

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Wednesday 22nd January 2025 at 7:00pm in the Main Hall of the Merryoaks Community Hall, Park House Rd, Durham DH1 3QF.

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

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley, Dave Clarke (Durham Police) and 12 members of the public.

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

Apologies were received and **accepted** from Councillor N Brown. No other apologies were received.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

None received.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 28TH NOVEMBER 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th November 2024 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr Nick Deeming and Mr Steven Lindsay advised that they were part of the group which helped to create the City of Durham parish community emergency plan, which is included in this meeting's Agenda. Both Nick and Steven highlighted the significant work carried out by volunteers as part of this project and requested that Members formally adopt this plan.

Following on from his last report to Full Council, Mr Rupert Benjamin advised that he was still experiencing issues at Homer Terrace where workmen were working on properties and dumping wood and rubble along the lane which he understands from Councillor Liz Brown is not an adopted highway.

Mr Benjamin also advised that the builders were also parking in areas where residents needed access to their vehicles. Whilst Mr Benjamin had already advised the builders of what was permitted, he advised that he found their attitude unhelpful at times.

Mr Benjamin advised that he would follow-up with this in writing to the Clerk and Councillor Brown and also advised that he had been liaising with Jacqui Toase at DCC on this issue too. Mr Benjamin expressed his frustration at the way DCC officers had dealt with his issues to date.

Ms Ophelia Vesely and two other student representatives from EcoDU attended the meeting and expressed their full wholehearted support for the motion in favour of the Parish Council endorsing the fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty. Ophelia advised that global action was needed now on the climate emergency and that fossil fuels were by far the main contributor to this crisis. Ophelia and her colleagues highlighted that, even at this level of local government, the Parish Council has the capacity to make a real and lasting difference and expressed the hope that Members would endorse the motion.

5. ADOPTION OF THE CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COMMUNITY EMERGENCY PLAN

Councillor C Lattin highlighted that it had been her pleasure to work with residents on the production of the Emergency Plan before Members at this meeting today. Councillor C Lattin took the opportunity to thank residents, Councillors and the Clerk for their tireless work on this project.

Councillor C Lattin advised that the emergency plan has been developed over nearly 2 years by a group of around 30 residents. It covers the whole city and involves coordination with the University, Cathedral, and local businesses.

Councillor C Lattin advised that the plan aims to ensure residents are aware of risks and have plans in place to care for themselves and their community while waiting for specialist help in an emergency.

Councillor C Lattin advised that, assuming its approval by the Parish Council today, the emergency plan will be submitted to the County Council's Civil Contingency Unit to test the various scenarios identified within the plan. If successful, the plan will be formally adopted.

Members commended residents involved in this project for their outstanding community achievement in developing this comprehensive emergency plan and agreed that this will put the city in a much stronger position to safeguard residents in a crisis.

Members voted unanimously to adopt the Community Emergency Plan as presented and also thanked Councillor C Lattin for her extraordinary work on this initiative.

6. COMMITTEE UPDATES

• Planning and Licensing Committee

Councillor G Holland presented the Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from meetings held on 15th and 29th November 2024. There being no queries from Members, Councillor G Holland moved on to Committee reports.

- **Proposal to produce a report in support of a new Article 4 Direction removing the permitted development right to transform front gardens into paved parking areas.**

Councillor G Holland advised that the Planning and Licensing Committee is concerned at the increased number of planning proposals which involve the loss of front gardens to hardstanding used for off-street parking in the City.

Councillor G Holland highlighted that, whilst there is some policy guidance on this issue, at present vehicle crossovers and hardstanding for dwellinghouses are permitted development and, as a result, the local planning authority cannot exercise any control if the works are completed within the provisions of Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 as amended.

As a result, Councillor G Holland stressed that the Committee acknowledges that there is a potential for a major change to the character and appearance of the street scene and, as such, the Committee wishes to form an evidence base in favour of an Article 4 Direction to be able to exercise control and manage such development in Durham City in order to preserve the verdant character of our streets both within and without the Conservation Area.

