

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Thursday 25th January 2024 at 7:00pm in the Main Hall of the Merryoaks Community Hall, Park House Rd, Durham DH1 3QF.

Present: Councillors A Doig (in the Chair), E Ashby, J Ashby, V Ashfield, L Brown, D Freeman, R Friederichsen and S Walker.

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley and Ms Polly Lowe (member of the public) and Councillor David Bell and Audrey Christie (CDALC).

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

Apologies were received from Councillors N Brown, E Scott, R Ormerod, G Holland and H Weston.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

None received.

3. PRESENTATION OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S QUALITY AWARD BY COUNTY DURHAM ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

The Chair welcomed Councillor David Bell and Audrey Christie, from the County Durham Association of Local Councils, to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

Councillor D Bell began by expressing his great joy to see the youngest local Council in County Durham – the City of Durham Parish Council - being recognised with a prestigious national award as part of the Local Council Award Scheme.

The Parish Council was awarded Quality Council status by the National Association of Local Councils last year. This achievement recognises that the council achieves the highest standards in governance, community leadership and council improvement.

Moreover, the City of Durham Parish Council goes above and beyond their legal obligations, leading their community and continuously seeking opportunities to improve and develop even further.

The City of Durham Parish Council has been in existence for just under 5 years and is now only one of three local Parish and Town Councils (out of 104 across County Durham) to have received this accolade and one of only 105 out of approximately 10,000 local Councils nationally.

The Award Scheme particularly highlighted community leadership, excellent governance, the Parish Council's corporate plan and the Neighbourhood Plan as outstanding in its assessment.

Councillor D Bell advised that the Local Council Award Scheme is a peer assessed programme that has been designed to promote and recognise councils that are at the cutting edge of the sector.

Councillor D Bell advised that it is great to see the speed and effectiveness with which the Parish Council has developed since it was founded in 2018.

In particular, the Parish Council has been known for taking the lead on big events such as Remembrance Day, The Platinum Jubilee, the King's Coronation and the City's Children's Book Festival.

In addition, the work the Parish Council does to improve its local environment, promote the City's rich and diverse heritage and tackle anti-social behaviour and environmental issues by working so brilliantly alongside the Police and Neighbourhood Wardens, have been tremendous.

As the City's local Council, Councillor D Bell advised that he was also aware that the City of Durham Parish Council gets its fair share of planning and licensing applications each month too. Analysing each application in such painstaking detail in order to protect the City from inappropriate development has been a key pillar in the Council's delivery. It is really tremendous to see the victories you have had on this front and the work you continue to do on this front.

Councillor D Bell advised that CDALC very much recognises that the City of Durham Parish Council has really established itself as an organisation which acts on its residents' issues and is now a major stakeholder in the life of our City.

The City of Durham Parish Council, and other local councils, are at the front line of the Government's localism agenda and it is clear that you do all you can to deliver services whilst being efficient and cost-effective.

Councillor D Bell expressed huge congratulations to all on this tremendous achievement.

Ms Audrey Christie also took the opportunity to highlight the success of the Parish Clerk in achieving his CiLCA qualification, which has propelled the Council to this recognition by the national body.

Audrey advised that the Clerk was a great joy to work with and she personally felt that the Clerk Adam had been her fellow study companion as she completed her CiLCA at the same time as Adam had. Audrey asked the Council to be in no doubt about the amount of work this qualification was and thanked Adam for all his support and work on this.

The Chair thanked CDALC for their continued work with the local Parish and Town Council sector and gratefully received the Award on behalf of the Parish Council.

4. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 19TH DECEMBER 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th December were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms Polly Lowe advised that she was attending the meeting with a general interest in all Agenda items.

6. COMMITTEE UPDATES

• Planning and Licensing Committee

Councillor S Walker presented the Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from the meeting held on 8th December 2023. There were no queries from Members.

• Environment Committee

Councillor C Lattin presented the Environment Committee minutes from the meeting held on 14th November 2023. There were no queries from Members and Councillor C Lattin took the opportunity to present two leaflets currently being produced by the Environment Committee and which would soon be distributed to residents of the parish. One leaflet being a recycling leaflet to various hotspot areas of the City where waste is a particular issue. The other being a community emergency plan leaflet – grant funded through the Community Resilience Fund – which is seeking volunteers to help with the production of the plan. Members thanked Councillor C Lattin for her continued efforts on these initiatives.

• Business Committee

Councillor D Freeman presented the minutes from the Business Committee meeting held on 21st November 2023. There were no queries from Members.

• Finance Committee

The Chair presented the minutes from the Finance Committee meeting held on 12th June 2023. There were no queries from Members.

7. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 19th December 2023 as follows:

The Chair began by warmly welcoming Councillor John Ashby to his place as the new Councillor for Durham South and offered many congratulations on his election victory.

The Chair also put on record his sincere condolences to Councillor Helen Weston and her family on the passing of Mike Weston. The Chair noted that Mike was a

former England International rugby player who captained his home team 5 times during the 1963 England rugby union tour of Australasia. The Chair highlighted that Mike's sporting and business endeavours makes him one of the City of Durham's outstanding sons.

The Chair also sent best wishes to colleague Councillor Grenville Holland and wished him a speedy recovery after an awful fall on 17th January.

The Chair remarked that the Agenda for the next Planning and Licensing Committee meeting is a very important one. On the positive, the Chair welcomed that the Committee will be meeting with Stuart Priestley - DCC's lead ecologist - on the important issue of biodiversity net gain as well as adopting Jo-Anne Garrick's excellent reports on short-term letting and Policy 16.

On the not so positive, the Chair expressed his horror at the suggested plans to build a 300 bed+ PBSA on car park land near the hospital for undergraduate students. The land in question is a 100-space car park that is completely vital for the acute demand for parking next to the hospital. The Chair advised that he has grave concerns about these plans and expressed his confidence that the Committee will be analysing the plans very carefully once received.

The Chair thanked all Members who took part in the meeting with the Citrus Group on plans for the new Prince Bishops Centre. The Chair also thanked James and the team for engaging with the Parish Council throughout this process. The Chair remarked that, whilst this is clearly a "do or die" scenario for the centre, it is concerning that little plans seem to be in place for the construction phase of this development and where the existing retail offer in the centre will be housed in the meantime. In addition, the Chair remarked that there seemed to be little community offer once the development is complete. The Chair did however highlight that James has reached out to the Clerk and offered a base for Durham Pointers to be housed in the centre.

The Chair expressed his shock at the alarming figures the Clerk circulated in relation to waiting lists for social housing. As of January 2023, nearly 10,300 people were on a waiting list for a house. The Chair remarked that the waiting time – even for those most in need – is absolutely horrific, all the more so given that 481 of those on the list are women fleeing domestic violence. The Chair advised that the need for more social and affordable housing is just as acute in the City as it is elsewhere in the County. As such, the Chair advised that he would be throwing his full weight and support behind Neville's Cross Councillors in identifying an appropriate site in the Ward for constructing new affordable housing, for which there is a substantial amount of Section 106 money that must be spent in the Ward. The Chair particularly thanked Councillor Susan Walker and Glen Walker for putting together a team of experts to look into this matter.

The Chair also expressed his shock to see the figures from today's Palatinate magazine which shows that Durham University's expenditure on commission for agents to secure international students has tripled to nearly £5million in 2022/23 alone. The University's original pledge to open 4-5 new colleges was not mentioned in the refresh of Durham's 10-year plan, while plans to increase the proportion of international students remain. The Chair remarked that Durham is

not alone in facing these pressures and it is worrying that the sector appears to be overly dependent on international students to prop up UK universities financially.

The Chair formally put on record his thanks to John Booth, the former Chair of the Freeman's charitable Trust, who has recently retired from this role. The Chair advised that John has been a terrific friend to the Parish Council – supporting our work particularly for the Platinum Jubilee and Coronation. The Chair advised that John's earlier work in 2008 as part of the Business Enterprise and Regeneration Group in the City set the tone for many more years of volunteer work in the City and undoubtedly the Freeman's Beacon will be his legacy. The Chair advised that he will be writing to John in due course to thank him for his work with the Parish Council and he has asked the Clerk to consider if there may be an appropriate award we can look to present to John for his many years' service.

Finally, the Chair thanked Owen Cleugh and Jacqui Toase – two exceptional officers at the County Council – for their ongoing work and commitment to the City Safety Hub. The Chair expressed his delight that they have worked so well with our brilliant new Vicar at St. Nic's Church and have managed to secure the room hire at nearly a third of the original cost. The Chair remarked that the Safety Hub is truly a remarkable example of partnership working delivering for our community.

8. REPORT ON THE UPGRADING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S WEBSITE

The Clerk reminded Members that there is a desire to upgrade the existing Parish Council website and a budget allocation to deliver this has been included in the Council's draft budget for 2024/25.

At present, the Clerk advised that the Parish Council has a service level agreement (SLA) with the County Council to provide our website, along with a maintenance and support agreement. Our current website and existing SLA with DCC have been in place since 2018.

