

Chester-le-Street & District Area Action Partnership (AAP) Board Meeting Minutes of Meeting held Monday 25th September 2023.

Present:

Councillors: Tracie Smith, Alison Batey, Elsie Forrester (Parish Council Representative), Phil Heaviside, and Emma Waldock.

Partner Organisations: Suzanne Jobson (Karbon Homes) Joanne Malki (Business Association Representative), Inspector Lee Morris (Police) Colleen Baker (VCS Rep) and Marion Ingleby (Durham County Council).

Public Representatives: Clare Todd, Khaled Malki, Chris Hoy, Jake Rollings and Howell Davies.

Officer Attendance: Michael Wilkes (Principal AAP Co-ordinator), Allyson Rose (Community Development Project Officer), Peter Garrod (Principal Community Development Officer) and Lesley Lines (Support Officer).

Apologies: Graeme Carr (Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue) Colin Stephenson (NHS), Janet Ford Davidson (Public Representative), Aaron McCormack (Public Representative), Cllr. Julie Scurfield and Cllr Bill Moist.

Public Attendance: Four members of the AAP Public Forum were present at the meeting.

Introductions, Apologies and Virtual Housekeeping Code of Conduct/Protocols

Cllr Alison Batey (Chair) opened the meeting. Housekeeping arrangements were noted. Apologies were also noted as above.

Declaration of Interest

Item 8 – Cllr Emma Waldock declared an interest in **The Fulforth Centre – Community IT Suite.**

Agreement of minutes from the previous meeting held on Monday 24th July 2023 & Matters Arising

The Chair went through the minutes page by page.

The Board agreed the minutes of Monday 24th July 2023.

Matters Arising

Page 12 – The minutes were circulated after the meeting by Ally.

Neighbourhood Issues

Michael advised that no neighbourhood issues had been raised prior to the meeting. Michael asked Board Members if they would like to raise any. None were forthcoming.

2024/25 County Council Forecast Revenue Budget Consultation

Jeff Garfoot, Head of Corporate Finance & Commercial Services, Durham County Council introduced 'The Forecast Revenue Budget Consultation.

Council budget proposals

Consultation on our budget proposals for 2024/5 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2025-2028

Have your say on our budget proposals for 2024/25, as well as on how we meet the financial challenges we face over the next four years.

Like all councils, we are facing unavoidable financial pressures driven by rising costs and increasing levels of demand, particularly for adult and children's social care. In total 47 per cent of our budget is spent on social care, providing support to 2.5 per cent of the population. It is becoming more challenging to balance budgets with the funding received from the Government and the income we are allowed to raise locally.

Despite some additional government funding and assuming that there will be continued annual increases in council tax, we forecast that we will still need to make £56 million in savings over the next four years, with savings of £12.1 million required next year.

Although we will continue to maximise savings and efficiencies in management and administration services, it is becoming increasingly difficult to do this. We have always sought to minimise the impact on front line services, however, without further funding from Government, some of these services will be more affected in the coming years.

We have already agreed £2.2 million of savings for next year, and we are now consulting on proposals to save a further £3.7 million. That would still leave us with a £6.2 million shortfall for 2024/25, so we are also seeking your views on where we could make these savings, as well as the savings we'll need to make in future years.

To help our most vulnerable households, we are also proposing to extend our Council Tax Reduction Scheme in its existing form for another year. This scheme offers a council tax discount to eligible residents on low incomes whether in work, unemployed or retired.

Please have your say on our spending plans, the current savings proposals and on which areas you feel we should prioritise for further, future savings.

We would like to hear your views on:

- Our proposals for saving £3.7 million and how these may impact on you.
- Our proposal to increase council tax for 2024/25 by 4.99% (with 2% of that to help meet rising adult social care costs)
- What other services areas we should prioritise for savings to meet the shortfall of £6.2 million for next year, and also to achieve the remaining £43.5 million required in savings over the next four years.

Below, you can read more about the detail of the challenges we face, what is impacting on our budget forecasts, the savings we propose from back office, efficiencies, increasing fees, and the changes to how we deliver front line services.

We also describe our reasoning for increasing the council tax for next year and list those service areas which may need to be targeted for savings either next year or over the next four years.

Saving from back Office and making efficiencies = Saving of £1.9 million



Better for everyone

We've looked at all our services to identify ways in which we can make further savings which will hopefully not affect front line service delivery, including changes to the structure of services and staffing reviews.