The Clerk advised that parking on a former front garden creates a domino effect because installing dropped kerbs removes on-road parking spaces. A garden lost to parking does not create more space for parking. The Clerk highlighted that more space is in fact lost. The amount of street parking space declines because access is needed in front of the property. Also, the road and pavement are already hard surfaces and the front garden adds to the amount covered with concrete or paving.

The Clerk advised that he had approached the Council's planning consultant Jo-Anne Garrick to seek her support in producing such a report to be sent to Durham County Council. Jo-Anne has agreed to carry out this work but has asked for specific examples of this within the City so as to reduce her time and workload and hence associated costs to the Council for this work.

Jo-Anne has quoted £1,300 to £1,600 in order to carry out this work on behalf of the Parish Council.

Members unanimously **agreed** to support the production of a list of properties and streets within the parish area where the removal of the front gardens is felt to have adversely impacted on the character of the area.

Following this and upon completion of this list, Members unanimously **agreed** to engage the services of Jo-Anne Garrick as set out in the report provided to produce this report supporting a new Article 4 Direction.

- **To consider the proposal to seek support from the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) to lobby Government on making health impacts one of the main licensing objectives under the Licensing Act.**

Councillor S Walker highlighted that the Parish Council has a highly active Planning and Licensing Committee and a key part of the Committee's aims is to promote

the health and wellbeing of its residents, particularly on issues relating to the licensing aspect of its work.

Councillor S Walker advised that the Committee has consistently lobbied for health to be included as a fifth licensing objective in the Licensing Act 2003.

In its recent response to the County Council's Statement of Licensing Policy consultation, the Parish Council called on the Licensing Authority to continue to press Government on this issue.

Councillor E Ashby, as the original proposer of this work, highlighted some alarming statistics relating to alcohol related harm and anti-social behaviour across the county and advised that she felt that the Parish Council should work together with bodies such as the LGA, NALC and CDALC in order to progress this on a national agenda.

Councillor E Ashby highlighted that she believes that, in order to address the alcohol related harm in the longer term, national policies are required, such as minimum unit price alongside a public health licensing objective.

Councillor S Walker highlighted that a fifth licensing objective of health and wellbeing would allow the public health team to use other health data without being restricted to the four licensing objectives. In the main, such a licensing objective would strengthen the representations from Public Health.

The Clerk advised that the Local Government Association has lobbied Government on health as a licensing objective several times over the last ten years.

Members unanimously **agreed** to support the Committee's efforts to request that CDALC itself joins with the LGA and lobby Government to introduce health as the fifth licensing objective within the Licensing Act 2003.

• **Environment Committee**

Councillor C Lattin presented the minutes from the Environment Committee meeting held on 12th November 2024. There were no queries from Members on these minutes.

• **Finance Committee**

Councillor A Doig presented the minutes from the Finance Committee meeting held on 14th October 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 28th November 2024 as follows:

- The Chair wished everyone a very happy, prosperous, and healthy New Year for 2025. A particular thank you was extended to everyone involved in the organisation and success of the Parish Council's Christmas civic event. It was wonderful to see so many people attend and to have the opportunity

to thank them for their work throughout 2024. The Chair expressed anticipation in working with them all in 2025.