The Parish Council's website is a key tool for publishing important (statutory) documents and making residents aware of the work of the Council as well as news and events happening in the parish area.

The Clerk highlighted that, as part of its recent public consultation exercise, members of the public identified the Council's website as the best way for residents to stay informed of the Council's work.

A number of schools and other Parish/Town Councils have a similar arrangement with the County Council to provide this service. However, in September 2023, DCC's Head of Digital Services advised partners that this agreement would end in April 2024, following a comprehensive review of the Council's website support SLA, we will no longer provide the service to schools and town/parish councils from 1 April 2024.

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council has established a website working group including himself and Councillors Ashfield and Walker.

In reviewing the design specification for the new website, the working group particularly highlighted the websites of Prince Bishops, Durham BID and Stanley Town Council as particularly attractive and user-friendly.

The Clerk advised that he had reached out to a number of website providers and had received the below quotes from various suppliers, all of whom can deliver this new site by the beginning of April 2024:

Company A - £1,650 (+VAT)

Company B - £7,400 (+VAT)

Company C - £8,200 (+VAT)

In the case of Company A, the Clerk advised that the Parish Council has previously worked with this company on other graphic design projects, e.g. the production of the "What to do if you have a local issue in Durham..." leaflet, etc.

In addition to the costs set out above, the Clerk also recommended that the Parish Council acquires a dozen or so photos to populate the webpage from a local photographer and an additional element to the budget for this work is included in the current draft budget, should Members approve the appointment of Company A.

Once the chosen company is selected, it was proposed that the Council's working group be delegated overall design responsibility for the new website.

Members unanimously **agreed** to the upgrading of the Parish Council's website, as set out in the above report. In doing so, Members also **agreed** that Company A should be selected to carry out the works for the new website.

Members also unanimously **agreed** to delegate overall design responsibility for the new website to the Parish Council's working group.

Members also unanimously **agreed** that Councillor John Ashby should join as an additional member of the website working group.

9. TO REVIEW THE PARISH COUNCIL'S MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND OUTSIDE BODIES

Following on from the Durham South parish ward by-election, the Chair advised that there is a need for the Parish Council to consider the membership of its own committees as well as Councillors who represent the Parish Council on various outside organisations.

Members unanimously **agreed** the new Membership of its Committees as follows:

Planning and Licensing Committee (7 Members) Grenville Holland (Chair) Susan Walker (Vice-Chair) John Ashby Carole Lattin Alan Doig Esther Ashby Nicola Brown	Environment Committee (6 Members) Carole Lattin (Chair) Victoria Ashfield (Vice-Chair) David Freeman Liz Brown Susan Walker Rupert Friederichsen
Personnel Committee (5 Members) Alan Doig (Chair) Elizabeth Scott (Vice-Chair) Liz Brown Victoria Ashfield Grenville Holland	Business Committee (6 Members) Richard Ormerod (Chair) David Freeman (Vice-Chair) Nicola Brown Grenville Holland Esther Ashby Victoria Ashfield
Finance Committee (6 Members) Alan Doig (Chair) David Freeman (Vice-Chair) John Ashby Victoria Ashfield Helen Weston Liz Brown	

Members also unanimously **agreed** its representation on outside organisations as follows:

Local organisation/ body	City of Durham Parish Council representative
Community Engagement Task Force	Victoria Ashfield
Community Engagement Task Force sub group - Economic	Esther Ashby
Community Engagement Task Force sub group – Citizenship	Victoria Ashfield
Community Engagement Task Force sub group - Lived Environment	Carole Lattin
PBSA Liaison Group	Esther Ashby
Durham Access Group	Nicola Brown and Susan Walker
CDALC Larger Councils Forum	Esther Ashby, Adam Shanley and Richard Ormerod
City Safety Group	Adam Shanley
Durham BID board	Adam Shanley
Durham AAP Board	Susan Walker
Durham University Housing Group	John Ashby

10. PARISH COUNCIL STRATEGY 2024/25

The Chair reminded Members that the aim of the Parish Council's strategy is to give local residents, Councillors and Officers a clear understanding of what the council is trying to achieve and how it intends to deliver its aims and objectives.

The strategy sets out what the areas of development or change the Council intends to focus on over the next year outlining those areas of service that are identified as priority aims and objectives.

