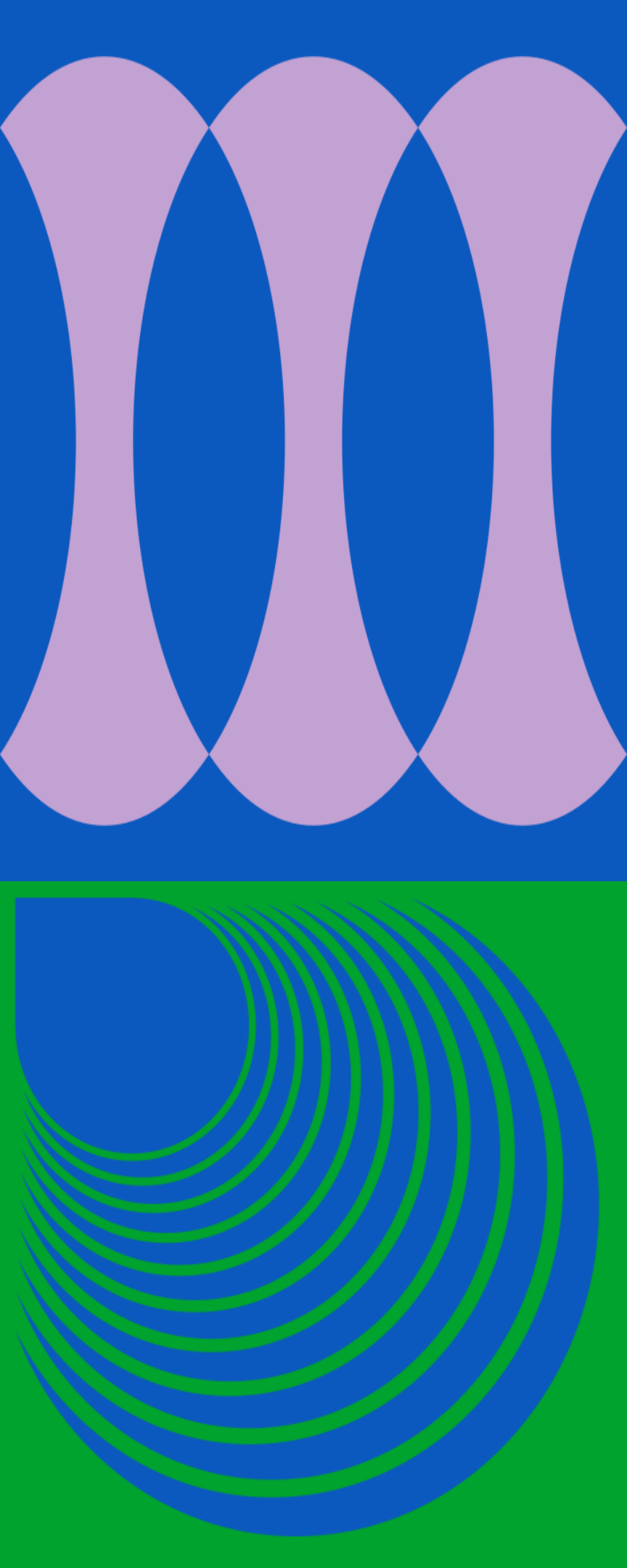