- The Chair also expressed gratitude to those involved in organising the upcoming Lunar New Year event in Durham City. The event is set to take place on 1st February, and there is great enthusiasm for celebrating Asian culture in the parish. The Chair and the Mayor, Councillor Liz Brown, will be taking part in the festivities, including the tradition of catching the lettuce, to ensure 2025—the Year of the Snake—gets off to a great start. A special thank you was given to the Clerk for stepping in at the last minute to help make this event possible, even during the holiday period. The work put into this event was acknowledged as a testament to the tremendous efforts of the late Brian Stobie, who made a significant impact as International Officer at the County Council.
- Congratulations were extended to Paul Howard and the Durham BID team on a successful Christmas light switch-on event and the exciting news that the City's Fire and Ice Festival has been shortlisted in the North East Tourism Awards. Voting is now open, and the Clerk has circulated details on how to participate. There is great anticipation for welcoming this fantastic event back to Durham City on 28th February, with a musical theme for all the family to enjoy.
- A reminder was given that Restaurant Week returns to Durham City from 31st January, with over 51 businesses already signed up. It was also noted that businesses outside the immediate City Centre and BID areas have expressed interest in taking part, highlighting the growing success of this initiative.
- Encouragement was expressed at seeing work finally commence at Silver Street on the new STACK premises earlier this month. Regardless of individual views on this project, best wishes were extended to STACK for their redevelopment, with hopes that the work proceeds swiftly and with minimal disruption. The Chair looks forward to collaborating with the STACK team in driving footfall to the City and working together on events. It was also hoped that they would join the Durham BID board and contribute to collective goals.
- It was noted that a further round of public consultation will soon take place regarding the new proposals for Elvet Park. It was welcomed news that funding for the site's redevelopment has been secured, and residents will have the opportunity to share their views. Thanks were given to Councillors Ormerod and Freeman for their efforts on this project. Collaboration with DCC officers on installing child-friendly equipment and new park benches is anticipated. Additionally, an appeal was made to the County Council to expedite the redevelopment of the old toilet block on the site, as there is considerable interest in transforming it into a café.
- Members were reminded that plans for the new data centre at Aykley Heads have been approved. Thanks were extended to Councillor Holland for representing the Parish effectively at Committee earlier this month. It was noted that, just a day later, the Prime Minister announced a new AI

revolution for the UK. There is hope that this signals good news for the funding of the Aykley Heads data centre.

- A reminder was given that the "Making Suicide Everybody's Business" Conference will be held on 18th February. The Clerk and AAP Manager Craig Morgan have shared details on how to participate. Members were strongly encouraged to attend as part of ongoing efforts to support the mental health and well-being of residents.
- With local elections approaching in May, best wishes were extended to all candidates. It was confirmed that an informal drop-in session, titled "A Day in the Life of a Parish Councillor," will be organised in early to mid-March to provide potential candidates with insights into the role and its level of commitment.
- Finally, sincere appreciation was extended to Clean and Green Team Leader Joe Peat. It was noted that Joe worked tirelessly over the holiday season, responding swiftly to residents' concerns through Members and the Clerk. His prompt action was highly valued by the community. A recent image of the newly trimmed-back Station View received positive feedback on social media. Joe has also been working closely with the Clerk and Councillor Ashfield on issues at the Sands. Gratitude was expressed for his dedication and the support of his team.

8. PARISH COUNCIL STRATEGY 2025/26

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 2025/26 should be as follows:

Committee priorities

The priorities for each Committee in 2025/26 are set out below:

Planning and Licensing Committee

Council priorities 2025/26	Planning priorities 2025/26	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
1. Being an ambitious voice for the city	Representing the Parish as a consultee on planning matters	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 4: A City With Attractive And Affordable Places To Live
	Consulting the Parish on planning matters	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future
2. Enhancing physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish	Ensuring schemes deliver the required levels of affordable housing and adapted housing for the disabled and elderly.	Theme 4. A City With Attractive And Affordable Places To Live
	Protect existing Rights of Way and promoting the creation and adoption of new Public Rights of Way and ensuring that they are accessible to all.	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 2025/26	Licensing priorities 2025/26	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
1. Being an ambitious voice for the city	Representing the Parish on licensing matters	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
2. Enhancing physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish	Ensuring that all new licensing applications and existing premises promote the four licensing objectives. Lobbying central Government on ensuring that health impacts become the fifth licensing objectives.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
	Empowering our residents to make informed	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future

	representations on licensing matters.	Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
	Supporting a cumulative impact policy for the parish Supporting a late night-levy on licensed premises in the parish.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
	Making licensing as open as possible by supporting DCC's new online licensing portal	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City
	Making the City more accessible to all by representing the needs of all users in relation to pavement and outdoor seating applications.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
3. Upholding the neighbourhood plan and representing the parish on planning matters.	Ensuring that the objectives of licensing and planning are aligned.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish	Promoting the early evening economy to families and tourists	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 2: A Beautiful And Historic City

		Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.	To encourage all new taxi licenses granted by DCC to be for low emissions/ electrical vehicles only.	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future

Environment Committee

Council priorities 2025/26	Environment priorities 2025/26	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
1. Being an ambitious voice for the city	Engaging with and responding to residents of all ages and backgrounds in environment-related work Mobilise Volunteer groups Work with young people and respond to their concerns	Theme 6: A City with an enriched community life.
2. Enhancing physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish	Promote cleaner air, a cleaner river, green spaces, and streets for living across the city. Reduction in light pollution. Reduction in night time noise. Sustainable travel Supporting the creation of a Community Emergency Plan	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 5: A City With A Modern And Sustainable Transport Infrastructure
3. Upholding the neighbourhood plan and representing the parish on planning matters.	Work with all relevant committees to ensure the climate and ecological emergencies are considered in all planning matters. Sustainable housing	Theme 4: A City with attractive and affordable places to live
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish	Improve and protect the appearance of the city and its heritage.	Theme 2: A Beautiful and Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy

5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.	Be proactive and collaborate with all partners (including Parish Council committees, Durham County Council, residents, developers, landlords, and other businesses) to coordinate our impact on the climate and ecological emergencies and increase community resilience. Encourage sustainable Travel Increased awareness and action on climate change. Tackle the ecological emergency	Theme 1: A City with A Sustainable Future Theme 5: A City With A Modern And Sustainable Transport Infrastructure
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Business Committee

Council priorities 2025/26	Business priorities 2025/26	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
1. Being an ambitious voice for the city	Engaging with local businesses, including improving the visitor economy	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
2. Enhancing physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish	Promoting responsible and environmentally sound businesses	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
3. Upholding the neighbourhood plan and representing the parish on planning matters.	Supporting new businesses and attempting to fill empty units across the City and promoting the overnight stay economy/ businesses across the city	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish	Marketing Durham as a place to visit, particularly the overnight stay sector	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy Theme 5: A City with a modern and sustainable transport infrastructure

	Contracting professional support for local businesses in the city	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
	Promoting footfall in the city centre and encouraging a variety of businesses to ensure wide range of choice for visitors	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.	Reducing food miles by encouraging the use of local suppliers and emerging green technologies and services	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy Theme 6: A City with an enriched community life

9. PARISH COUNCIL BUDGET FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2025/26

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 2025.

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 2025.

The Clerk highlighted that the Finance Committee had met on 15th January to discuss this and the proposed budget was before Members to consider alongside three proposals for the precept as part of item 10.

Members carefully considered each item of expenditure as proposed by Committees and the majority of Members (by 6 votes in favour, 5 votes against and 1 abstention) agreed that they wished to achieve a budget which facilitated the precept to only be increased by 2.6% in line with UK inflation.

Those Members who voted against this proposal voted in favour of the Finance Committee's recommended budget and precept (as detailed in the report at item 10).

With the proposal to only increase the precept in line with the 2.6% inflation rate agreed by majority, Members unanimously agreed the budget as set out below:

Planning and Licensing Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Representing the parish on planning and licensing matters	
Professional support in responding to planning applications and licensing hearings	£5,000.00

Review of County Durham Plan policies	£2,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Improving the licensed economy	
Enhanced drug searching scheme with Durham Police	£600.00
Deployable noise monitoring equipment	£0.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2025-26 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£7,600.00

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	£40,000.00
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	£2,000.00 (£8,000.00 added from 2024/25)
PRIORITY 4: Engaging the youth in the work of the Parish Council	
Project working with young people (clean air and climate change)	£2,500.00
PRIORITY 5: Improving the appearance of our City	
Neighbourhood Warden SLA	£12,000.00
PRIORITY 6: Promoting the heritage of our parish area	
Introduction of new blue plaques	£5,000.00
PRIORITY 7: Enhancing the River Wear	
Supporting the work of the Wear Rivers Trust (Education and INNs)	£5,000.00
PRIORITY 8: Emergency planning	
Supporting our community in preparing for emergency events	£2,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2025-26 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£80,500.00

