

# City of Durham Parish Council

**Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023 at 15:45pm in the Lantern Room, Durham Town Hall. Durham. DH1 3NJ.**

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

**Also present:** Parish Clerk Adam Shanley and 6 members of the public.

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

Apologies were received from Councillors E Scott and H Weston.

## **2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS**

None received.

## **3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 28<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2023**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

## **4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None received.

## **5. COMMITTEE UPDATES**

### **• Planning and Licensing Committee**

Councillor G Holland presented the minutes from the Planning and Licensing Committee meetings held on 15<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> September as well as 13<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> October 2023. There being no queries from Members, Councillor G Holland moved on to Committee updates.

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

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

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

Members that this protocol had been considered at the last Full Council meeting and that, since the decision was deferred, the Planning and Licensing Committee had considered this matter further and had agreed to recommend the draft protocol as per the report provided.

Members unanimously **agreed** the new protocol as follows:

The City of Durham Parish Council has created a Planning and Licensing Committee, which will consider and make representations on new planning and licensing applications for sites in the City of Durham parish area, or which will have a significant impact on the parish. The Committee has delegated authority to respond to new applications on behalf of the Parish Council as a corporate body.

Although the City of Durham Parish Council is not the decision-maker on new planning and licensing applications, it has an important duty to discharge in representing its residents in assessing new applications. In the case of new planning applications, the Parish Council is a statutory consultee on planning matters which occur in our area.

The final decision on all new planning and licensing applications rests with Durham County Council as both the Local Planning Authority and Licensing Authority.

## **Introduction**

1. Site visits by the Planning and Licensing Committee can be helpful in reaching a decision on issues where site circumstances are fundamental to the decision.
2. Members will have access to any application which is to be considered by the Planning and Licensing Committee and can discuss this with the Clerk prior to the meeting.
3. Where site visits are considered appropriate, Committee site visits should:
  - focus precisely on the observation of site factors which are relevant to the consideration of the application;
  - not be an opportunity for lobbying, public address, submission of new information etc;
  - not be used purely as an opportunity to defer consideration (if there is a good reason to defer consideration of an application, this should be done openly at the Committee meeting);
  - always involve the Clerk or another appropriate officer of the Parish Council;
  - be carefully conducted so that Members cannot be accused of bias to any of the parties involved
  - not go ahead if it is known in advance that a Member or Clerk/ Officer will be attending unaccompanied.
4. A site visit should only be arranged where a proposal is contentious or particularly complex and where the potential impact of the proposed development is a crucial factor which the Committee may find it difficult to visualise or assess from the plans and photographs made available on the Council's planning portal<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Simple Search \(durham.gov.uk\)](http://durham.gov.uk)

and other supporting material. The purpose of a Committee site visit should only be to gain further information on a specific issue(s) or to assist Members in gaining a better understanding of the proposal.

5. Where a proposal is clearly contrary to national or Development Plan policy it should be refused for reasons of principle unless material considerations indicate otherwise. A site visit will not normally be appropriate in the absence of any overriding clear and convincing material considerations, except if necessary to decide whether particular local circumstances warrant the inclusion of additional reasons for refusal.

6. No minutes will be taken of the site visit and no recommendation will be made back to the Committee, as the purpose of the site visit is simply to assist in the decision-making process. Members of the Committee should endeavour to attend site visits to ensure they are fully apprised of all the relevant information prior to considering the application concerned but if all Members cannot attend this will not be a reason to defer a decision on how to respond to the application.

### **Pre-Committee Site Visits**

7. For major/particularly contentious applications, a site visit may be recommended by the Clerk or any Member in advance of a decision on how to respond to the application. In such cases, the Clerk or Member should make a recommendation to the Chair of the Committee (in the cycle before the meeting at which it is intended to consider the application or earlier) that a site visit be undertaken prior to considering the application.

8. If the consultation timeframe allows for a decision to be deferred to the next meeting, any Member may propose that a site visit be undertaken at the relevant Committee meeting. Where there has been no pre-Committee site visit, the Committee may decide that a Member site visit is required in respect of a specific planning/ licensing application or enforcement matter.