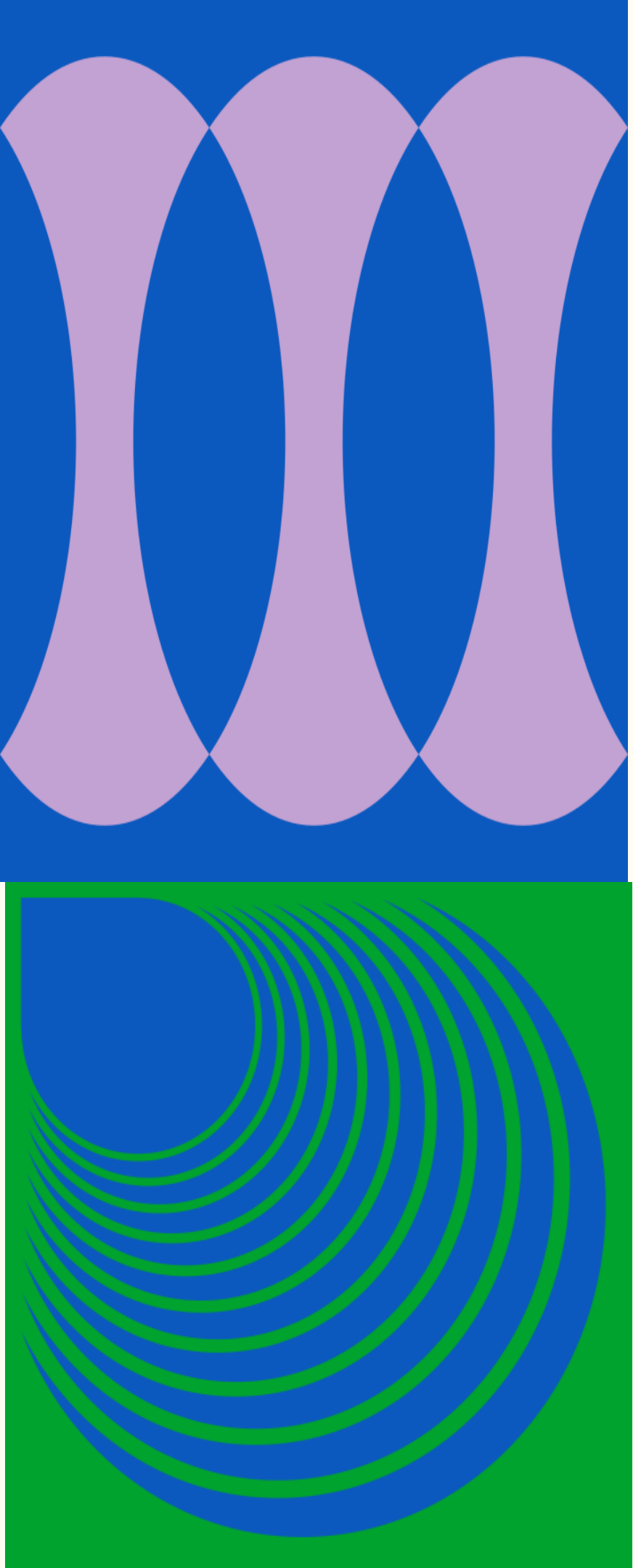