Business Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Supporting Independent businesses	
Professional support for independent businesses in Durham	£3,600.00
PRIORITY 2: Increasing footfall through events	
Hosting events in Durham City (Remembrance Sunday, Christmas events, D-Day Anniversary, miscellaneous).	£30,000.00
Sponsoring community events with local businesses – a specific focus on improving the early evening economy	£5,000.00
PRIORITY 3: Tackling shoplifting and anti-social behaviour	
Funding new radios and other initiatives as part of Shopwatch	£2,000.00
PRIORITY 4: Improving shop frontages in the City	
Christmas Frontage Awards (previously under Environment Committee)	£1,500.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2025-26 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£42,100.00

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)	£19,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Training of staff and Councillors	
Training budget	£3,000.00
PRIORITY 3: supporting local community and voluntary organisations	
Grants budget	£15,000.00
PRIORITY 4: Staffing costs	
Clerk salary (including salary, pension, NI on costs)	£85,000.00
PRIORITY 5: Paying for elections	
Parish contribution towards the cost of all-out elections	£20,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2025-26 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£142,000.00

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	£7,600.00
Environment Committee	£80,500.00
Business Committee	£42,100.00
Full Council	£142,000.00
Contingencies and election reserves (to be added)	£20,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2025/26 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£292,200.00

In agreeing this budget, the following was also unanimously **agreed** to be amended from the Finance Committee's recommended budget:

- The budget set aside for the review of the County Durham Plan should be reduced from £5,000 to £2,000.
- The planting budget should be reduced from £15,000 to £2,000 (in terms of additional funding).
- The £8,000 earmarked for the much-delayed Market Place improvement project should instead be used to top up the general planting budget.
- The £2,000 to provide support to climate groups in Durham City was removed entirely.

10. PARISH COUNCIL PRECEPT REQUEST FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2025/26

It was **noted** that the 2025/26 Tax Base is 4,622.9. The 2024/25 City of Durham Parish Council Tax Base was calculated at 4,450.1

Members noted that the Tax Base has therefore increased by 172.8 which equates to an increase of £10,644.48 although Members also noted that the LCTRS grant payable to the City of Durham for 2025/26 is £0. The increased tax base and the removal of the LCTRS Grant produces a net position of -£2,208.48 for 2025/26.

Members **agreed** by majority (6 votes in favour, 5 votes against and 1 abstention) to Option 2 for the precept, as set out in the report provided, to increase the precept in line with inflation at 2.6%, which equates to a Band D charge of £63.20 and generate a total income of £292,167.28.

11. REQUEST FOR THE PARISH COUNCIL TO ENDORSE THE FOSSIL FUEL NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY

Councillor V Ashfield presented a report to Members highlighting that the world is in a climate emergency and fossil fuels are responsible for the bulk of CO2 emissions worldwide.

Councillor V Ashfield highlighted that support for the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty is gaining momentum worldwide. Many local and subnational decision-makers are supporting the call. One hundred cities and subnational governments – including the US state of California, London, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Barcelona, Vancouver, Sydney, Los Angeles and Toronto – have endorsed the treaty. An ever-growing bloc of national governments has joined them - including Colombia, which is economically dependent on fossil fuels. The support of local councils around the world is key for building the pressure to get more national governments on board and ready to start the treaty process.

Councillor V Ashfield highlighted that the three pillars of action proposed by the Fossil Fuel Treaty are:

- Non-Proliferation - preventing new coal, oil, or gas developments
- Equitable Phase Out of existing fossil fuel production plans
- Just Transition so that no community, country or worker is left behind

Councillor V Ashfield acknowledged what the Parish Council can achieve on its own is small so stressed the need to call upon the County Council to support this treaty. Councillor V Ashfield advised that DCC is doing good work towards achieving carbon neutral in the County, mainly through their Climate Emergency Plan 3, and the targets are ambitious.