This includes a proposal to review the Music Service for schools, looking at how this service is delivered, considering its overheads, outgoings, its pricing policy and accommodation, to see where savings can be made.

We also propose to start a number of service reviews including for Corporate Affairs, Finance and Commercial Services, Digital Services and Customer Services. Within these reviews, we will consider several things such as the structure of these services and how best to use the resources they have available to achieve better value for money. We can and do consider the use of technology and how innovation can also bring about efficiencies to how these services operate.

Additionally, we aim to save money by deleting current vacant staff posts in the areas of development management and spatial policy which sit within our planning services team.

The opportunities available to save money from back-office efficiencies going forward are getting much more difficult to achieve.

Raising additional income and reducing our third-party contributions = Saving of £1.2 million

We have looked at ways in which we might raise additional income and reduce the amount of contributions we make to others. The proposals in this area can be summarised as follows:

- reduce contributions by bringing charges for the in-house extra care community alarm scheme in line with private sector schemes.
- increase community protection fees and charges which will be passed onto local businesses and traders, as well as bringing in new charges where possible.
- increase fees and charges across children and young people's services particularly reviewing and expanding services charged to schools.
- increase traffic management income, for example, from additional enforcement activities.
- increase income from roads, for example, from extra licensing income from companies carrying out roadworks.
- increase fees and charges within environmental services, relating to refuse and recycling, Fixed Penalty Notices (fines) and Durham Crematoria.

Separately we have consulted with Town and Parish Councils in relation to the option to reduce the grant support provided to some local councils by 50% over a two-year period. We are one of a few councils across the country, and the only one in the northeast, that still pays a grant to Town and Parish Councils.

We are also consulting separately on proposals to implement changes to our long term empty property policy and to introduce a premium on second homes in line with new powers we expect to receive once the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill passes through parliament in the Autumn. More details on these proposals can be found on our [Consultation on increasing the council tax on empty properties and second homes](#) page.

Savings from the changes in the way we deliver front line services = Saving of £0.67 million

We will continue to explore ways to deliver services in different, and more effective and efficient ways, to help better meet the needs of our residents. Where appropriate, we will involve you in further conversations to get your feedback in more detail. Proposals outlined so far, which would be subject to further conversations, engagement or consultation with service users and/or the public are:



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- moving Durham County News to a mainly online format, with four online editions and one printed version per year
- a review of Early Years Services across the children and young people's service with new ways of working and delivering services having the potential so see a reduction in service costs
- a review of Early Help to remove vacant staff posts as a result of more collaborative ways of working with partners and the benefits of linking this service to the new Family Hubs model
- a review of how we provide safeguarding services including the introduction of a new Family Help service, in line with the Government's national reform programme, leading to a reduction in service costs

A [review and consultation around home to school transport](#) was carried out earlier this year. A report, considered by our Cabinet meeting on 14 June 2023, agreed with all of the proposals except the fare increase for the concessionary bus scheme - this was reduced to £2 instead of the proposed £2.80.

Council tax increase of 4.99% (2.99% plus 2% adult social care precept) Additional Income £13.3 Million

As in previous years, to try and reduce the impact of cuts to services and the possible impact on many of our most vulnerable residents, an increase in council tax is also proposed.

Our savings figures have been calculated after an assumed increase in council tax to its maximum allowed amount of 4.99% next year. 2% of this figure is for adult social care services. The proposed increase is in line with the Government's expectations and represents the maximum increase permissible without a referendum. For each 1% reduction in this figure, the funding gap we've outlined will increase by a further £2.567 million.

It is estimated that a 4.99% council tax increase will generate £13.3 million of additional income. If we set this figure lower, we would need to find more savings elsewhere than we've currently forecast.

A 4.99% increase in our council tax equates to a £92 increase on a Band D property which is around £1.76 per week. However, in County Durham, 83% of all properties are in Bands A to C, which means that the majority of people will be charged less than this. For example, those living in a Band A property would be charged £61 more next year - or £1.18 per week.

The average council tax charged per household in County Durham is £1,385. This is £193 (12.2%) below the national average. Of the 295 local councils in England, we rank 229th in terms of the highest council tax which puts us in the bottom 25%.

Financial support for households

We offer [Support to help you pay your council tax](#) to our most vulnerable households who may be struggling to pay and are proposing to extend our local [Council Tax Reduction scheme](#) in its existing form for another year. This scheme provides council tax discounts of up to 100% to eligible households. We are one of the few authorities in the country to provide this level of support, with our scheme mirroring the entitlement afforded to people in 2013, before the National Council Tax Benefits system was abolished and decisions on the level of support provided to financial vulnerable working age claimants was passed to local authorities.