Development of the Darlington Autism Strategy 2025-2026



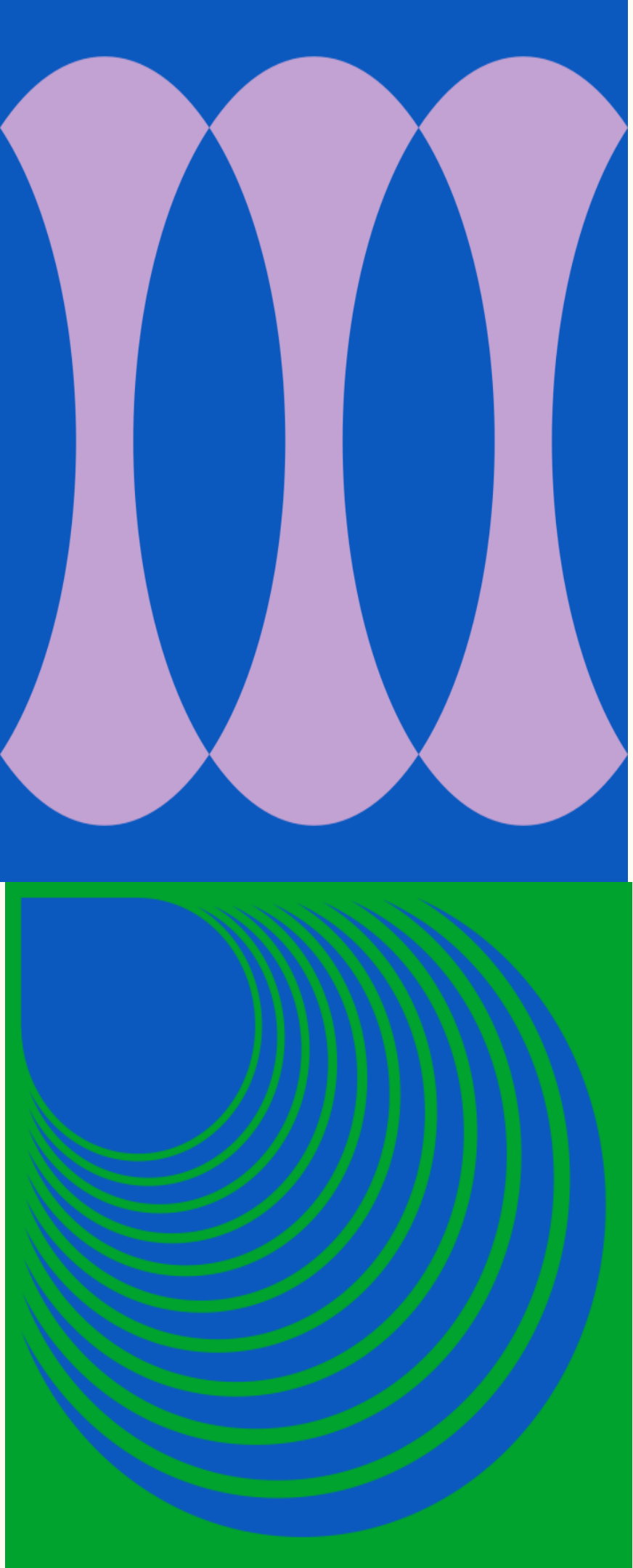
Objectives

Darlington is currently developing a local Autism Strategy that aligns with the national strategy “The National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults: 2021 to 2026.”

The local strategy aims to improve outcomes for autistic people across all ages by promoting inclusion, access to services, and understanding of autism within the community.

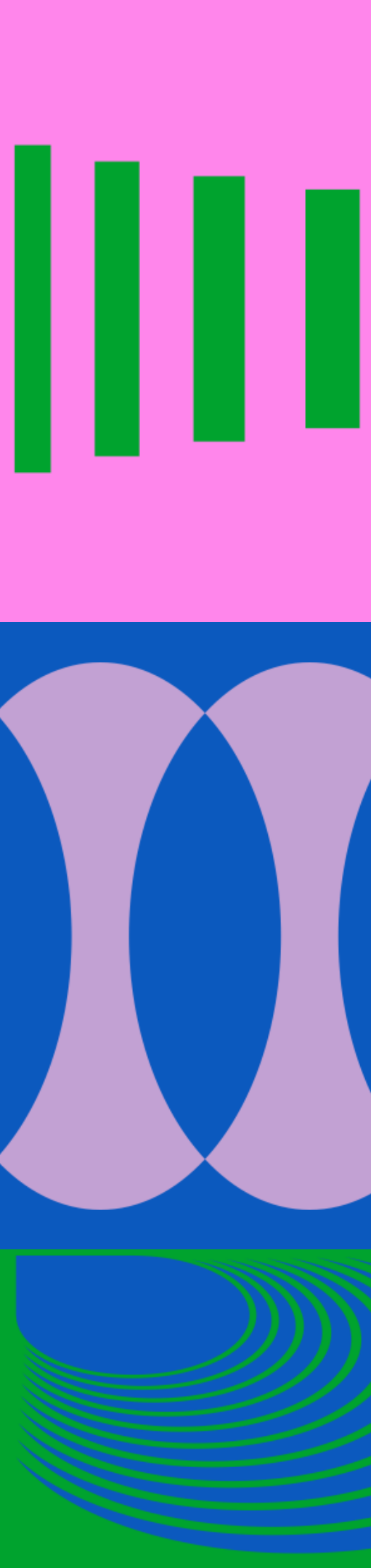
Key aims of the strategy include:

- Improving understanding and acceptance of autism.
- Enhancing access to education, employment, and health services.
- Reducing health inequalities and improving physical and mental health outcomes.
- Supporting autistic people to live independently and safely.
- Strengthening community inclusion and reducing isolation.



