



Introduction

The Bishop Auckland Town Council is proud to reflect on the achievements and contributions made throughout the 2024-25 municipal year. As the final year of the current four-year term, leading up to elections in May 2025, the Council has remained steadfast in its commitment to enriching the town and serving its residents.

Throughout the year, the Council has continued to deliver essential services, including the management of the Allotment Service, and a range of community events that bring people together. The hugely successful Youth Awards highlighted the incredible young individuals who make a difference in Bishop Auckland, celebrating their achievements and inspiring future generations.

The Council has also played an active role in supporting key town traditions and festivals, including the Heritage Festival, Remembrance Sunday Parade, Christmas Town, Family Festival, Pride, and Bishop Auckland Food Festival. These events have strengthened community spirit and reinforced the town's cultural identity.

In addition to event and service delivery, the Council has supported the town's growth through financial grants via the Community Fund, enabling vital community projects and events to thrive. Donations have been made to local organisations such as Auckland Youth and Community Centre and Woodhouse Close Community Centre, reinforcing the Council's dedication to supporting residents and grassroots initiatives.

As this term draws to a close, the Council takes great pride in its accomplishments and looks ahead to a future of continued collaboration, growth, and service to the people of Bishop Auckland.

The Town Council's aims and values are set out in the following Mission Statement:

"Working in partnership to improve the quality of life for all those who live, work, visit or invest in Bishop Auckland."

In doing so, the Council will:

- Conduct business openly and democratically, and consult with local people.
- Act in the best interests of local people in making appropriate representations to Durham County Council and other appropriate private and public sector groups.
- Deliver services to the highest quality in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and value for money.
- Continue to build relationships with the community and voluntary organisations and with the statutory, public and private sector.
- Encourage and promote economic and commercial long terms plans for the town through partnership working.
- Recognise and support diversity and seek to strengthen the inclusion of all residents of Bishop Auckland.



In 2022 Bishop Auckland Town Council signed up to the Civility and Respect Pledge. The Civility and Respect Pledge is being introduced by the National Association of Local Councils because there is no place for bullying, harassment and intimidation within the sector. It shows that Bishop Auckland is committed to standing up to poor behaviour and to drive through positive changes which support civil and respectful conduct.

Bishop Auckland Town Council has an office based at Kingsway Court, 54 Kingsway Bishop Auckland. It currently employs a full time Town Clerk, a full time Assistant Town Clerk, a full time Admin Assistant and a part time Allotments Officer.

Message from outgoing Mayor, Cllr Mike Harker (Mayor of Bishop Auckland 2024-25)

As the 17th Mayor of Bishop Auckland throughout 2024 -2025 it has been a real honour to serve our community and see first-hand the dedication, community spirit and progress made by everyone. In this, the final year of the four – year term, we at the Town Council have continued to fulfil our objective by ‘Working in partnership to improve the quality of life for all those who live, work, visit or invest in Bishop Auckland’.

I have had the privilege of attending numerous events, celebrations and various meetings and initiatives, both in the Town and beyond, to represent all aspects of our area. These occasions continually reinforce the deep - rooted connections embedded in our town with local organisations and valued partners who work tirelessly to ensure Bishop Auckland continues to improve the lives of residents, especially the young and elderly.

From the success of our Youth Awards to our support for local events including the Heritage Festival, Remembrance Parade, Christmas Town, and Bishop Auckland Food Festival, the Council has remained committed to enriching the town’s social and cultural fabric. Additionally, our ongoing financial grants via Community Fund have enabled vital local projects and organisations to maintain their efforts —such as the Auckland Youth and Community Centre, Wear Valley Community Action, Bishop Auckland Rugby Club, the Cadets and Woodhouse Close Community Centre, to continue making a difference in people’s lives.

We are very committed to delivering high-quality services while actively contributing to the regeneration of the town. For example our Allotment Service continues to improve, with ongoing site maintenance and the appointment of an Allotments Officer, ensuring better support for local growers.

Regeneration efforts, driven through the Stronger Towns Board, have made significant progress and, with funding from the Future High Streets and Stronger Towns Funds enabling more transformative development. The successful opening of the McIntyre Centre by Bishop Auckland College, along with the development of Kingsway Square Car Park, demonstrates how investment is bringing tangible benefits. With continued work on the redevelopment of the Bus Station and other key projects coming to fruition, we are finally beginning to see the town’s regeneration unfold, fulfilling long-standing promises of revitalization and growth.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my fellow councillors, staff, and the residents of Bishop Auckland for their wholehearted support during my term of office. It has been a privilege to work alongside so many passionate individuals who share a vision for a stronger, more vibrant town we are proud to live in. Together, we have accomplished much, albeit with more to do , and I remain absolutely confident that the future of Bishop Auckland remains bright.

