

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Thursday 24th October 2024 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**), E Ashby, J Ashby, V Ashfield, L Brown, N Brown, D Freeman, R Friederichsen, G Holland, C Lattin and E Scott.

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley, four members of the public, Dave Clarke and Ashleigh White (Durham Police), Ken Judd and Jacqui Toase (DCC).

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

Apologies were received and **accepted** from Councillors A Doig and R Ormerod. No other apologies were received.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

Councillors S Walker, L Brown and E Scott declared an interest in item 8 and took no part in the discussion or vote on this item.

Councillor E Scott declared an interest in the reports relating to DCC's budget consultation and the Section 106 application consultation. Councillor E Scott took no part in the discussion or vote on either item.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 25TH SEPTEMBER 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th September 2024 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chair welcomed Mr Kevin Robinson from Durham Football Club (FC) to the meeting. Kevin began by thanking the Parish Council for the opportunity to speak with Members today and highlighted that Durham FC was established in 2020 (Junior team) and that the team is presently looking around for a new field or venue from which to play organised training and football games.

Kevin advised that the team used to play from Belmont but were presently located at Consett. Kevin advised that the team were most keen to secure a City centre location and asked the Parish Council for its support in principle in finding such a location.

Kevin advised that the team presently caters for under 16s and were very successful as a team. Councillor G Holland expressed his wholehearted support for the team and advised that it is essential to find an appropriate city centre location for the football team. Councillor G Holland particularly highlighted the benefits of

sport for health and wellbeing reasons and also in tackling issues such as youth anti-social behaviour.

Councillor C Lattin asked why the option at Belmont was no longer viable for the team and Kevin explained that this was only a temporary home and that another team actually plays at this location.

Councillor S Walker highlighted the works set to take place on the field next to Merryoaks Community Hall in order to resolve the flooding issues here and asked if Kevin had considered this as an option. Kevin advised that he had looked into this and would be keen to explore this option. The Clerk advised that he would liaise with Kevin on this.

Councillor D Freeman expressed his support for the team in being able to locate a city centre field from which to play. Councillor G Holland urged Kevin and the team to reach out to bodies such as Sports England and the FA for funding.

The Chair thanked Kevin for presenting this matter to the Parish Council and asked that Kevin make contact with the Parish Clerk to progress some possibilities. Kevin thanked Members for their time and left the meeting.

Mr Rupert Benjamin raised a concern relating to the ongoing maintenance of Homer Terrace by a local housing association and highlighted that he is regularly carrying out clean-ups and maintenance of the area himself as an individual. Mr Benjamin advised that he would be writing further to the Parish Clerk on these matters and the Chair thanked Mr Benjamin for drawing these issues to the Council's attention.

5. DISCUSSION WITH POLICE INSPECTOR DAVE CLARKE ON THE CITY'S OPERATION LENTIL

The Chair welcomed Dave Clarke to the meeting and thanked him for his time in speaking with the Council.

Dave began by confirming that the two additional officers as part of the Operation Lentil project in the City began in early April 2023 and that this additional visible presence around the City and its surrounding residential areas had been recognised by local residents. Dave thanked the Parish Council for its provision of £50,000 of additional policing funding over the last two financial years and highlighted the significant impact this has had.

Dave advised that these additional officers had already dealt with a number of incidents since commencing and having the additional resource for the City meant that issues were being dealt with much quicker than they were prior to the Operation.

Dave took the opportunity to thank the Parish Council and local residents for their ongoing support with this Operation and time will tell what difference this makes for the City in addition to the work already being done by the Parish Council and others on the Safety Hub.

The Clerk highlighted the exceptional amount of work which Dave Clarke has put into this Operation and his ongoing work to make the City a safer and more pleasant place for residents.

Members thanked Dave Clarke and his team for their work and agreed that this additional visible presence was really having a positive impact on the City.

6. COMMITTEE UPDATES

• Planning and Licensing Committee

Councillor G Holland presented the Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from meetings held on 6th and 20th September and 4th October 2024. There were no queries from Members on these minutes.

• Environment Committee

Councillor C Lattin presented the Environment Committee minutes from the meeting held on 19th September 2024. There were no queries from Members on these minutes.

• Finance Committee

Councillor V Ashfield presented the Finance Committee minutes from the meeting held on 11th September 2024. There being no queries from Members on these minutes, Councillor V Ashfield moved on to Committee reports.

Response to DCC's budget proposals for 2025-26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2026-2029

The Clerk highlighted that Durham County Council is facing a budget gap of £64.1 million over the next four years. The Clerk advised that the County Council is seeking to balance its budget through a combination of savings, a council tax increase, and using the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Support Reserve:

- **Savings:** The council has identified savings of £8.083 million for 2024/25 and £16.360 million for the MTFP period. These savings include staff reductions, back-office savings, and changes to how front-line services are delivered.
- **Council tax increase:** The council is proposing to increase council tax by the maximum of 2.99%.
- **MTFP Support Reserve:** The council will use £3.798 million from the MTFP Support Reserve to balance the 2024/25 budget. This is a short-term solution to allow time to develop more sustainable savings for 2025/26.