First Year Objectives

- Establishment of Darlington Steering Group to represent the community with purpose of developing an autism strategy
- Survey Darlington residents on key areas relating to autism.
- Review the feedback to inform the development of strategy.
- Draft strategy and consultation period.
- Finalise strategy
- Development of delivery plan.



Progress time-line

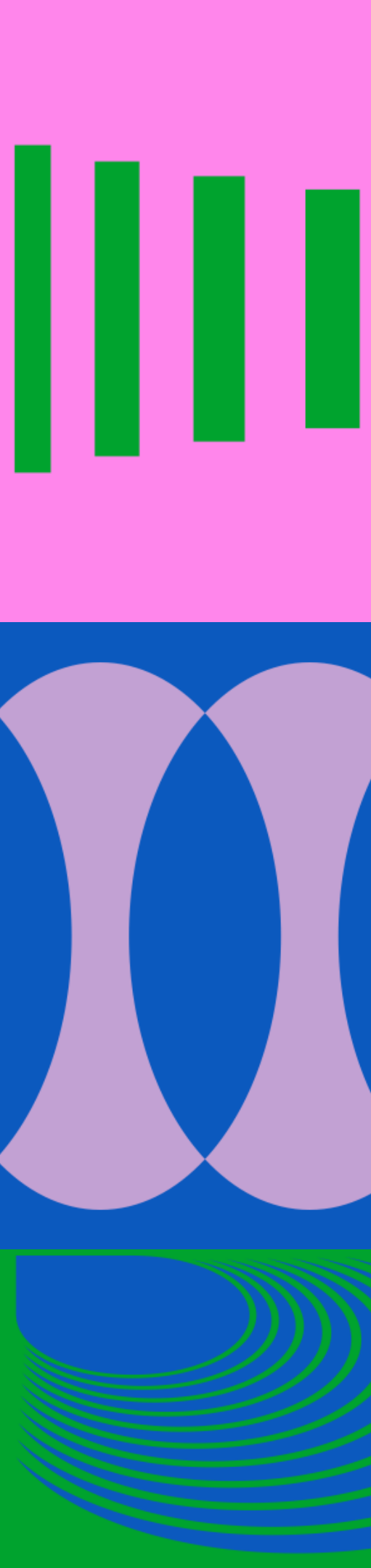
September Meeting: Continue to look at themes derived from survey results to inform the strategy.

November Meeting: Look at draft strategy & start to develop 1st year delivery plan.

January Meeting: Look at 1st year delivery plan.