81.4% of all eligible (financially vulnerable) working age households (around 33,400) in County Durham currently receive 100% support and have no bill to pay.

You can also find out about a range of other [financial help available to residents](#).

Priorities for further savings for 2024/25 and the following three years

Although we have identified several savings proposals for next year, there remains a funding shortfall of £6.2 million for 2024/25, and a £43.5 million shortfall over the following three years. With this in mind, we need your views on how we might make further savings.

Our biggest budgets relate to social care services for adults and children, waste disposal, home to school transport and capital financing costs linked to the council's external borrowing. In total 47 per cent of our budget is spent on social care, providing support to just 2.5 per cent of the population. In the vast majority of circumstances, we are limited to how much we can reduce spend on these budget areas and in recent years, particularly in children's social care there have been significant cost and demand pressures that we have had to face.

We will continue to seek efficiencies within adult and children services, but savings of this nature will not meet the amount needed.

Furthermore, our options for savings in areas, such as social care, are generally limited due to the statutory nature of some services. In other areas we are limited in the savings we can make because we have fixed costs that we need to pay such as in waste disposal. It is therefore becoming more difficult to find other areas where savings can be found.

In previous years we have used reserves to help us reduce our budget shortfalls. For example, in 2023/24 we have used £10 million of reserves to bridge the funding gap. However, this is not a sustainable position, and we cannot continue to do this going forward. Reserves are held for a number of reasons including:

- To help cushion the impact of any uneven cash flows, for example, delays in expected income or funding.
- To avoid unnecessary temporary borrowing, especially important given rising interest rates.
- As a contingency to cushion the impact of any unexpected events or emergencies, for example flooding, and other exceptional weather.
- As a means of building up funds for known or predicted future liabilities. These are known as earmarked reserves.

So, any use of reserves to bridge the budget gap impacts on our financial stability and programmes and projects funded from earmarked reserve.

By the end of this financial year, our reserves will have reduced by £73 million since 1 April 2022 and our General Reserve (to cushion unforeseen events) will be only 5% of our Net Expenditure.

Other areas we can explore:

We have compiled a list of front-line services where we could make further savings to help close the current budget deficit, which would only increase if the assumed council tax increases are not implemented. We want to gather your views on these areas to understand where you would prioritise savings. It is important to remember that savings in these areas will still be difficult to achieve and could have a significant impact.

- **Community safety and protection** - environmental health, trading standards, taxis and events, neighbourhood wardens, emergency planning, road safety and school crossing patrol services.
- **Council tax, benefits and other processing** - processing of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and other Council Tax and Business Rates account changes
- **Culture** - council owned museums and theatres, libraries and support to cultural events.
- **Customer access and customer services** - customer access points, call handling and contact arrangements to report issues / access services.



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- **Economic development** - support for businesses, projects and support services to improve the county's economy, creating jobs and wealth.
- **Environment and climate change** - reduction of carbon emissions for the council, residents, and business, to tackle pollution and nature conservation.
- **Housing services** - homelessness, home adaptations for vulnerable people and housing advice.
- **Leisure and wellbeing** - leisure centres, parks, play areas, playing pitches and allotments and associated activity programmes.
- **Local community projects** - support for community development including Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) and the voluntary sector.
- **Local council tax support** - provided to working age people. We could cap or cut the current level of support in future years.
- **Planning services** - provision of planning and building control services.
- **Preventative services** - community-based early intervention support for vulnerable people with their mental and physical wellbeing to maintain their quality of life and independent living, thus helping to reduce future statutory social care spending.
- **Roads and transport** - road and footpath maintenance, pothole repairs, gully cleaning, street lighting, winter maintenance, parking services, subsidised transport e.g. bus routes and bus passes.
- **Street cleaning and grounds maintenance** - including parks, cemeteries and open spaces, litter picking, fly tipping, dog fouling, grass cutting, flower beds and trees
- **Waste collection, disposal and recycling** - household and business bin collections and recycling centres.
- **Welfare assistance and advice** - advice and financial support provided to vulnerable people to help address poverty especially during the cost of living crisis.

Jeff opened the floor to questions.

Clare Todd – Are you expecting extra support from Government for schools dealing with the RAAC crisis.

Jeff – We have revenue ringfenced for schools. The capital we have maintains 150 schools. The RAAC schools effected are all academies. Jeff highlighted school transport could be affected.