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

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

Members also unanimously **agreed** that the priorities for each Committee in 2024/25 should be as follows:

Planning and Licensing Committee

Council priorities 2024/25	Planning priorities 2024/25	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
1. Being an ambitious voice for the city	Representing the Parish as a consultee on planning matters	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 4: A City With Attractive And Affordable Places To Live
	Consulting the Parish on planning matters	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future

2. Enhancing physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish	Ensuring schemes deliver the required levels of affordable housing and adapted housing for the disabled and elderly.	Theme 4. A City With Attractive And Affordable Places To Live
	Promoting the creation and adoption of new Public Rights of Way and ensuring that they are accessible to all.	Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 5: A City With A Modern And Sustainable Transport Infrastructure
	Protecting our green infrastructure and assets within our parish boundary and ensuring that they are used to the best possible public benefit.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
3. Upholding the neighbourhood plan and representing the parish on planning matters.	Upholding the development plans for the area i.e. Neighbourhood Plan and County Durham Plan.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 4: A City With Attractive And Affordable Places To Live

	To maintain and develop an evidence-base to update the Neighbourhood Plan and comment on planning applications.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 4: A City With Attractive And Affordable Places To Live
	Protecting our World Heritage Site, Conservation Areas and designated and non-designated heritage assets.	Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
	Delivering a Conservation Area Management Plan	Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
	Protecting against overdevelopment	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 4: A City With Attractive And Affordable Places To Live
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish	Supporting accommodation above retail units in the City centre.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 4: A City With Attractive And

		Affordable Places To Live
	Supporting tourist attractions and transport infrastructure for the visitor economy	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.	Putting green future at the heart of planning considerations	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
	Resisting schemes which do not deliver net zero by 2030 and supporting those which do.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future

Council priorities 2023/24	Licensing priorities 2023/24	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
1. Being an ambitious voice for the city	Representing the Parish on licensing matters	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
2. Enhancing physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish	Ensuring that all new licensing applications and existing premises promote the four licensing objectives.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
	Empowering our residents to make informed representations on licensing matters.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy

	Supporting a cumulative impact policy for the parish Supporting a late night-levy on licensed premises in the parish.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
	Making licensing as open as possible through hosting an online licensing map	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
	Making the City more accessible to all by representing the needs of all users in relation to pavement and outdoor seating applications.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
3. Upholding the neighbourhood plan and representing the parish on planning matters.	Ensuring that the objectives of licensing and planning are aligned.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish	Promoting the early evening economy to families and tourists	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.	To encourage all new taxi licenses granted by DCC to be for low emissions/ electrical vehicles only.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future

Environment Committee

Council priorities 2024/25	Environment priorities 2024/25	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
1. Being an ambitious voice for the city	Engaging with and responding to residents of all ages and backgrounds in environment-related work Mobilise Volunteer groups Work with young people and respond to their concerns	Theme 6: A City with an enriched community life.
2. Enhancing physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish	Promote cleaner air, a cleaner river, green spaces, and streets for living across the city. Reduction in light pollution. Reduction in night time noise. Sustainable travel	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 5: A City With A Modern And Sustainable Transport Infrastructure
3. Upholding the neighbourhood plan and representing the parish on planning matters.	Work with all relevant committees to ensure the climate and ecological emergencies are considered in all planning matters. Sustainable housing	Theme 4: A City with attractive and affordable places to live
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish	Improve and protect the appearance of the city and its heritage.	Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.	Be proactive and collaborate with all partners (including Parish Council committees, Durham County Council, residents, developers, landlords, and other businesses) to coordinate our impact on the climate and ecological emergencies and increase community resilience. Encourage sustainable Travel Increased awareness and action on climate change. Tackle the ecological emergency	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 5: A City With A Modern And Sustainable Transport Infrastructure

	To work with partners to establish a Community Emergency Plan for the parish area	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
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Business Committee

Council priorities 2024/25	Business priorities 2024/25	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
1. Being an ambitious voice for the city	Engaging with local businesses	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
2. Enhancing physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish	Promoting responsible businesses	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
3. Upholding the neighbourhood plan and representing the parish on planning matters.	Supporting new businesses in empty units across the city	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish	Marketing Durham as a place to visit	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy Theme 5: A City with a modern and sustainable transport infrastructure
	Contracting professional support for local businesses in the city	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
	Promoting businesses in the city centre and encouraging a variety of businesses to ensure wide range of choice for visitors	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.	Reducing food miles by encouraging the use of local suppliers	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy

		Theme 6: A City with an enriched community life
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11. PARISH COUNCIL BUDGET FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2024/25

The Clerk reminded Members that there is a need for the Parish Council to have agreed its budget and to submit its precept request for the forthcoming financial year by the end of January 2024.

In order to support this work, all of the Parish Council's Committees met last year and have submitted their respective budget proposals for their work from April 2024.

The Chair highlighted that the Finance Committee had met on 17th January to discuss this and the proposed budget was before Members to consider.