January- March: Consultation period

*** March- April 2026** - Publish Autism Strategy & 1st Year Delivery plan.



Themes from survey feedback

Education

Employment

Involvement

Access to Support

Financial Support

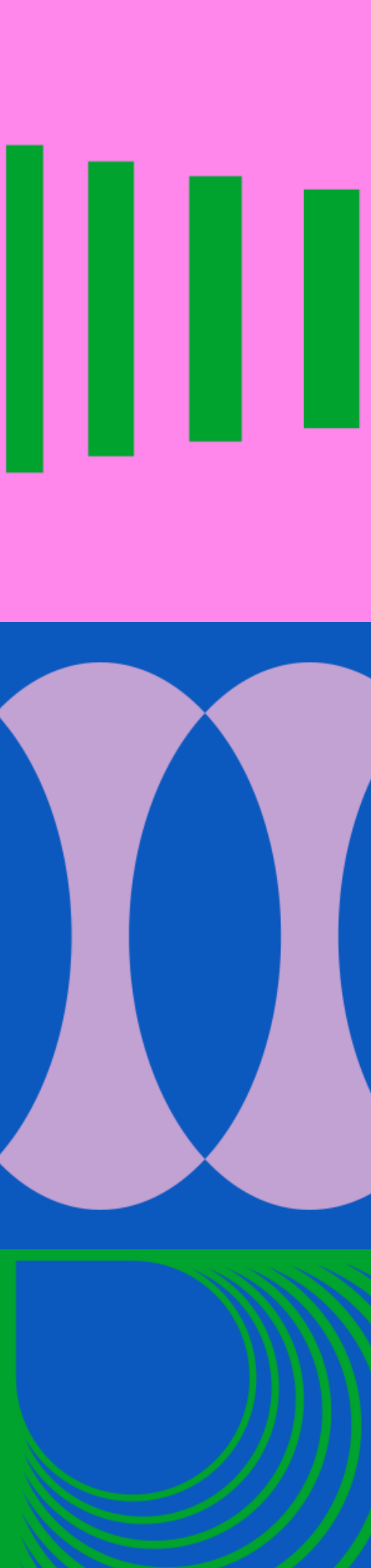
Sensory/ Quiet Spaces

Healthcare

Safety & Housing

Community & Belonging

Celebrating Autism



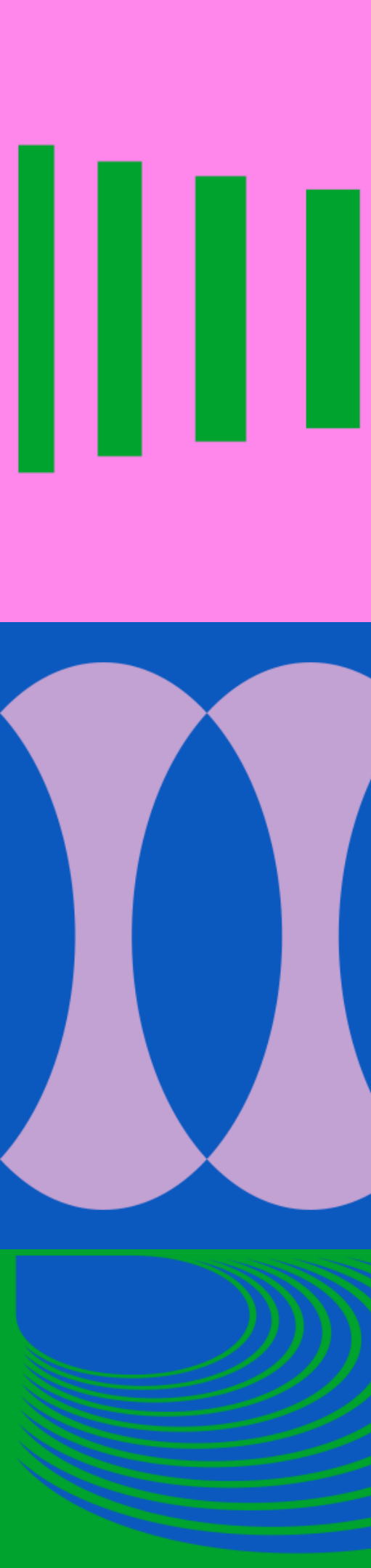
Key Survey findings

Employment

- Lack of opportunities (66%).
- People want more access to opportunities for autistic people.
- Linked to the need for better reasonable adjustments at work.

Education

- Better education opportunities to improve employment options.
- Better SEN support in schools – particularly around training for staff to be better at recognising SEN.