9. In all circumstances, the Clerk or Members must state their reasons for recommending a site visit. The reasons for the decision (either way) will be clearly recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

10. A site visit cannot be requested by the applicant/agent or member of the public.

### **Organisation of Committee Site Visits**

11. The organisation of the site visit will fall to the Clerk or relevant officer of the Parish Council. The Clerk/ Officer will send relevant communications inviting the following bodies to the site visits:

- all Members of the Committee
- the Ward Members
- The applicant/agent

12. Other third parties will not be invited to attend a site visit. However, there may be exceptional circumstances where the Chair of the Committee does allow for

third parties to attend the site visit. If this does occur then the third parties will be expected to make their own transport arrangements for the visit.

13. No opportunity for speaking will be afforded to any party other than Members of the Committee who attend the site visit unless specifically requested by the Committee Chair in order to answer questions of fact. This will be pointed out by the Chair at the beginning of the site visit.

14. The Clerk or relevant officer of the Parish Council must always attend a site visit.

### **Format of Committee Site Visits**

15. For major applications, the Clerk or relevant officer of the Parish Council should prepare a briefing note for Members providing a description of the proposal, a brief summary of any consultee and public responses and identifying the key issues raised by the proposal. This should be circulated in advance of the site visit wherever possible.

16. On assembling at the site at the time specified, the Committee Chair will open the meeting and advise those present of the purpose of the site visit in line with this protocol and of the procedure to be followed, so that all are aware that it is a fact-finding exercise only and that no decision will be taken until the relevant Committee meeting.

17. Members should stay close together and should not engage in discussion individually or in small groups with others who may be present. Any request for Members to express a view or offer of hospitality should be politely declined.

18. The Clerk or relevant officer of the Parish Council will describe the development and point out/explain the issue(s) which Members have come to view, making use of relevant plans when appropriate.

19. Members should address any questions of clarification through the Chair.

### **Committee meeting following the site visit**

20. All members of the Committee, including any who were not able to attend the site visit, are entitled to participate in the discussion and vote when it is reported back to Committee.

### **Appeal site visits**

21. If a planning decision is appealed, the Planning Inspector (appointed by the Secretary of State) will undertake a site visit. For smaller sites, or ones where the site is viewable from public vantage points, the Inspector may make an unaccompanied visit. Where that is not possible, the Inspector will make an accompanied visit with representatives from each side present, as well as any third parties who may have requested to be present.

22. The site visit will follow a similar procedure to the Committee site visit, with the Inspector able to ask for clarification from either party. Sometimes, if the appeal is being determined by way of a Public Inquiry, or a Hearing, the Inspector

may leave the Inquiry of Hearing 'open' for the duration of the site visit, and will allow representations to be heard from both parties on site.

23. In all cases, the Inspector will decide the time and date of the site visit, and will set out on what basis the visit will proceed.

### **Proposal to produce an evidence base in support of a planning policy on short-term lets/AirBnBs**

The Clerk highlighted that the issue of short-term letting has been raised on a number of occasions during the Parish Council's Planning and Licensing Committee. Whilst the public awaits the outcome of this consultation and proposals from the Government, the Clerk advised that the Committee was keen to take a proactive approach on this issue.

As such, the Clerk advised that he has discussed this issue with the Parish Council's Planning Consultant Jo-Anne and she has agreed to produce a report which will:

- produce an evidence paper which highlighted the need for such a policy (outlining the current issue); and
- demonstrate how different councils across the country (maybe even Scotland) approach this issue and this could include relevant appeal decisions.

In anticipation of the Government consultation, Councillor G Holland advised that the report could be presented to DCC to illustrate how they could enforce against the use of properties as short term lets i.e. because there has been a material change of use without planning permission. Should the Government decide to introduce some sort of controls, then it could be used to justify the need for an article 4 direction.

