT PROPOSALS FOR A CONSULTATION CODE OF PRACTICE

Following a number of concerns from Members on the practicalities of this proposed protocol, this item was withdrawn from the Chair and not progressed further.

9. COMPLETION OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S EXTERNAL AUDIT 2022/23

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

Earlier this year, the Internal Auditor carried out a review of the Parish Council's workings and provided a positive report, as provided to Members. Mazars LLP have now completed their external audit for the year ended 31 March 2023 and have certified the Annual Governance and Accountability Return. The Clerk advised that no issues have been identified in the external audit review. As such, the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 set out what the Parish Council must do at the conclusion of this audit.

Members thanked the Clerk for his work on this audit and unanimously **agreed** to note the conclusion of the external audit for 2022/23 and to instruct the Clerk to take all appropriate action, as set out in the report provided.

10. PROPOSAL TO FUND THE NIGHT TIME SAFETY HUB IN DURHAM CITY

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council is a funding partner for the City Safety Hub at St. Nicolas Church. In setting its budget for 2023/24, the Clerk advised that the Council had agreed to provide an additional £10,000 worth of funding for the hub for this financial year. This is in addition to the funding provided in 2022/23 of £10,000.

The Clerk advised that other funding partners include: Durham County Council, Durham Police, Safer Streets (national) funding through the OPCC, Durham BID and Durham University.

Since opening on the 5th February 2022, the Clerk advised that the hub has proven to be a positive and at times life-saving facility for Durham City on the busiest three nights of the week. Working between the hours of 8pm and 3am they have provided necessary support, assistance, and guardianship not only to females in a vulnerable or at-risk state, but also males in a similar situation. The hub has dealt with over 3,500 incidents since launching and these can range from the most serious life-threatening issues to the everyday care and wellbeing facility.

The Clerk reminded Members that the latest (confidential) report from August 2023 of the hub's operations and incident log has been circulated to Members.

The Clerk also advised that the running costs for the hub are approximately £130,000 per annum. This includes staffing, training, room hire, equipment and campaign materials. The hub is fully funded till the end of 2023.

To date, the University has committed a further £10,000 thereafter and Durham BID has given a verbal commitment to continue to support the hub.

More worryingly, the criteria for Safer Streets funding has changed and cannot fund ongoing operations such as the hub. There is therefore a need to consider the long-term sustainability of the hub.

Whilst expressing support for the work of the hub, a number of Members expressed concerns that the Parish Council and other public bodies should not continue to fund this indefinitely and expressed the hope that hub could be funded into the long-term by the trade itself.

A number of Members advised that they felt that the Parish Council contribution towards the hub should be gradually reduced.

Councillor E Ashby advised that she lived very close to the City centre and was exceptionally grateful for the work of the hub staff and supported the continued funding for the hub.

In the meantime, the Clerk advised that DCC staff who run the hub are looking for funding from all other partners.

Members unanimously **agreed** to provide the £10,000 funding agreed in this year's budget for 2023/24 for the hub, as set out in the report provided.

Due to the confidential nature of the following items, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and the public were excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the LGA 1972 Act and section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. At this point in time the press and the public were asked to leave the room.

11. NOMINATION FOR THE FREEDOM OF THE PARISH AWARD

Members unanimously **agreed** to award Colin Wilkes the Freedom of the Parish.

At this point, the Clerk left the meeting ahead of item 12 on the Agenda.

12. OUTCOME OF THE CLERK'S FORMAL APPRAISAL BY PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

The Chair provided a report to the Council following the recent appraisal of the Parish Clerk. Members **agreed**:

- The Clerk focus on those strategic areas identified in the appraisal;
- The Clerk undertake the proposed postgraduate qualification in planning, subject to;
- The Parish Council would be happy to consider requests from the Clerk where he may consider daytime attendance or study may be required to complete the course;
- The Clerk remains in post for at least 2 years following completion of the qualification, otherwise the costs of the course be repaid to the Parish Council;
- The Parish Council vires sufficient funds into the training budget in anticipation of any calls on the training budget by councillors.
- The title of the Parish Clerk be revised to Parish Clerk and Executive Officer;
- The Clerk's salary be raised to £50,782 (SCP44), subject to the pending pay rise and to be paid with effect from April 2023 (the latter aspect of this being **agreed** by 10 votes in favour and 2 votes against);
- The Parish Council invite the Clerk to present for consideration proposed costs of buying a commercial parking contract in a convenient car park;
- The website and the door to the Parish Council offices specify that any visit shall be by appointment only and/or specify days/times of availability to discourage ad hoc and persistent callers;
- The Committees of the Parish Council be invited to consider whether or not they would find it useful to explore the possibilities of additional support and what form that might take (for example, the employment of an

undergraduate or postgraduate from Durham University on a living wage of £10.90 an hour) to provide assistance in committee business;

- Further inquiries be made about possible support for committee administration, including agenda preparation and minute-taking;
- Expressions of interest be sought for: a local IT firm to devise and maintain the Parish Council website; development of an external communications strategy; and event delivery.

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

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'A' followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish.

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council
(23rd November 2023)**