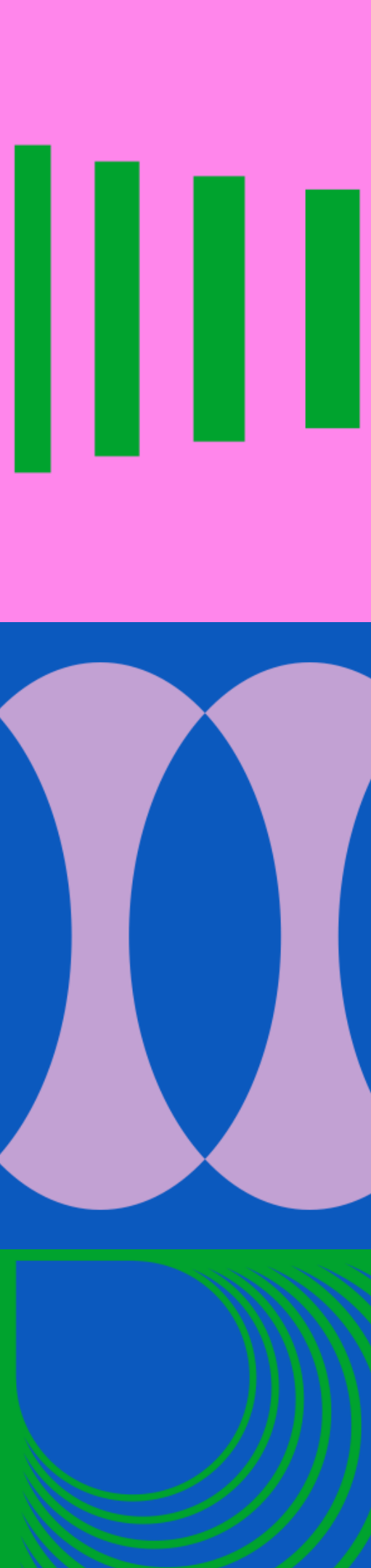
Key Survey findings

Involvement & Co-production

- 79.69% said they don't feel listened to or properly involved in decisions.
- Strong desire for co-production and inclusion of lived experience experts.

Financial Support

- 53.13% said they don't know where to get help with money, benefits, or bills.
- Need for clearer signposting and accessible financial advice.



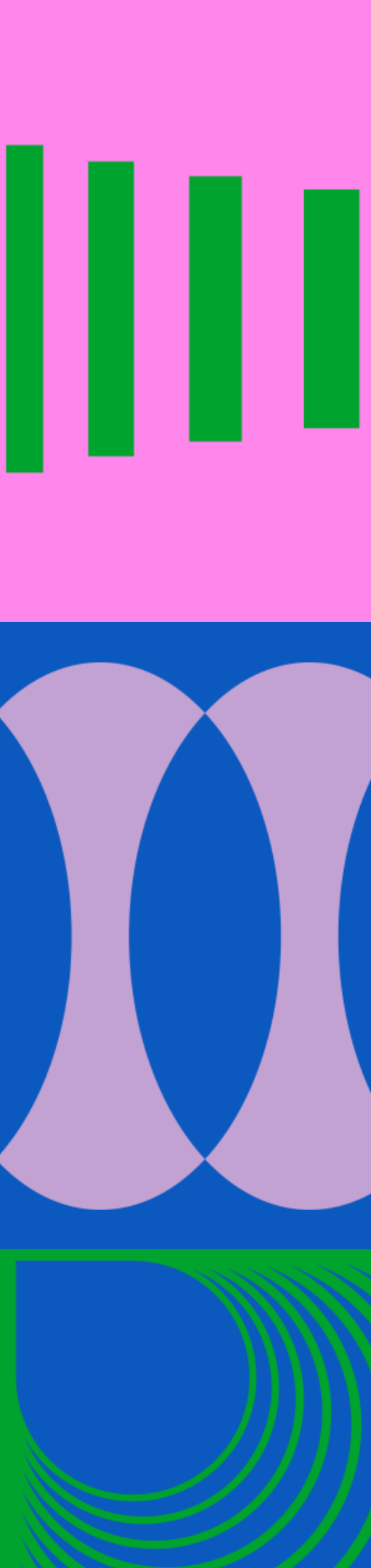
Key Survey findings

Access to support

- Many described services as slow, poor quality, and hard to access.
- Family carers appreciated support but noted it required persistent effort.
- Barriers include being questioned about needs, lack of clarity, and long waiting times.

Sensory & Quiet Spaces

- Requests for quiet, sensory-friendly environments in public and community spaces.
- Barriers to access include lighting, noise, heat, and crowded spaces.
- Emotional barriers such as anxiety, masking, and fear of judgment were frequently mentioned.