Clare Todd – What about Community Buildings with RAAC owned by Durham County Council?

Jeff – Highlighted he was not aware of any DCC buildings with RAAC. Most buildings were built well before RAAC was used.

Chair – Highlighted that Pelton Primary and Secondary Schools were both affected. She advised DCC have a responsibility to transport children to alternative venues.

Jeff advised these Capital costs would be met by Government, but it could take two years to receive this funding.

Chris Hoy – From the savings already made over the years, what has been the least or most negative savings?

Jeff – A 66 million target was made through the merging of eight councils quite quickly, however, over the years, this has become quite lean, to the point that we end up cutting services that are needed.

Jeff – Highlighted that County Durham has 39 libraries, which members highly value. He highlighted that 3,000 people were looked after in residential care and 3,000 in Home Care. A majority of these are not self-funded.

Chair – Previously highlighted that most of County Durham properties were terraced properties in band A.

Howell Davies – How safe is the Council Tax Reduction Scheme?

Jeff – Since 2013 the scheme has been maintained.

Cllr Phil Heaviside - If Durham County Council didn't set a balanced budget, would it be better to let the government set it?

Jeff – That is why we are asking what you want to protect now and what you want to cut.

Khaled Malki – With DCC buildings, when does it become viable to replace instead of repair?

Jeff – As a council we have the biggest capital programme going, however, interest has gone up from 1% to 5% on the borrowing.

Cllr Tracie Smith – Highlighted the Leisure Centre had closed because of problems with the roof. Cllr Smith asked how do you decide where to spend the money? There is a need to enhance the town.

Jeff – Advised that Leisure Centres were costly to run. Income pays for the borrowing. Currently construction costs are up, interest rates are up and the aftereffects of Covid are still being realised.

Jeff advised it was up to each and every one to choose what services they wanted to keep.

Mick Rodgers – Has the sale of assets and disposal of land not generated a huge amount of money?

Jeff – Land & Building Capital Receipt's of 16 million for selling land. Over the past 10 years most of the buildings have been sold off. A lot of land has been put into Chapter Homes (DCC) or Social Housing so there is not much land left.

Jeff advised that everyone contribute to the consultation. Jeff added that paper copies were available.

The Chair thanked Jeff for the presentation.

Fun and Food Programme

Michael introduced Lindsey Davison, Durham County Council, who gave a presentation highlighting the Fun & Food Programme.

This presentation is available on request.

The Chair thanked Lindsey and highlighted the problem each holiday period brought in having to whittle down the applications because of lack of funds.

The Chair asked for more information about the SEND offer.

Lindsey - Advised that this provision was provided through the NEPO portal. This is separate from the AAP Fun & Food. Programme.

Clare Todd noted that up to 25% of the children in schools were not claiming the free school meals. How can we or your team do more.

Lindsey – The Poverty Team are working with The Youth Council and The Bread & Butter Thing in trying to capture the outputs.



Better for everyone

Suzanne Jobson – Having done some quick calculations, highlighted that families had saved £62,400. Suzanne asked if anyone followed up on no shows?

Lindsey - Advised that groups themselves do follow up but some groups over book anyway to avoid this situation.

Howell Davies – The Fun & Food Programme covers 30 days. What happens to the other days.

Lindsey – Referrals and signposting to the likes of foodbanks, but there is always more to be done.

Clare Todd - Highlighted that there were not as many applications at Christmas due to schools closing over the holidays. Is there a way of letting the Government know that these funds could be used better in the other holiday periods?

The Chair thanked Lindsey and the team for an amazing job. The Chair highlighted how important this funding is, that for most of these young people it is the only event they participate in over the holidays. The Chair encouraged Board Members to get involved in the Funding Assessment Panel meetings.

AAP Monitoring Report

Michael advised Board Members had already received this report by email prior to the meeting. Michael asked if any Board Member had any questions. There were no questions.

Michael highlighted a further report would be brought to the next meeting.

Neighbourhood Budget Report

Neighbourhood Budget Small Grant Allocations

Councillors Emma Waldock and Simon Wilson – Edmondsley Parish Council – Edmondsley York Trip

The aim of this project is to take residents of Edmondsley on a trip to York.

