



Introduction

The Bishop Auckland Town Council is proud to reflect on the achievements and contributions made throughout the 2025-26 municipal year. This has been the first year of the new four-year term following the local council elections in May 2025. Throughout this year 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 year 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.

Throughout the year the Council have been reviewing their Strategy and action plans, and we move into 2026-27 the Council will be launching a public consultation to see the views of the community. The feedback will be considered before the strategy is adopted in July 2026. The new strategy will see each committee responsible for delivery of component parts of the strategy with regular review and monitoring.

Bishop Auckland Town Council has an office based at Kingsway Court, 54 Kingsway Bishop Auckland. Throughout the year the council has undertaken a review of the staffing capacity of the Council and currently employs a full time Town Clerk, a full time Assistant Town Clerk, a full time Admin Officer and a part time Allotments Officer, Governance Support Officer, and Community Support Officer. The full complement equates to 4.7 Full time equivalent of staff.

As the 18th Mayor of Bishop Auckland throughout 2025-26, and being able to serve for a second term it has been a real honour. In this first 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’.

As Mayor I have had the privilege of attending numerous events, celebrations and various meetings and initiatives, both here in our Town, but also across the county, as a representative of our area. These occasions continually reinforce 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.

Our 2025 Youth Awards were a great success, sharing the stories of our young people. We have had great support for local events including the Heritage Festival, Remembrance Parade, Christmas Town, and Bishop Auckland Food Festival. We have remained committed to enriching the town’s social and cultural fabric.

It was heart warming to see over 50 organisations come together to consider applying to be the Town of Culture 2028, and it reinforced that everyone wants and is working towards a ‘Better Bishop Auckland’. We hope to learn if our expression of interest has secured us a place to prepare a formal bid in the early part of 2026-27. Regardless of the outcome the group are still keen to work collaboratively to enhance the cultural offer available in our town.

Our ongoing financial grants via Community Fund have enabled vital local projects and organisations to maintain their efforts and improve services available to residents such as a new defibrillator on Finkle Street, in partnership with Cornerstone, support to groups at Woodhouse Close Community Centre, funding to the In Bloom group for improvements to the Coronation Garden at the Railway station.

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 McIntyre Centre by Bishop Auckland College, has celebrated its first birthday, and the Kingsway Square Car Park is in operation, ground has been broken for the development of the new Market Place Hotel and the bus station is now in operation.

With continued work on other key projects coming to fruition, we are finally beginning to see the town’s regeneration unfold, fulfilling long-standing promises of revitalisation and growth. It is fantastic to see a cinema back in operation in the town. It was an honour to join the founder’s family, as one of my last official engagements as Mayor, for the 25th Anniversary celebration of the REELS Cinema company.

I give thanks to my fellow councillors, Town Council staff, and the residents of Bishop Auckland for their support during my term of office. It has been a privilege to serve as Mayor for a second term. Together, we have accomplished much, albeit with always more to do, and I remain 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 municipal year 2026-27.

Thank you

Cllr Sam Zair, Mayor of Bishop Auckland

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 annual inspections took place at all allotment sites in June and July 2025. 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 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.

Greener Together

The Council have introduced a new working group called Greener Together it will support the Allotments and Environment Committee in identifying, developing, and promoting initiatives that enhance the environmental quality and visual appeal of Bishop Auckland. The group will focus on green spaces, community planting, "In Bloom" activities, green matters, and the provision and maintenance of hanging baskets. They coordinated the community planting for the fixed flower beds for the spring planting in March 2026. They have lots of mini-projects planned for 2026-27.

Bishop Auckland Food Festival 2026

The Bishop Auckland Food Festival once again, 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 and were thrilled to be the named sponsor of the Children's Cookery School, which was a huge hit. Children were able to sign up on the day to join experts and make delicious treats. Over 150 children took part. This is a great event which is firmly places on the regional map, and it 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.