In agreeing the below budget, the following amendments were made and voted on as follows:

- The events budget was unanimously **agreed** to be reduced from £30,000 to £25,000.
- The budget agreed for the toilet project was **agreed** by 7 votes in favour and 1 vote against. The description of the project was also **agreed** to be changed to "improve condition and accessibility" of toilets.
- The £10,800 budget in the Business Committee budget was unanimously **agreed** to be amended to "support for local businesses".

The following budget was unanimously **agreed** by Members:

Planning and Licensing Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Representing the parish on planning and licensing matters	
Professional support in responding to planning applications and licensing hearings	£5,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Improving the licensed economy	
Enhanced drug searching scheme with Durham Police	£600.00
PRIORITY 3: Review of the Licensing Framework Policy	
Professional support for licensing policy review	£5,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2024-25 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£10,600.00

Environment Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Additional policing and safety for the parish area	
Enhanced SLA with Durham Police for late night policing	£30,000.00 – (£15,000 carried forward from 2023/24)
Safety of Women at Night Hub	£10,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Noise abatement	
Building on the <i>Shhh...11pm to 7am</i> campaign	£2,000.00
PRIORITY 3: Clean Air, Clean and Green City	
Planting budget	£10,000.00
PRIORITY 4: Engaging the youth in the work of the Parish Council	
Project working with young people to promote awareness of clean air (OASES project)	£2,500.00
PRIORITY 5: Improving the appearance of our City	
Neighbourhood Warden SLA	£10,000.00
Christmas frontages awards	£1,500.00
PRIORITY 6: Recycling	
Terracycle scheme	£3,000.00
Green business award	£1,000.00
PRIORITY 7: Enhancing the River Wear	
Supporting the work of the Wear Rivers Trust	£5,000.00
PRIORITY 8: Emergency planning	
Supporting our community in preparing for emergency events	£2,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2024-25 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£78,000.00

Business Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Supporting Independent businesses	
Support for independent businesses in Durham	£10,800.00
PRIORITY 2: Increasing footfall through events	
Hosting events in Durham City (Remembrance Sunday, Christmas events, D-Day Anniversary).	£25,000.00
PRIORITY 3: Filling empty units with new retailers	
Welcome to Durham Fund (match funded through UKSPF)	£5,000.00
PRIORITY 4: Improving public toilets	
Improving public toilets, <u>for example</u> , accessibility and condition	£10,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2024-25 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£50,800.00

Full Council

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Administration of Parish Council	
(Office rent, room hire, audit, insurance, printing and postage, newsletters, website and other expenditure)	£17,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Training of staff and Councillors	
Training budget	£3,000.00
PRIORITY 3: Upgrading the Parish Council website	
Website upgrade	£3,000.00
PRIORITY 4: supporting local community and voluntary organisations	
Grants budget	£10,000.00
PRIORITY 5: Staffing costs	
Clerk salary (including salary, pension, NI on costs)	£75,000.00
Part-time administrative support for the Parish Council's functions	£15,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2024-25 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£123,000.00

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

Committee	Cost (£)
Planning and Licensing Committee	£10,600.00
Environment Committee	£78,000.00
Business Committee	£50,800.00
Full Council	£123,000.00
Reserves (to be added)	£20,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2024/25 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£282,400.00

12. PARISH COUNCIL PRECEPT REQUEST FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2024/25

It was noted that the 2023/24 Tax Base is 4,641.5. The 2024/25 City of Durham Parish Council Tax Base has been calculated at 4450.1. Members noted that the Tax Base has therefore decreased by 191.4 which equates to a reduction of £9,985.34.

Members also noted that the LCTRS grant payable to the City of Durham for 2023/24 is £8,437.00. The reduced tax base and the LCTRS Grant produces a net position of -£1,548.34 for 2024/25.

Having carefully considered the budget item under item 11 of the Agenda, Members unanimously **agreed** that the total precept charge for 2024/25 will be £282,429.66 which equates to an increase in a Band D charge from £52.17 to £61.57 (18.02%).

13. REPORT ON PARISH COUNCIL INTERNAL CONTROLS

Members unanimously **agreed** to the appointment of Mr Gordon Fletcher as the Parish Council's internal auditor for the financial year 2023/24.

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 £150.

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

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

External Audit

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

4. REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

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

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

5. EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

The external audit report for 2022-23 was carried out by Mazars and was completed in September 2023. No issues were raised by the external auditors.

6. INTERNAL CONTROL ISSUES

The Auditors did not raise any issues as part of the 2022-23 Audit.

End of report

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 stylized initials followed by a surname, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council
(22nd February 2024)**