Declaration of Interest: None

NBSG Allocation: £550 (Each Cllr committing £275)

Neighbourhood Budget Allocations

Councillor Craig Martin – DCC Highways - Installation of DAR on Broadway and Road Markings on Park Road North, Chester-le-Street

The aim of this project is to install a dropped access ramp on Broadway to aid free movement for people with mobility issues. The project will also install road markings to encourage drivers to drive within the speed limit.

Declaration of Interest: None

NB Allocation: £1,236

Councillors Alan Bell and Phil Heaviside – DCC Highways – Installation of 7 DARs at Great Lumley & Bournmoor



Better for everyone

The aim of this project is to install seven dropped access ramps, six in Great Lumley and one in Bournmoor, to aid free movement for people with mobility issues.

Declaration of Interest: None

NB Allocation: £5,765 (Each Cllr committing £2,882)

Councillors Alison Batey, Danny Wood, Emma Waldock, Simon Henig, Simon Wilson, Paul Pringle, Julie Scurfield, Phil Heaviside – Pelton Community Centre – Additional Warm Packs

The aim of the project is to add additional warm packs to the Area Budget Warm Packs project. This funding will enable the centre to distribute more packs across more centres.

This additional funding will give each centre an additional ten packs plus support the below centres to engage in year two and have an additional ten packs per centre.

- Chester le Street Community centre
- Cornerstones
- Edmondsley Parish Memorial Hall
- Nettlesworth
- Ouston

***Declaration of Interest:** Councillor Simon Henig (Board Member Pelton Fell Community Partnership)

NB Allocation: £3,120 (Councillors Alison Batey, Danny Wood, Simon Henig, Paul Pringle, Julie Scurfield and Phil Heaviside each committing £233. Councillors Emma Waldock and Simon Wilson each committing £861)

Councillors Emma Waldock and Simon Wilson – Edmondsley Primary School – Sensory Garden

The aim of this project is to create a sensory garden in the centre of the school. In recent years there has been a growing trend of children with sensory based needs. Provision involves regular sensory breaks.

***Declaration of Interest:** Councillor Simon Wilson is a governor at Edmondsley Primary School

NB Allocation: £9,991 (each councillor committing £4,995)

Councillors Emma Waldock and Simon Wilson – The Fulforth Centre – Community IT Suite

The aim of this project is to replace old computers with laptops and the required software/accessories, alongside a printer with scanner and photocopying capabilities. The project will then re-launch the community IT suite for use by members of the local community. The project also involves purchasing six new lightweight trestle tables which can be used to create a portable IT suite for training and other events.

*** Declaration of Interest:** Councillor Emma Wilson is the County Council representative who sits on the Board of the Community and Sports Trust (Fulforth Centre) that oversees the running of the Fulforth Centre.

NB Allocation: £4,000 (each councillor committing £2,000)



Better for everyone

Councillors Julie Scurfield, Bill Moist, Karen Fantarrow- Darby, Simon Henig & Paul Sexton – DCC Clean & Green – Installation of three seats on Front Street, Chester-le-Street

The aim of this project is to enhance the Front Street by installing three bespoke seats to an area of land directly in front of the car park on the opposite side of the road to the Post Office. There is a lack of seating on Front Street and this forms part of a wider regeneration of this area.

Declaration of Interest: None

NB Allocation: £5,068 (Councillor Julie Scurfield committing £3,379 and Councillors Bill Moist, Karen Fantarrow-Darby, Simon Henig & Paul Sexton committing £422 each)

Councillor Craig Martin – DCC Clean & Green – Diamond Flower Bed Installation at North Lodge

The aim of this project is to install a new flower bed and planting within the ward of North Lodge. This will bring some much-needed colour to the area.

Declaration of Interest: None

NB Allocation: £1,751

Councillor Tracie Smith – DCC Clean & Green – Pelaw Square – 4 x 3 tier planters + maintenance

The aim of this project is to supply and install 4 x 3 tier planters with plants at Pelaw Square, South Pelaw. This project will also include one years' maintenance for planting twice in the year.

Declaration of Interest: None

NB Allocation: £4,098

Councillors Bill Moist and Paul Sexton – DCC Clean and Green - Golf Bench Riverside Park

The aim of this project is to supply and install one golf bench at the Rowing Club at Riverside Park. This project includes maintenance by DCC Clean and Green.

Declaration of Interest: None

NB Allocation: £1567 (£783.50 per councillor)

Declarations are shown above. The Board Agreed all the above projects.