Finally I would like to congratulate the new Mayor on their appointment and my best wishes for their endeavours.

Thank you

Cllr Mike Harker Mayor of Bishop Auckland

Looking back 2023-24

Allotment Service

The Council continues to deliver allotment provision across the town council area. Sites are predominantly managed by the Town Council, with some having associations in operation, and one site being self-managed.

The Council has sites at Tindale Crescent, Woodhouse Close, Edge Hill, Pollards, South Church, Mill Race, Broken Banks and West Mills.

The annual inspections took place at all allotment sites in June and July 2024. Whilst on the whole the plots met the requirements of the council's rules and regulations those which did not were issued with enforcement action taken if standards are not met.

The management and maintenance plans for each site were reviewed and investment has meant that pot holes could be addressed and essential works could be carried out. The introduction of the part time Allotment Officer has further improved relationships and built a good rapport with tenants, we have also hosted a coffee and chat evening for tenants to come to chat about any issues, this was very successful as tenants now feel that they have a voice.

The council again awarded certificates, and shields for 'Best Allotment' or 'Best Newcomer'. Winners get to hold the shield for 12 months and gift voucher for allotment supplies.

Bishop Auckland Food Festival 2025



The Bishop Auckland Food Festival, brought in thousands to the town, to experience flavours from around the region and world. The live cookery demonstrations were a huge success in the outdoor demo kitchen, and live music and walking street performers entertained the crowds. The Town Council are a proud sponsor of this event as it continues to go grows each year, attracts needed footfall into the town centre, which is fantastic for the local economy and small businesses. In addition, the Town Council continued to sponsor the young people's photography competition at St Anne's Church, which saw some fantastic entries.

Bishop Auckland Remembers

The Town Council supported two remembrance events in 2024-25, with the 80th Anniversary of D Day landing in Normandy on 6th June 2024, saw people gather for a Church Service at St Anne's Church followed by refreshments, and a minute silence at the War Memorial. With the day ending at 9pm, with Deputy Lord Lieutenant Dr McManners, the Mayor and Rev. Keddilty, being joined by Veterans, Cadets, and the public at the War Memorial for a reading, prayers and the lighting of the Town Council Beacon simultaneously with the rest of the United Kingdom and Channel Islands.

Bishop Auckland Market Place was awash with people gathering for the Annual Remembrance Sunday Service 2024 in order to pay tribute to those who had fought and lost their lives in war. The day was planned by the town council staff in collaboration with Rev. Keddilty of St Anne's Church. The staff spoke to the DLI and RBL in advance of the service and ensures any of their comments and observations from the year prior were taken into consideration. Once again, the parade was led by Captain Dave Ridley 8th Battalion the Rifles, followed by Army Cadet Force, Royal Air Force Cadets, the Scouts, Guides, veterans and members of the public, the 8th Battalion the Rifles set off from Newgate Street and marched to the War Memorial in the Market Place. Two minutes' silence was impeccably held at exactly 11.00am marking the Anniversary of the end of World War One.



Christmas Town 2024

Due to the continued success of Christmas Town the Town Council once again partnered with Bridge Creative CIC and Bacchanalia CIC to host an ambitious 10-day programme of festive fun, with the event opened by loved local celebrity, Sara Davies, Star of Dragons Den and the Mayor. The ambitious step up from one weekend to ten days, saw the town come alive, but sadly due to weather warnings for extreme winds and rain, saw the programme cut short by 3 days. The event was bigger and better, with footfall exceeding 2023's 35,000 people. The Ferris Wheel, and new addition of the Christmas Carousel as well as the ice-skating rink were huge successes.

There was something for everyone and data shows that some people even travelled from outside the county to come along. This event alongside AGLOW at The Auckland Project firmly put the town on the map of must see activities for Christmas cheer.



Bishop Auckland Heritage Fair

Back for a successful second year, the Heritage Fair returned in September 2024, with a growing number of organisations showing off their displays in the town hall, to the beautiful vehicles on show in the Market Place thanks to Northern Bygones Society. There were children's activities, and heritage talks at the Town Hall and The Auckland Project had their Horticulture Show in the castle grounds, making the fair another well-rounded and successful day across the town.