The Clerk highlighted that Jo-Anne has previously produced an evidence base in favour of the Article 4 Direction for Mount Oswald in our parish, which was successful. In order to carry out this work on short-term lettings, Jo-Anne would charge a total of £900 to produce this evidence base and there is sufficient budget available for this work.

Councillors L Brown and C Lattin expressed their sincere support for this work and advised that they felt that this was a growing issue which needed to be addressed at both a national and local level.

Members unanimously **agreed** to the production of an evidence report into a policy on short-term lettings, as set out in the report provided at a total cost of £900.

### **Proposal to produce a report and evidence base in support of a review of County Durham Plan policy 16 on student accommodation.**

Councillor G Holland advised that both the Parish Council and local residents have had a number of success stories recently overturning the recommendation for

approval on several planning applications for Change of Use from C3 to C4 (33 St. Bede's Close, 41 Fieldhouse Lane, 1 Larches Road and 5 Lyndhurst Drive).

Councillor G Holland remarked that it is evident that the planning department is concerned that the Central and East Area County Planning Committee has overturned a number of their recommendations and there is a desire to review Policy 16.

As such, the Clerk highlighted that the Planning and Licensing Committee has recently agreed that their hope is to add to the existing Policy and not to remove anything from the Policy. The Clerk advised that the case of 5 Lyndhurst Drive in particular highlighted the impact of a single application on cul-de-sac areas within the parish and the Committee has agreed to look at the possibility of a so-called "cluster" policy which would consider the impact of several HMOs within close proximity to one another on neighbouring C3 dwellings.

The Clerk advised that Jo-Anne Garrick has also confirmed that she would be able to prepare an evidence report to feed into the review of policy 16 of the CDP at a fee of £900.

The Clerk highlighted that this report would look at approaches used across the country – for example Birmingham uses a radius approach, but also considers the impact of family dwellings being located between two HMOs - the policy is supported by a supplementary planning document (SPD).

The Clerk advised that there is sufficient funding within the budget to fund this work and this is seen as a top priority for residents.

Members unanimously **agreed** to the production of an evidence report supporting a review of County Durham Plan policy 16 on student accommodation, as set out in the report provided at a total cost of £900.

### **Update on the local heritage list for Durham City**

The Clerk reminded Members that the Local Heritage Listings Project is a national initiative launched in 2020 by Government across 22 pilot areas.

The Clerk also reminded Members that the County Council was successful in receiving grant funding to participate as a pilot project. Resources in the Design and Conservation function of Planning and Housing were secured to conduct the research, ICT development, engagement, and data processing to produce lists of non-designated heritage assets (NDHAs) for eight pilot areas across the county, also known as a local list.

The criteria used to identify candidates for the local list was developed and agreed with project sponsors; DLUHC and Historic England, and reflects the national guidance in Historic England Advisory Note 7- Local Heritage Listing: Identifying and Conserving Local Heritage published January 2021.

The Clerk advised that the identification of an asset as being a non-designated heritage asset via the planning process or its inclusion on a local list, means that any proposals requiring planning permission which have an impact on its significance or setting would fall under Policies 44 and 46 of the County Durham Plan (as well as section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework and relevant policies within Neighbourhood Plans). The planning process provides a balanced judgement which will have regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset. The County Durham Plan advises that, 'Heritage assets; designated and non-designated, are irreplaceable so any harm or loss will require clear and convincing justification.'

The Clerk advised that preparation of the local lists for the pilot areas is now complete, and a report was presented and agreed at DCC's Cabinet meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2023 which allows for the publication and promotion of these lists. DCC will now submit the publication date of this list to DLUHC.

In total, 340 locally listed assets have now been identified across the pilot areas in County Durham, 65 of which are located in Durham City (although not all of these are located within the parish area). These are set out in Appendix 1.

There were a total of 8 different pilot areas across the county and these include: Bishop Auckland, Durham City, Sacriston, Seaham, Sedgefield, Shotley Bridge, Staindrop and Stockton & Darlington Railway route (including Shildon).

The Clerk highlighted that Appendix B of the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan lists a number of non-designated Heritage Assets within the Neighbourhood Plan area and this list will now need to be updated accordingly.