Councillor V Ashfield advised that a motion from DCC to endorse the Fossil Fuel Treaty would put additional pressure on the UK Government to endorse this important treaty. The motion provided within the Agenda papers was **proposed** by Councillor V Ashfield and **seconded** by Councillor C Lattin. Members unanimously **agreed** the motion as follows:

This Council notes that:

- 1. The scientific consensus is clear that fossil fuels are primarily responsible for accelerating global climate change, and that the climate crisis now represents one of the preeminent threats to global lives and livelihoods.*
- 2. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report states that it is unequivocal that climate change has already disrupted human and natural systems and that societal choices and actions implemented in the next decade determine the extent to which medium-*

and long-term pathways will deliver higher or lower climate resilient development.

- 3. The International Energy Agency stated in its May 2021 report "Net Zero by 2050" that in order to reach that goal there should be no new oil or gas fields, or new coal mines, as of that moment.*
- 4. The Paris Climate Agreement is silent on coal, oil and gas, an omission with respect to the supply and production of fossil fuels (the largest source of GHGs) that needs to be collectively addressed by other means; and that global governments and the fossil fuel industry are currently planning to produce more than double the amount of coal, oil and gas by 2030 than can be burned if the world is to limit warming to 1.5°C and avert catastrophic climate disruption, and such plans risk undoing the work of our Council to reduce GHG emissions.*
- 5. A new global initiative is underway calling for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty that would plan the end of new fossil fuel exploration and expansion, phase out existing production in line with the global commitment to limit warming to 1.5°C and accelerate equitable transition plans globally.*
- 6. Our entire global community will be impacted by the climate crisis. Vulnerable communities, and those who have contributed the least to climate change, however, will often be impacted most acutely.*

This Council believes that:

- 7. New fossil fuel infrastructure and expanded reliance on fossil fuels exposes communities to untenable risks to public health and safety at the local and global levels; and that the economic opportunities presented by a clean energy transition far outweigh the opportunities presented by an economy supported by expanding fossil fuel use and extraction.*

This Council resolves to:

- 8. Formally endorse the call for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty and make that endorsement public.*
- 9. Call on Durham County Council to endorse the call for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty and to call on the UK government to do likewise.*
- 10. Reaffirm our commitment to rapidly decarbonising our economy at a local and national level.*
- 11. Write to the Local Government Association and raise the need for a planned phase out of fossil fuels, and to call on it to promote the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty among its members.*

12. REPORT ON THE PARISH COUNCIL'S INTERNAL CONTROLS

Members unanimously **agreed** to the appointment of Mr Gordon Fletcher as the Parish Council's internal auditor for the financial year 2024/25.

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 adopted a risk register and this is under continuing review by the Clerk and the Chair/ Chairs of Committees and any issues arising from risk assessments carried out will be reported to Full Council.

The assessment of the risk attached to any and all of the Council's actions and responsibilities forms an essential part of all Council decisions. Risk mitigation (the reduction in the level of risk where it is deemed to be too high) is integral to many of the Council's policies but it also forms an important part of the detailed Standing Orders which govern the way in which the Council carries out its business.

A copy of this risk register has been circulated to Members and this includes a table identifying risk mitigation/ contingencies. This is kept under annual review and Members unanimously **approved** the risk register and the associated mitigation actions identified through this review.

The Council

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

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

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

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

Clerk to the Council

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

Payments

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

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

Risk Assessments/Risk Management

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

Internal Audit

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

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

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

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

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

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

External Audit

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

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 2023-24 was carried out by Mazars and was completed in September 2024. No issues were raised by the external auditors.

6. INTERNAL CONTROL ISSUES

The Auditors did not raise any issues as part of the 2023-24 Audit.

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.

13. FUTURE REVIEW OF SCHEME OF DELEGATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL

It was **agreed** to defer this item until after May 2025. No decisions were taken on this matter.

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, appearing to be 'A. A. White', written in a cursive style.

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council
(27th February 2025)**