Youth Awards



The now annual Youth Awards are a great addition to Bishop Auckland Town Council's event portfolio. It is a fantastic opportunity to celebrate the achievements of some of the young people in our town for the great work, help and support they do selflessly for others. The evening was hosted by regional singer-songwriter Channy Thompson who had a great connection with the young people, as she too has an inspirational story to tell, and is truly a brilliant host.

The evening starts with a red-carpet entrance to the Town Hall, followed by an evening of celebration, whilst on occasion it is an emotional roller coaster listening to their stories of survival, support and personal battles. The event also had nine sponsors who attended the evening to share in the recognition of the young people of our town.

Supporting the Community

Bishop Auckland Town Council allocates £5,000 each year to support local organisation working for the benefit of Bishop Auckland residents. Community groups and local charities can apply for grants of up to £500. Applications are considered twice a year. Firstly, in June and then again in December. The Council also provides wider community support via events and core funding, examples of these have been:

- Monthly Street Food Market – a grant was provided to enable the continuation of the markets and each one attracts over 4,000 people to the town which supports the businesses in the town centre.
- Auckland Youth and Community Centre (AYCC) to provide outreach space for their Mancave Group and Adult 'Youth Club', for social inclusion activities.
- Bishop Auckland Community Partnership – support towards costs of social activities for their recovery support groups.
- Lingfield Court for disability friendly seating in their community garden space.
- Bishop Auckland Rugby Union Football Club – for equipment for their youth training sessions.
- Woodhouse Close Community Centre - Community Christmas Lunch, to provide social activity for those on their own, and group attendees a festive feast and party.

The town council also have made donations and sought donations to support other projects such as:

- Hanging Baskets – the Town Council supplies funding to Durham County Council to provide the hanging baskets to 50% of Newgate Street.

- Skate Park Lighting – the Town Council supplies the Lighting to the skate park in the Town Rec so that the facility can be used on the dark evenings.
- Citizen’s Advice – the Town Council provided additional project funding for a Cost of Living project worker to operate one day per week from the town council premises. In the 15month period January 2024 to end March 2025 this funded advice service helped 76 clients with 212 issues and achieved financial gains totalling £60,878 of benefit and support were awarded to residents in the town.

Financial Summary

Funding source	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Council Tax – The ‘parish precept’	£237,622	£404,699	£483,029
Localisation of Council Tax Grant which is passed down from the Government via DCC	£5,762	£2,802	£nil

The ‘parish precept’ is collected as Council Tax, on our behalf by Durham County Council from each household pays Council Tax.

There are eight council tax bands which range from **Band A** (Properties valued at below £40,00 on 1st April 1991) to **Band H** (properties valued above £320,000 on 1st April 1991).

Council Tax is usually quoted at **Band D** so that comparisons can be made with other councils. However, this does not give the full picture as the majority of people within our area live in Band A properties.

- 61% of council tax payers in the Town Council area live in Band A properties.
- Only 7% of council tax payers in the Town Council area live in Band D properties.

Council Tax Band	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Band D	£54.71	£92.23	£109.10

The 2023 -24 Statement of Accounts, are available to view on the Council website, along with the annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and both the Internal and External Audit Reports. The 2024-25 Statement of Accounts, will be available on the website, along with the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) once completed and submitted to the external auditor.

Town Councillors

There have been no changes to councillors during 2024-25. Cllr Mike Harker was appointed as Mayor at the Annual meeting of the Council in May 2024. Co-opted Councillors* are not eligible to take an allowance from the council unless they are elected as Chair.

The Local Authorities Members' Allowances (England) Regulations 2003 require the Council to publish details of the actual allowances paid to its elected Councillors for the financial year 2024-25. The Local Authorities Members' Allowances (England) Regulations 2003 require the Council to publish details of the actual allowances paid to its elected Councillors for the financial year 2024-25.

Name	Basic Allowance	Mayoral Allowance	Travel Expenses	Notes
Harley Balmer – Howieson	£0			Opted not to receive a Members Allowance from June 2024.
Jamie Blackburn	£440.4			
Katie Fryatt (Eliot)	£440.4			
Mike Harker*	£0	£440.4	£121.05	Co-opted Member
Kimm Lawson	£440.4			
Andrew Legge*	£0			Co-opted Member
Michael Siddle	£440.4			
David Wilson	£440.4			
Adam Zair	£440.4			
Lesley Zair	£440.4			
Sam Zair	£440.4			