### **Appendix 1 – local heritage list for Durham City**

- The Old Neville's Cross Hotel,
- Sainsbury's, Newcastle Road, Crossgate Moor,
- Ye Old Elm Tree Public House, Crossgate,
- 20 Allergate,
- Harrisons Organ Factory, 1 Hawthorn Terrace,
- Street Sign, 57 Hawthorn Terrace,
- St Margaret's Allotments, Margery Lane,
- Park Garden and Landscape Holliday Park, Langley Moor Park / Landscape
- 1 to 7 Railway Cottages, Quarry House Lane, Durham
- Racecourse Riverside, Durham City.
- Park, Garden and Landscape Dunn Cow, Riverside, Durham City.
- Former Swimming Baths, Elvet Waterside,
- Unite Students, Rushford Court, North Road,
- DLI Museum , Aykley Heads, Durham and landscape
- DLI Cottages, Back Western Hill,
- Lychgate, Bede Lodge, Redhills Lane,
- Flass Lane
- New Street,
- Stone pillar, Station Approach,
- Telephone box North Platform, Durham Railway Station,
- Station Bank, North Road,

- 25 Tenter Terrace, North Road,
- Painting attached to 13-15 Silver Street,
- Public Art Vennel between 6 & 7 Silver Street,
- Post box, Palace Green,
- Telephone box, Palace Green,
- DLI Memorial Stone, Palace Green,
- Durham Heritage Centre, North Bailey,
- Garden between 14 & 15 South Bailey,
- Historic garden adjacent to 13 South Bailey,
- St Chads College Chapel, North Bailey,
- Bridge footings near Counts Corner,
- Sculpture, South Street Bank, north of Prebends Bridge,
- Upper Footpath Wall near Prebends Bridge Cottage, Quarryheads Lane,
- Prebends Bridge Cottage, Quarryheads Lane,
- Stone arch, riverbanks, upper path near Quarryheads Lane,
- Floorscape, Riverbanks, upper path near Quarryheads Lane,
- St Oswald's Park, Church Street,
- St Aidan's College, Windmill Hill,
- Van Mildert College, Mill Hill Lane
- St Mary's College, Elvet Hill Road,
- Physics Building, Lower Mountjoy, South Road
- Trevelyan College, Elvet Hill Road,
- Grey College, South Road,
- Durham Crematorium, South Road,
- Dept. of Geography, University Science Park, Stockton Road,
- Dawson Building, University Science Park, Stockton Road,
- Bill Bryson Library, University Science Park, Stockton Road,
- "Cry for justice" sculpture, University Science Park, Stockton Road,
- British Isles floor sculpture, University Science Park, Stockton Road,
- Josephine Butler & Stephenson Colleges,
- Browns Boathouse, Elvet Riverside,
- DLI Statue, Market Place,
- "The Journey" sculpture, Millennium Square,
- Two Telephone Boxes, Land adjacent 97 Claypath,
- 80 Claypath,
- 57 Gilesgate
- School View Lane, Durham
- Rifle Range Targets, Kepier, Kepier Brick Kiln, Kepier,
- Belmont Community Centre and Park, Sunderland Road, Belmont, Durham Park, garden, and landscape with built elements.
- Dragon Park, Sherburn Road, Durham Park, garden, and landscape with
- East Durham College, Houghall Campus
- Spigot Mortar Site,
- Shincliffe Bridge, Shincliffe, Durham
- Mural attached to Ruth First House, Providence Row



Members unanimously **agreed** to note the publication of the local heritage list and to instruct the Clerk to take all necessary steps to update the Neighbourhood Plan accordingly.

- **Environment Committee**

Councillor C Lattin presented the minutes from the Environment Committee meetings held on 12<sup>th</sup> September and 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023. There being no queries, Councillor C Lattin moved on to Committee reports.

**To consider a nomination for a blue plaque for Bow Cottage.**

The Clerk reminded Members that the City of Durham Parish Council has funded the production of new blue plaques around the parish area, as part of our aim of promoting the rich and diverse heritage of the City.