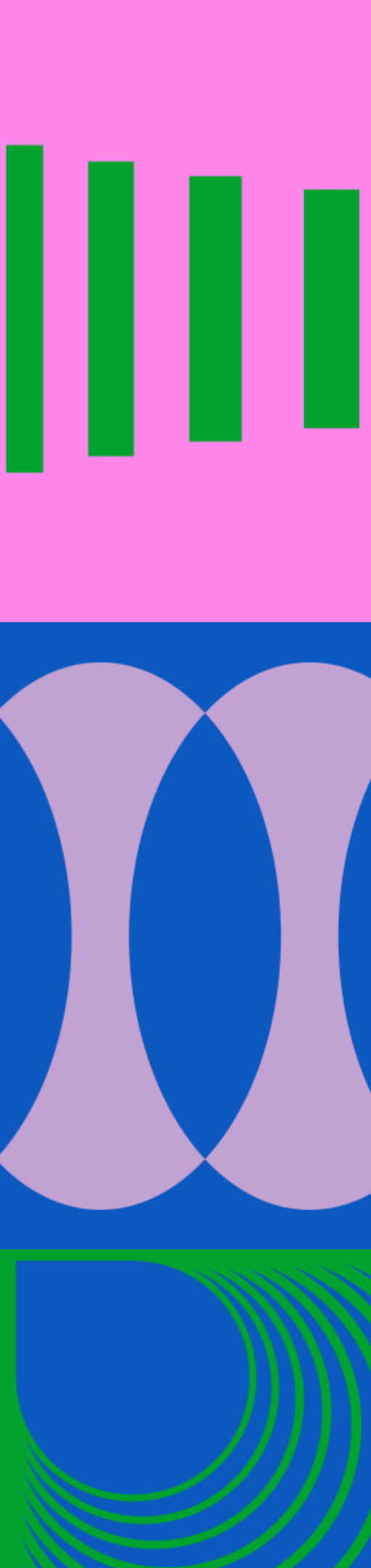
Key Survey findings

Safety & Housing

- Mixed responses: some feel safe and settled, others report bullying, anti-social behaviour, and unsafe neighbourhoods.
- Emotional safety is a concern, especially in public and social settings.

Healthcare

- Reinforced need for autism-specific training for health professionals.
- Respondents want more compassionate and informed care, especially during diagnosis and mental health support.



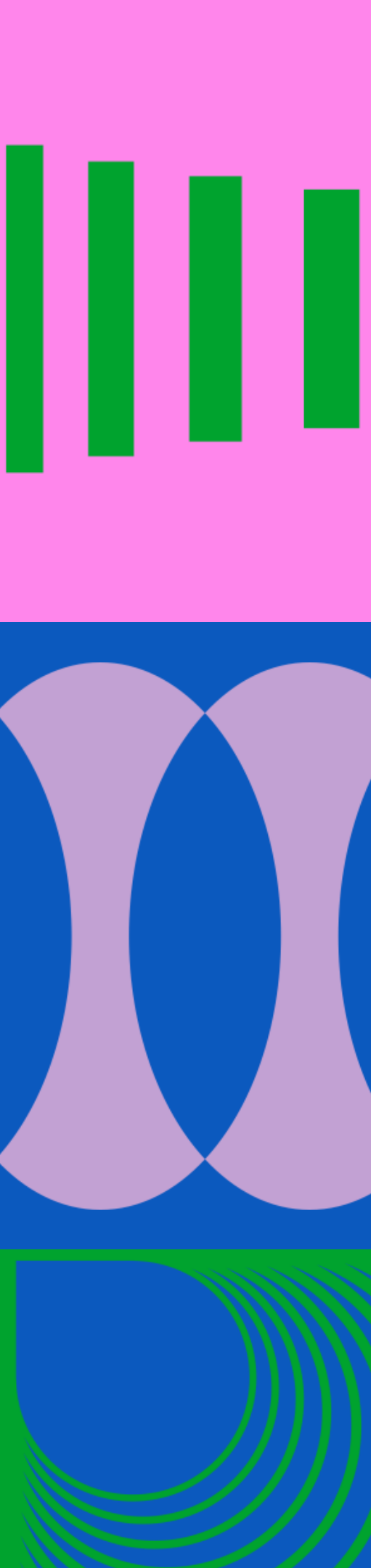
Key Survey findings

Community & Belonging

- Many feel isolated or lack spaces where they belong.
- Desire for inclusive community spaces and social opportunities.

Celebrating Autism

- Continued call to celebrate autism in Darlington.
- Suggestions included awareness events, positive representation, and community education.



Next meeting

Any Questions ?