The Clerk advised that the County Council is also seeking public input on the proposed budget solutions. The council's budget challenges are due to a number of factors, including:

- Unfunded budget pressures, particularly in children's social care and home-to-school transport
- Pay and price inflation, which is partially linked to expected increases in the National Living Wage
- Uncertainty about how available funding will be shared between councils

The Clerk advised that the Parish Council's Finance Committee recently met and considered the consultation on this matter and has agreed a draft response to this consultation which is included with the Agenda.

The Clerk highlighted that, since this draft was compiled, the Government has now agreed a set figure for pay increases for green book employees and, in most cases, this did not equate to the 5.5% increase expected and therefore this aspect of the response needs to be removed.

Councillors G Holland and D Freeman expressed concerns at the response's approval for a more than 2.99% Council tax increase. Councillor G Holland advised that he felt that this would put yet further pressure on hard-hit families across the county during this cost-of-living crisis.

Members fully endorsed the section within the response relating to a longer-term asset strategy for the County Council.

As the funding arrangements for local Government at a national level were as yet unknown, it was agreed that the Parish Council should await the outcome of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement before submitting this response. Members expressed a preference not to include a reference to the Council tax increase at all in this response.

Response to Section 106 by Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation and Durham City Hockey

The Clerk reminded Members that a new Section 106 grant application has been submitted by Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation (DCSF) which seeks funding to improve hockey facilities at their site in Durham. The key proposal is to refurbish the existing AstroTurf and install floodlighting.

The Clerk advised that the documentation indicates that these upgrades are essential to expand the usage of the pitch, particularly for local clubs like Durham City Hockey, as the demand for hockey facilities has exceeded supply, especially with university growth limiting access to other pitches.

The Clerk advised that the project is valued at £373,469.92, including £83,514 for floodlighting. The Foundation will provide £12,000 in management costs and match funds from the Section 106 agreement. The total amount of funding sought from Section 106 is £141,015.20.

The Clerk advised that the improvements will make the pitch available for community use, particularly in the evenings and on weekends, with fees set below market rates.

The Clerk also highlighted that the project is supported by Durham County Council, as it aligns with their leisure strategy and sports pitch development plans, and is backed by local sports groups and governing bodies such as England Hockey.

The Clerk advised that, because of the strict timetable in which to respond to this application (within 21 days of receipt of the application documentation), this matter was delegated to the Parish Council's Finance Committee at the beginning of October and the Committee has agreed to object strongly to these proposals.

Councillor V Ashfield expressed her wholehearted support for the Finance Committee's position on this application and advised that she found it outrageous that this application should even be considered acceptable by some parts of DCC and other bodies.

Councillor L Brown highlighted that she had objected to this proposal in its entirety and expressed grave concerns over the floodlighting element of this proposal, particularly given Clay Lane's sensitive location in heritage and wildlife terms.

Councillor S Walker also expressed her disappointment that this funding could not have been earmarked towards improving Merryoaks community playing fields. This was echoed by Councillor L Brown.

Members **approved** (by 10 votes in favour and 1 abstention) the response from the Finance Committee to this application and agreed to await an outcome on this matter.

• **Business Committee**

Councillor D Freeman presented the Business Committee minutes from the meeting held on 15th July 2024. There were no queries from Members on these minutes.

7. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 25th September 2024 as follows.

The Chair began by thanking everyone involved in the event to unveil the blue plaque dedicated to Professor Dame Rosemary Cramp on Church Street. The Chair offered a particular thanks to Vice Chancellor Professor Karen O'Brien and Professor Sarah Semple for their support as well as to Councillors Ashfield and Lattin and Elvet Residents Association for organising this and for speaking so well at this event. The Chair remarked how wonderful it is to see a trailblazer like Rosemary honoured in this way and expressed the hope that the many thousands of students who pass the plaque each day are inspired by her legacy.

The Chair also thanked colleagues at Durham County Council for their financial support for *The Bread and Butter Thing Hub* in Gillesgate. The Chair highlighted that this is a food surplus redistribution charity which offers residents across County Durham an affordable food service. The charity makes life more affordable for people on a low income, builds stronger communities and reduces food waste

using an innovative and self-sustaining approach to the redistribution of surplus food and non-food items. The Chair thanked all involved in this wonderful project.

The Chair warmly welcomed the news that the City's Customer Access Point at Clayport library will continue its invaluable service as usual at least until March 2026. The Chair reminded Members that the earlier proposal to limit this service to one day per week only and to divert residents to more online and telephone-based services. The Chair remarked that this proposal was one which the Parish Council raised serious concerns about in its consultation response; highlighting that the Parish Council regards the easy access, predominantly appointment-free, face-to-face aspect of this service to be of real benefit to residents. The Chair advised that the Parish Council will continue to engage with our DCC colleagues and thanked DCC for delaying these changes for the time being.

The Chair also thanked local MP Mary Kelly-Foy and others for coming along to a joint enforcement operation earlier this month to tackle displaced and illicit parking in the Market Place and Elvet Bridge.