These blue plaques seek to celebrate a person, event or building of significance and have been popular with visitors and local residents. In addition to the Parish Council's own scheme, the County Council has also run a similar scheme to celebrate heritage and the two projects have complimented one another.

Councillor C Lattin advised that recent meetings of the Parish Council's Planning and Licensing Committee and Environment Committee have discussed the possibility of having a blue plaque produced for Bow Cottage in our parish, with Members expressing their strong support.

The Clerk advised that, although the building is unlisted, Bow Cottage is potentially a non-designated heritage, it is identifiable on the 1st edition OS Map c.1856-60, the older elevations a mixture of C19 brickwork and some render. The site is highly sensitive in heritage terms because of its location, Bow Lane is medieval in origin being the site of an important part of the castle defences "Kings Gate" at the bottom of the lane. It is important historic pedestrian link to Mary-le-Bow church and the Cathedral precinct from the Elvet area via Kingsgate Bridge.

More recently however, the Clerk highlighted that Bow Cottage was the former home of sculptor Dr Fenwick Lawson and was in fact the location where the Journey sculpture was made. As such, it was proposed that the blue plaque captures this history with the following wording:

***Bow Cottage  
World-renowned sculptor Dr Fenwick Lawson ARCA lived here  
1977 - 2015. The much-loved Journey sculpture in Durham was  
crafted here***

If approved, a blue plaque at the site would be acquired by the same company which provided the other blue plaques and the costs would be approximately £500.

Councillor L Brown expressed her full support for this project highlighting the importance of Bow Cottage in the heritage of the City. Councillor L Brown advised that this would be a fitting tribute to highlight the building's significance as the home of a truly remarkable and visionary artist as Fenwick.

Councillor G Holland echoed those remarks and said that the City is truly blessed to have been the home of such a fantastic and humble gentleman and artist as Fenwick. Councillor G Holland advised that the Parish Council should also host a reception after the unveiling and that the Council should ask Dr Bill Bryson to unveil this plaque.

Members unanimously **agreed** to support the production of the blue plaque for Bow Cottage, with the decision on its final wording being taken by the Lawson family.

Members also unanimously **agreed** to host a reception after the unveiling and instructed the Clerk to make all of the necessary arrangements to make this happen.

#### • **Business Committee**

Councillor R Ormerod presented the minutes from the Business Committee meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2023. There being no queries from Members, Councillor R Ormerod moved on to Committee reports.

At this point, Councillor R Ormerod left the meeting.

#### **Proposal to support a series of events over the Christmas period in the City.**

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council has agreed a total budget of £25,000 towards events for this financial year. As part of this, Christmas has been identified as a key season for events in the City and the Parish Council has previously supported Christmas events as a way of promoting footfall to the City during the festive season.

The Clerk advised that, this year, the Parish Council has earmarked a total of £7,000 towards Christmas events over December 2023.

The Clerk highlighted that planning for Christmas events started earlier this month and representatives of the Parish Council have met with key stakeholder representatives of the business community in Durham to arrange events in the lead up to Christmas. These meetings have included Durham Markets Company,

Durham University and Durham BID (with the board having individual business representatives).

The Clerk advised that partners were looking for financial support for Christmas events, as follows:

- Support for the Christmas Festival - £3,000
- Funding towards the Children's arts and crafts festival - £1,500
- Support towards street entertainment in December (the Grinch) - £2,000
- Advertising of Winter events in Durham City - £500

The Clerk also advised that the latest meeting of the Parish Council's Business Committee had considered these proposals and had unanimously agreed to support these initiatives.

Members unanimously **agreed** to working in partnership with key stakeholders on the hosting of Christmas events.

Members also unanimously **agreed** to provide funding for the Christmas events, as set out in the report provided.

Members also unanimously **agreed** to delegate organisational responsibility for these events to the Parish Clerk and the Parish Council's Business Committee.