The town council also lead some 'Greener Together' initiatives from the new Arts Hub in the heart of the Market Place. We launched our new mobile 'Can Crush' to encourage events to recycle more aluminium cans. The can crush is inspired by resident David Johnson who since 2020 has been actively litter picking and collecting cans, which he crushes at home and then recycles. All of the proceeds from which he gives to the local food bank at Woodhouse Close and local churches for their community activities. In 2025 he collected over £791. We hope our station can help to raise more funds as well as helping the environment by recycling. Our station has already been used at event at the Rugby Club and will be out at the summer Street food markets.



We also launched a fabulous 'Plot to Plate' activity which saw families plant heritage seed potatoes, in recycled flower buckets from a local supermarket. The idea is that the families nurture and care for their potatoes, and then they bring them back to the autumn Horticulture Show which runs in tandem with the Heritage Festival. An allotment Association helped source the potatoes, and there will be prize for the most potatoes' and ugliest!

Goldwing Owners Club of Great Britain

Bishop Auckland Market were thrilled to welcome the Goldwing Owners Club of Great Britain for their annual gathering in August 2025. On Friday evening, when crowds filled the Market Place to view the impressive display of Honda Goldwing motorcycles. The Light Parade, featuring a procession of illuminated bikes through the town, drew spectators creating a truly memorable atmosphere. Both the Mayor of Bishop Auckland, Councillor Sam Zair, and the Town Clerk, Sarah Harris, were invited to join parade as passengers on trikes and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.



Bishop Auckland Remembers

The Council marked the 80th Anniversary of Victory of Japan Day on 15 August 2025. To mark the occasion people gathered at the War Memorial in the Market Place at 11am, followed by a service in St Anne's Church lead by Rev Matt Keddily which ended with participation in the national silence at 12 noon. We then welcomed attendees, visitors and observers back into the Church for refreshments.



Bishop Auckland Market Place was awash with people gathering for the Annual Remembrance Sunday Service November 2025 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. Keddily 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 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 2025



Due to the continued success of Christmas Town the Town Council once again partnered with Bridge Creative CIC and Bacchanalia CIC, who hosted an ambitious 4-day programme of festive fun. The event was bigger and better, with footfall exceeding 2024. The Ferris Wheel, and new addition of the vintage skid were as well as the ice-skating rink were huge successes.

In addition the 2025 Event included a parade funded by the Town Council, it brought together over 100 performers, dancers and drummers and community members with their lanterns. The cold wet night didn't deter the residents for coming out to support the festive magic. As part of the Councils Festive programme the Council supported

more than 25 organisations to host Christmas activities with their service users and members, this included children's Christmas parties, wellbeing groups, Auckland Youth and Community Winter Wonderland, and the Theatre Society and their annual Panto.



Family Festival

The town council supported the annual Family Festival at Jane Armstrong Park with some funding. The 2025 theme was Lego and Building. It was a fabulous family event with lots to see and do.



Bishop Auckland Pride 2025

The Council supports Bishop Auckland Pride as an important event that champions equality, celebrates diversity and strengthens community pride. It provides an opportunity to bring residents and visitors together in a positive, inclusive environment that supports the town's social and cultural life.

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 – Harvest Festival in the castle grounds, making the fair another well-rounded and successful day across the town.



Town of Culture 2028 Expression of Interest

The Town Council have coordinated an Expression of Interest which could bring the Town of Culture to Bishop Auckland for 2028. A range of partners, volunteers and community members mobilised to quickly work together to shape the submission.

This is an exciting step for Bishop Auckland and our growing cultural story.

We will know by late Spring (so early 2026-27) if the town is through to the formal bid stage.



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.