Partner Updates

Police

Inspector Lee Morris highlighted that most will have seen the media, reports of the current Chief Constable Jo Farrell who's moving on to pastures new and north of the border to go up to Scotland. The candidate that's been chosen to replace her is a lady called Rachel Bacon who is ex Northumbria Assistant Chief and currently Deputy Chief Constable of South Wales. No exact start date has been given. Neighbourhood Policing is at the forefront of one of the things that she wants to look at and invest in and that is positive at this current point in time.



Better for everyone

Market Activity Week - Insp. Morris highlighted the success yet again of the week's activities. Lee thanked Board Members for the funds allowing this to take place. Lee highlighted it is more than just the physical financial funding, it's all of the volunteers and networking that goes along with it. Lee thanked everyone who was involved. Lee added the event continues to grow year on year and estimated somewhere in the region of 20,000 people took part. The weather did play a part as it was lovely weather all week which really helps. It did bring a lot of people to the town centre, it takes away some of the boredom element for a lot of our kids, with free activities which you just don't see anywhere else.

Lee advised perhaps some people think some things could be improved upon, food in particular is a key thing. This has been tried in previous years but turned into chaos with everyone taking the free food.

Lee ended saying a big thank you to everybody involved, particularly Adrian and Christine for their efforts in pulling the event together.

Operation Trial Blazer – Money from the PCC allowed for extra patrols in relation to antisocial behaviour, these have continued since the last meeting. Feedback received from residents around visibility was very positive. The Police were able to tackle a lot more, and data showed a dramatic drop in reports of social behaviour.

Operational Endurance – The forces response to off road anti-social behaviour, nuisance from motorbikes. Crime Stoppers are offering up to £1,000 pound cash reward for information which leads to a successful prosecution.

General – Dozens of bikes over the summer period have been seized. The Police are working with partner agencies issuing a number of fixed penalty notices. Tenancy Warning Notices and Community Protection Warning Notices have started to be issued, which makes it clear if people get caught they will be removed from their homes.

Operation Trident – Additional resources allowed for a recent day of action. Targeting those individuals who cause high harm within our communities. Executing warrants and arresting four people for certain offences. Some might think four is not a lot but when you multiply that across the force, where on average four were arrested that day, taking people off the streets that are causing some pain and high harm safeguarding the community is a good achievement.

The Chair thanked Christine and Adrian on behalf of the Board for the work they put into making Market Activity Week a success.

Karbon Homes

Suzanne Jobson reminded everyone that one of the countywide APP funded projects were holding their next Durham Employment Connections at the Riverside on Friday 28th September. Suzanne noted that the next Forum would include the likes of Amazon and Lidl.

Suzanne noted that Durham Employment Connections project is hosting a local jobs fairs in Chester le Street "Pathways to Employment" on Friday 20th October at The Parish Centre.

Suzanne to forward information for Michael to send to the Board

VCS Sector

Aspire - Colleen Baker advised a higher volume of women are attending all services, which means all their services are now full to capacity.



Better for everyone

Another positive matter to update is that Aspire have secured a lovely amount of funding from the Big Lottery that's going to help fund support services and develop them so that Aspire can work further to enable women to then support each other.

AAP Coordinators Update

Community Engagement Review – Michael advised there was work going on in terms of the work streams. Looking at and trying to make sure that we are in the best position possible for the launch of local networks. Michael advised this would be kept on the agenda as a standard agenda item.

Fun & Food Update – Michael advised the AAP Team had received 13 applications totalling £18,000. Michael highlighted the budget of £15,000 left for the remaining two holiday periods. The panel will meet tomorrow to discuss the applications. All Board Members were invited to take part.

Board Champions – Michael advised that visits to live projects would be organised within the next couple of weeks.

Any Other Business

The Chair highlighted two fantastic awards to share with the Board. Riverside Park achieved Gold in the Parks Category of Northumbria in Bloom and Chester-le-Street in the Large Town category achieved Silver. The Chair also noted that St Cuthberts received a gold/best in class award and Homelands Park Residents received a level two advancing award.

All fantastic news for the Chester-le-Street area and The Chair thanked Claire Todd and the teams for their hard work.

Michael passed on a letter the AAP had received about the benefits of charity shops in Chester-le-Street. It highlights some of the economic advantages that charity shops currently bring to the town centre.

The Chair asked for the letter to be circulated to Board Members.

Action: Michael

Howell Davies highlighted reduced hours to the office at Citizens Advice. From October, it will only open on a Monday.

The Chair thanked everybody for their attendance and wished them a safe journey home.

Date and Time of the next meeting

Monday 27th November, 6pm. Venue TBC.