## **6. CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023 as follows:

The Chair began by thanking everyone involved in the extraordinary effort of planning the Remembrance weekend. The Chair remarked that it is a great source of pride to us that the Parish Council yet again took on the civic responsibility of hosting this event this year. The Chair advised that he was equally delighted to receive a kind letter of thanks from His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant Mrs Sue Snowden for our efforts in organising this event. The Chair advised that he was aware that the Clerk has already arranged a debrief meeting with key partners and is already looking ahead to making next year's event even bigger and better.

Similarly, the Chair advised that planning for Christmas events is well underway and the Chair thanked partners for all their work on this. The Chair advised that he is aware that this is a mammoth undertaking by partners, such as Durham Markets Company who plan the Christmas Festival each year. The Chair advised that he was looking forward to seeing this in December. The Chair also thanked Councillors who are supporting the Clerk distribute the leaflet to all schools letting pupils and parents know about the fantastic range of events taking place this year.

The Chair expressed his delight that the Government has seen sense and has now decided to U-turn on the ill-thought-out plans to close our ticket office in Durham. The Chair advised that he was delighted that the Parish Council, alongside others including our MP Mary Foy, led the campaign to save our much-loved ticket office.

The Chair advised that these plans amassed a sea storm of objections and the Parish Council sought a sit down with the rail minister earlier this year to highlight our concerns. Rail users in Durham really value the exceptional service provided by the ticket office staff and it has been our contention throughout that these ticket office closures would impact on disabled and elderly users the hardest. The Chair once again thanked all those concerned.

The Chair also congratulated the organisers of this year's Lumiere festival which saw over 160,000 visitors in attendance. The Chair advised that he understood that Durham BID is carrying out a survey of local businesses to understand the true economic impact of this event.

The Chair advised that he echoed the concerns of many in our community regarding the ongoing saga that is the Milburngate development. The Chair advised that it is now a matter of public knowledge that there are major construction issues with this site, meaning that the fire safety certificate cannot be signed off and therefore the building cannot legally be occupied. The Chair advised that whilst he was sure that this must be a huge frustration to many businesses seeking to operate in Milburngate, he felt that the recent press release by the CEO of Brewdog in which he appeared to blame the County Council for this saga was incredibly unfair and ill-advised.

Equally, the Chair expressed his disappointment to hear the news of yet further delays with the construction of the new bus station. The Chair advised that this development has been beset with problems; the latest issues are now being investigated by the Health and Safety Executive we understand. We hope that these issues can be overcome and that the building can soon be in operation. The Chair advised that the disruption caused by this development is highly regrettable to say the least.

The Chair also welcomed the news that Hanro has now withdrawn its recent plans to turn part of our greenbelt in the Sidegate part of our parish into a substantial car park. The Chair advised that our greenbelt is a precious resource and cannot be allowed to be depleted in this way. Then Chair advised that he was aware that our Clerk has a meeting with representatives of Sidegate Residents Association tomorrow to discuss further communications with Hanro.

The Chair also echoed the disappointment expressed by Councillor Amanda Hopgood earlier this week following the Government's shock decision for the second time this year not to award any of our County a penny of levelling up funding. The Chair highlighted that this is against a backdrop of County Durham being in priority 1 for funding. The Chair remarked that the County Council are quite right to now be asking questions on the criteria for this funding and he hoped that politics - as opposed to need - has not played the main deciding factor in these decisions.

The Chair offered enormous congratulations to Tortilla on winning this year's Durham City's Greenest Business Award. The Chair advised that he understood that they are overjoyed at this news and they were certainly worthy winners. The Chair highlighted that our Environment Committee was overwhelmed by the business' commitment to sustainability and how they merge this with their day-to-day operations. The Chair advised that he is aware that our Clerk and retail

consultant Graham Soult are working to ensure that this best practice can be recognised and championed by other businesses in the city.

Finally, the Chair thanked the Clerk and Councillor Freeman for the proactive work they have been doing with WHSmiths and the Post Office to ensure that usual service may be resumed at the post office in the City. At present, this is operating a very limited service due to staff recruitment issues. The Chair advised that he understood that an advert is soon to be going live for a full-time operations manager role as well as other part-time roles and the Clerk has been linking the University's employment services team with the post office to help advertise some of these roles.