Our evening started with a red-carpet entrance to the Town Hall, followed by an evening full of emotion, smiles and stories survival, success and personal battles. The event also had nine sponsors local 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 funds 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 £1000. Examples of these have been:

- Bishop Auckland Community Partnership – support towards costs of social activities for their recovery support groups.
- Cornerstone Supported Housing – for Defibrillator.
- Lingfield Court for disability friendly seating in their community garden space.
- In Bloom – Coronation Garden development at Bishop Auckland Station
- Bishop Trains – Memorial Bench for David Million
- Royal Airforce Cadets – Archery Equipment
- Wear Valley Amateur Club – Support with swimming pool hire
- Durham Amateur Football Trust – Exhibition Materials
- Renaissance NE CIC – NPORS accreditation
- Bishop Auckland Rugby Union Football Club – for updated website.
- Woodhouse Close Community Centre - Men's Group activities



The Council also supports community organisations with core funding totalling over £16,000, examples of this include:

- Bacchanalia CIC & Bridge Creative CIC for the 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 continue to develop and deliver a full range of activities for children, young people and adults living of the Woodhouse Close estate, and the wider Bishop Auckland area, which has seen AYCC have 8861 attendances in 2025/26



- Kings James WI – for materials for the creation of Knitted Bollard Covers for Christmas.

The funding from the council has made a huge difference. It has:

- significantly improved people's mental and physical well-being.
- boosted cognitive health has been.
- decreased loneliness and isolation
- offered a renewed sense of purpose.
- enabled individuals to stay resilient during difficult times.

Anne Ramshaw
Woodhouse Close Community Centre Manager

- Woodhouse Close Community Centre to enable the centre to support salary costs of their Older People's Social Participation Worker, - supported room costs for older people's activities (3 per week), bought resources for 3 older people's groups (flower arranging, themed activities for Christmas, Easter, Halloween etc). It made a difference to as well as supported Community Christmas Lunch, to provide social activity for those on their own, and group attendees a festive feast and party.



- Wear Valley Community Action for provision of a range of social events within the community.

- Bishop Auckland College – week of community action materials for 'Bishop Auckland In Bloom' Display

The town council also have funded other projects such as:



- Floral Displays – the Town Council took over the funding of the town centre floral displays for 2025-26 this included, hanging baskets in Newgate Street, floral beds on Bob Hardisty Drive, fixed beds and planters in the Market Place, and fixed bed at the rear of the Newgate Centre.
- 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.
- Advice and Guidance in Co Durham – 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, via Citizens Advice Co Durham. This contract changed to Groundwork NE, who provide the Advice and Guidance Service the council provides space on a fortnightly basis, but for 2026-27 we are looking to bring this back to a weekly service.

Funding source	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Council Tax – The ‘parish precept’	£237,622	£404,699	£483,029	£671,734
Localisation of Council Tax Grant which is passed down from the Government via DCC	£5,762	£2,802	£nil	£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	2026-27
Band D (cost per year)	£54.71	£92.23	£109.10	£149.08



Bishop Auckland Town Council 2026-27 Budget and Precept

Budget 2026-27



Council Tax - Precept Band D*

In total
£149.08
per year

Which is
£2.87
per week



This is an increase of £3.33 per month

*59.9% of all properties are in Council Tax Band A

How every £ is spent



The 2024-25 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. Both the internal and external audit were passed without any actions for improvement.

The 2025-26 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 was a new compliment of Councillors following the election in May 2025. Cllr Sam Zair was appointed as Mayor at the Annual meeting of the Council in May 2025. Cllr Michael Siddle was elected as Deputy Mayor for the year.

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 2025-26. 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 2025-26.

Name	Basic Allowance	Mayoral Allowance	Travel Expenses	Notes
Andrew Legge	£0			Co-opted Member
David Wilson	£440.4			
Dickie Wilkinson	£0			Co-opted Member
Jasmine Fox	£440.4			
Lesley Zair	£440.4			
Michael Siddle	£440.4			
Mike Harker*	£440.4		£79.65	
Rob Elliott	£440.4			
Sam Zair	£440.4	£440.4		
Stephen Gray	£440.4			
Tom Redmond	£220.2			Appointed following byelection at November

Co-opted Councillors* are not eligible to take an allowance from the council unless they are elected as Chair.