The Chair remarked that the message could not be clearer that we will take action against anyone using our historic Peninsula as a parking place in the evening. Civil Enforcement Officers and the Police are increasing their patrols ahead of further investigation into a new and more robust set of parking rules over the coming months, which will help ensure the area is kept free of vehicles during busier times and allow more efficient enforcement which will include number recognition cameras that will ensure that PCNs are issued each and every time a vehicle unlawfully enters these areas. The Chair thanked Mary for supporting the Parish Council in continuing to lobby Government to allow Local Authorities to increase PCNs as a further deterrent to tackle this problem.

The Chair also thanked the Environment Committee and particularly Councillors Freeman and Lattin for their continued lobbying on the matter of clean air in the City. The Chair expressed her horror that 60% of emissions in Church Street are associated with buses and how pleased she is to see the Committee make the case for zero-emission buses to North East Mayor Kim McGuinness earlier this month. No resident, particularly our youngest residents, should have to endure air quality which is a detriment to their health and the Chair urged everyone to keep up the lobbying on this desperately important issue.

The Chair thanked Councillor Elizabeth Scott and the Clerk for the continued hard work in planning for Uniformed Services Day and Remembrance Day this year. The Chair advised that she very much looked forward to these important events, with a particular emphasis on honouring the important 200-year anniversary since the founding of the RNLI. A lot of work goes into the organisation of these major events and the Chair expressed her delight to see so much partnership support for this in the City.

The Chair also advised that the street scene appearance of 4-6 Silver Street – the premises to be occupied by STACK – has been a burning issue in the City. The Chair expressed her gratitude to the Parish Council and particularly the Clerk for the proactive work in addressing this issue with some iconic images of Durham City by renowned photographer Graeme Hall soon to be installed to the premises

frontage. The Chair advised that she was aware that the Clerk has worked with partners such as Design and Conservation, Planning, Durham BID and DCC Regeneration team to try and get this resolved. This will hopefully be completed by the end of the first full week of November, with STACK scheduled to commence work on site in Easter. The Chair expressed her hope that this will give this historic street an uplift in the meantime.

8. PROPOSAL TO CONTRACT THE SERVICES OF A GRANT FUNDRAISER FOR A PARISH COUNCIL PROJECT

The Clerk reminded Members that, in agreeing its budget for financial year 2024/25 in January 2024, the Council unanimously approved a fund of £15,000 towards assistance for the Clerk in supporting the functions and aims of the Parish Council.

Although originally envisaged to be administrative support, the Clerk reminded Members that previous efforts to recruit at this level have been unsuccessful and the Council has also acquired the Fathom app, an AI minute taker which sits alongside Zoom and the Clerk reported that this is cutting down his workload and supporting the minute taking aspect of his work.

The Clerk advised that the Council has previously expressed a desire to focus on acquiring external funding for projects within the City of Durham parish area. As such, it was agreed at Full Council's July Full Council meeting that this fund be used to finance a number of one-off, time-limited pieces of work on a contract basis for grant funding and the Council advertised this contract opportunity via its website and the Clerk advised that he had also reached out to the AAP Manager to identify if staff support from the AAP team might be a possibility.

In doing so, the Parish Council also agreed to focus on 3 particular areas for achieving external finance from this budget: a green/clean air project, heritage at risk and culture.

Since advertising this contract, the Clerk reported that the Parish Council has received one expression of interest from a local resident who has experience of grant funding. The full content of her proposal was included with the Agenda pack for Members and is based on a day rate of £250/day.

The Clerk advised that the Parish Council's Environment Committee has expressed a desire to focus fundraising efforts on areas such as green-roof bus shelters and topiary statues, examples of which were included with the agenda. The Clerk highlighted that Section 106 funds could be used in order to finance much of this work.

Councillor E Ashby advised that she very much welcomed the provision of green-roof bus shelters across the parish in both Neville's Cross and Elvet and Gilesgate. Councillor E Ashby expressed concerns at the provision of topiary statues and felt that this needed further consideration in terms of ongoing maintenance and security, etc.

Members expressed a desire to focus solely on the green-roof bus shelter aspect of this contract and agreed an upward limit of £5,000 in total for this contract.

Councillors V Ashfield and C Lattin expressed their full support for this initiative and also expressed how impressed they were with the level of experience brought by this applicant.

Members considered the expression of interest carefully and unanimously **agreed** to award of this grant fundraising contract. Members also unanimously **agreed** to delegate responsibility to managing this contract to the Parish Council's Environment Committee.

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.

9. REPORT ON POLICY ON VEXATIOUS BEHAVIOUR

Members considered a report by the Vice-Chair of the Personnel Committee and Designated Councillor (as per the Council's adopted policy on vexatious behaviour) in relation to ongoing vexatious behaviour by a member of the public.

Members also noted the significant explanations given to the resident and **agreed** that the behaviour from the resident had been excessive and inappropriate. It was **agreed** to wait for a period of 24-hours following receipt of a further communication to the resident on this matter. In the event that an apology from the resident was not forthcoming, it was **agreed** that an appropriately worded warning letter which set out that the Parish Council now considered the matter closed, should be sent to the resident, in accordance with the Council's adopted policy.

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
(28th November 2024)**