## **7. PROPOSAL TO CONTRACT ADDITIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT FOR THE PARISH COUNCIL**

## **8. LOCAL GOVERNMENT PAY AWARD FOR 2023/24**

The Clerk advised that the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) has been advised by the Local Government Association that agreement has now been reached on the pay award for local government services ('Green Book') employees, covering the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

The new pay rates for local councils have been agreed with SLCC and ALCC. Employers are encouraged to implement this pay award as swiftly as possible.

The Clerk advised that, for all spinal points to 43, the agreed award is a flat rate payment of £1,925. For scale points above that the award is 3.88%.

In September 2023, the Parish Council agreed a new spinal point salary level of 44 for the Parish Clerk and therefore the award is calculated at 3.88%.

Members unanimously **agreed** to accept the 3.88% increase to the Clerk's salary and to make the necessary arrangements for arrears to be paid in the November 2023 payroll window.

## **9. TO CONSIDER THE LATEST UPDATES ON THE VACANCY WITHIN THE DURHAM SOUTH PARISH WARD**

The Chair reminded Members that a vacancy for the Durham South parish ward had been advertised, following the resignation of Councillor G Nair. The Chair took the opportunity to wish Councillor Nair well in his future endeavours and thanked him for his work on the Parish Council.

The Chair advised that, in accordance with legislation, a by-election may be called at any time before midnight this evening (Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> November). The Chair advised that, should a by-election not be called, he would like to invite Members

to a special meeting of the Parish Council on 19<sup>th</sup> December whereby Members will discuss the co-option process for filling this vacancy.

The Chair reminded Members that, should a by-election be called and is contested, the Parish Council would need to bear the full costs of this.

The Chair advised that the Clerk would be circulating an update on this matter in the morning.

## **10. TO CONSIDER THE LATEST UPDATES ON THE PARISH COUNCIL'S BUDGET SETTING PROCESS**

The Clerk presented a report to Members to update the Council on the current budget setting process for the Parish Council to date. The Clerk advised that a number of the Council's Committees have already met and discussed their individual priorities and budget request for 2024/25 and this will need to go to the Parish Council's Finance Committee in early January 2024.

### **Information on Council Tax base**

Council Tax base is calculated by taking the number of houses in the City of Durham Parish Council area, allocating a weight to them based on their council tax banding and adding up the total of the weighted households. For example, higher council tax band properties carry a higher weighting and lower council tax base properties carry a lower council tax weighting. The Council Tax Base can therefore fluctuate from year to year based on the number of properties in each area. For example, council tax base will increase if any new houses have been built and the occupants have started to pay council tax but may decrease if for example any houses have been demolished in an area or have changed their use from Use Class C3 to Use Class C4 or sui generis (non-tax paying Use Classes).

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. Our Tax Base has therefore decreased by 191.4 which equates to a reduction of £9,985.34.

### **Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Grant**

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.

### **Precept request**

The Clerk advised that the precept request must be submitted to Durham County Council by the end of January 2023.

The Parish Council's precept Band D charge is currently £52.17. Although the City of Durham Parish Council area has a high population, its tax income is lower than areas of similar size due to the significant number of properties exempt from Council tax because of their use as student accommodation.

The Band D charge in the City of Durham parish area remains one of the lowest in County Durham.

The current draft budget is set out below:

#### Planning and Licensing Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
<b>PRIORITY 1: Representing the parish on planning and licensing matters</b>	
Professional support in responding to planning applications and licensing hearings	£5,000.00
Review of County Durham Plan policies	£3,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 2: Improving the licensed economy</b>	
Enhanced drug searching scheme with Durham Police	£600.00
<b>TOTAL PROVISION IN 2024-25 AGAINST PRIORITIES</b>	<b>£8,600.00</b>

#### Environment Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
<b>PRIORITY 1: Additional policing and safety for the parish area</b>	
Enhanced SLA with Durham Police for late night policing	£30,000.00
Safety of Women at Night Hub	£8,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 2: Noise abatement</b>	
Building on the <i>Shhh...11pm to 7am</i> campaign	£2,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 3: Clean Air, Clean and Green City</b>	
Durham in Bloom	£10,000.00
A project to promote clean air across the City	£2,500.00
<b>PRIORITY 4: Engaging the youth in the work of the Parish Council</b>	
Project working with young people (OASES / Elvet and Bailey)	£2,500.00
<b>PRIORITY 5: Improving the appearance of our City</b>	
Neighbourhood Warden SLA	£10,000.00
Christmas frontages awards	£1,500.00
<b>PRIORITY 6: Recycling</b>	
Terracycle scheme	£3,000.00
Green business award	£1,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 7: Enhancing the River Wear</b>	
Supporting the work of the Wear Rivers Trust	£5,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 8: Improving access to public toilets</b>	
Production of a map and extra signage on available public toilets	£1,500.00
<b>TOTAL PROVISION IN 2024-25 AGAINST PRIORITIES</b>	<b>£77,000.00</b>

#### Business Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
<b>PRIORITY 1: Supporting Independent businesses</b>	
Professional support for independent businesses in Durham	£10,800.00
<b>PRIORITY 2: Increasing footfall through events</b>	
Hosting events in Durham City (Remembrance Sunday, Christmas events, D-Day Anniversary, miscellaneous).	£30,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 3: Filling empty units with new retailers</b>	

Welcome to Durham Fund (match funded through UKSPF)	£5,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 4: Promoting accessibility and the tourism offer of the City</b>	
Part-funding a Cathedral bus service on a Sunday	£10,000.00
<b>TOTAL PROVISION IN 2024-25 AGAINST PRIORITIES</b>	<b>£55,800.00</b>

#### Full Council

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
<b>PRIORITY 1: Administration of Parish Council</b>	
(Office rent, room hire, audit, insurance, printing and postage, newsletters, website, other expenditure)	£17,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 2: Training of staff and Councillors</b>	
Training budget	£5,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 3: Upgrading the Parish Council website</b>	
Website upgrade	£8,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 3: supporting local community and voluntary organisations</b>	
Grants budget	£15,000.00
<b>PRIORITY 4: Staffing costs</b>	
Clerk salary (including salary, pension, NI on costs)	£75,000.00
Part-time administrator for the Parish Council	£15,000.00
<b>TOTAL PROVISION IN 2024-25 AGAINST PRIORITIES</b>	<b>£135,000.00</b>

General reserves	£45,000.00
Contingencies	£15,000.00
<b>TOTAL PROVISION IN 2024-25 AGAINST PRIORITIES</b>	<b>£60,000.00</b>

Committee	Cost (£)
<b>Planning and Licensing Committee</b>	<b>£8,600.00</b>
<b>Environment Committee</b>	<b>£77,000.00</b>
<b>Business Committee</b>	<b>£55,800.00</b>
<b>Full Council</b>	<b>£135,000.00</b>
<b>Reserves</b>	<b>£60,000.00</b>
<b>TOTAL PROVISION IN 2024/25 AGAINST PRIORITIES</b>	<b>£336,400.00</b>

- End of year position for 2023/24 = £45,000.00 (reserves).
- Funds required (Working budget + contingencies) = £291,400.00
- Precept (if frozen) + LCTRS grant = £241,938.12
- Difference - £49,461.88

#### Parish-wide public consultation on precept

The Clerk advised that, as with the previous financial year, it is proposed that the Parish Council launches a public consultation between November and January to gain public views on priorities and the budget. A copy of the draft consultation form was included with this agenda.

Members unanimously **agreed** to note the report provided and the ongoing budget setting process.

Members also unanimously **agreed** to launch a public consultation as set out in the report provided on Council priorities and budget.



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

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'A' followed by a wavy line and a long horizontal stroke.

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council  
(19<sup>th</sup> December 2023)**