

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting, held in the Waterside Building (Durham University Business School), Durham City. DH1 1SL at 18:30pm on Wednesday 21st May 2025.

1. Welcome from the Chair of the Parish Council

The Chair of the Parish Council Coun. Susan Walker took the opportunity to thank all those present for attending the meeting today and particularly thanked all residents who had supported the work of the Parish Council since its inception in 2018. The Chair wished all present good health and wishes.

2. Confirmation of the minutes of the last parish meeting

Residents confirmed the Minutes of the Parish meeting held on Wednesday 22nd May 2024 as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

3. Chair's update on the work of the Parish Council

The Chair of the Parish Council provided an update on work carried out by the Parish Council since the last meeting of the parish as follows:

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in the work of the Parish Council since our last annual meeting of the parish. It is a real honour to serve as Chair of this Parish Council – one of only three Quality Award status Councils in our county - and to work alongside the great team of volunteer Councillors as I do.

An enormous thank you particularly to those Members who have recently retired after such wonderful, long and dedicated service to our community. We wish them all our sincere thanks and the very best of wishes for the future. In doing so, we also bid a warm welcome to our new Councillors, recently elected following the local elections earlier this month. All of them are in no doubt at all about the hard work and commitment needed as part of the work of this Parish Council.

I would stress that our community remains a wonderful place to live, work and visit and the sense of community spirit and amazing civic pride simply would not be possible without the extraordinary voluntary work of the many partnership organisations we work with day in, day out.

Environment Committee

As many of you will know, one of the Parish Council's key priorities has been to keep our community as clean, green, and pleasant as possible. It is clear that environmental quality is a central concern for many residents and our message today is that we share those concerns and are keen to address them.

Firstly, through our Service Level Agreement with Durham County Council, the Parish Council funds an additional 10 hours of enhanced Neighbourhood Warden time each week. This investment allows us to tackle local issues more effectively and respond more quickly to concerns raised by residents. Our dedicated Wardens, Kirk Thiis and Antony Waterson, do an outstanding job—whether its addressing problems with litter

and bins, tackling low-level anti-social behaviour, or enforcing the Public Space Protection Order that helps manage street drinking in the city, nuisance begging and anti-social behaviour or dog fouling. Kirk and Ant also play a vital role in promoting the resident-led *"Shhh... 11pm to 7am"* campaign, encouraging late-night quiet in residential areas. From monitoring fly-tipping to supporting community initiatives, their presence on our streets makes a visible and valued difference every week. We will hear more about their work later this evening.

To support our ongoing efforts, two years ago the Parish Council also launched a voluntary contribution levy for local student landlords – an initiative we are continuing and designed to ensure that those who profit from rental properties also contribute to the upkeep of our shared community spaces.

The funds raised through this levy have allowed us to continue supporting key initiatives like the Green Move Out scheme and our Tidy Gardens campaign. These projects make a real difference—helping to reduce waste at the end of tenancies, encouraging better upkeep of front gardens, and improving the look and feel of our neighbourhoods for everyone who lives here. It is a practical example of how targeted funding can deliver visible, lasting benefits in the places we all share.

The Parish Council has also put the environment at the heart of its fundraising efforts this last year too. In doing so, we are delighted to have contracted the services of Claire Murray-Kemp whose focus has been to help us secure funding for new green roof bus shelters—an innovative project that combines practical infrastructure with carbon capture and visual greening of the public realm. These bus shelters are planned for the Elvet and Lower Claypath areas of the parish, where we know air quality remains a significant concern. If successful, this initiative will not only improve the street environment but also contribute to tackling pollution in some of our most affected neighbourhoods. We are currently awaiting the outcome of a Section 106 funding bid, which we hope will provide the resources needed to bring this project to life.

At the same time, we have been lobbying our North East Mayor Kim McGuinness on the rollout of new low emission bus services for our City, mindful that a significant level of pollution in hotspot areas such as Church Street in Elvet comes from emissions from buses.

I would particularly like to thank the many volunteers who have worked with the Parish Council over the last year to help make our city greener and more beautiful. Your dedication has been truly inspiring—contributing to the planting of over 75,000 spring bulbs, hundreds of trees, and supporting our ongoing work as part of the Durham in Bloom initiative. Thanks to your efforts, Durham City was once again awarded the Gold Award for Best Small City at last year's Northumbria in Bloom Awards. We are absolutely delighted with this recognition, which is a testament to the pride, care, and hard work that so many people put into looking after our wonderful City.

We are equally delighted to support the work of the Wear Rivers Trust and the recently formed Durham City Riverscape Community groups. These dedicated groups of volunteers work tirelessly to combat invasive species, litter pick along the riverbanks and even within the River Wear itself—helping to protect our natural environment, support local wildlife, and enhance one of the most cherished parts of our city which

forms part of the wider appreciation for our World Heritage Site. Their commitment and energy are truly commendable, and we look forward to working closely with them as they continue this vital contribution to the beauty and health of our riverscape.

We'll hear more about this later this evening so I won't steal Inspector Dave Clarke's thunder. However, the Parish Council continues to place a strong focus on community safety, working closely in partnership with Durham County Council and Durham Police to help keep our city safe and welcoming for everyone.

We are committing additional funding to support Operation Lentil, which provides extra police officers to Durham City throughout the year and provides a visible presence and reassurance to both residents and visitors.

We also remain one of the main funding partners for the Safety of Women at Night Hub – a desperately important initiative offering a safe space and practical help during the night-time hours.

Alongside this, we are continuing our funding for initiatives such as ShopWatch and the Durham City Street Friends, which bring together local businesses and volunteers to promote safety, prevent crime, and support vulnerable people. These initiatives reflect our deep commitment to building a safer, more caring city for all and we are really pleased at the noticeable impact of this investment as well as the introduction of the new Public Spaces Protection Order our Inspector Dave has championed.

Business Committee

The work of the Parish Council is perhaps never more visible than when we are out supporting and hosting events—and we are absolutely delighted to have played a part in some truly memorable occasions over the past year. We are proud once more to support the financing and delivery of some really iconic events in our City such as the Durham Fringe Festival – which this year marks its fifth anniversary - Durham Pride, the Children's Book Festival, our annual Christmas Festival, Uniformed Services Day, Lunar New Year and Durham Regatta, as well as some significant national commemorations including our annual Remembrance Day event, most recently the 80th anniversary of VE Day and so much more.

Most notably, we were honoured to play a small part in supporting the Royal Maundy Service, which saw Their Majesties The King and Queen attend a service at Durham Cathedral only last month, from dressing the City in bunting and blooms to putting on music entertainment and royal-themed food, the 17th April in our City was truly a day to remember.

These events bring people together, showcase the very best of our city, and remind us of the important civic role the Parish Council plays in the life of our community. Equally as important, they form the main tool at our disposal to increase footfall to our high street. Ultimately our aim is to drive increased footfall to the city, fill our shops with thriving retailers and get money behind the tills of the businesses who are the lifeblood of our city.

This year we are going even further with this initiative and working directly with businesses on the delivery of events within their premises too through the launch of our

Business Events grant fund and I would encourage all of our venues to take advantage of this additional funding.

Thanks also go to our retail consultant Graham Soult who this year has a significant focus on our behalf in filling empty units in our city.

Residents were most keen to express their thanks to the Parish Council too following our intervention to address the frontage of the upcoming STACK premises on Silver Street. We were delighted to partner with renowned photographer Graeme Hall in producing some iconic images of Durham alongside our colleagues at Durham BID and have these provide a special covering whilst internal works take place at the Silver Street premises.

Promoting and protecting the rich cultural heritage of our city is a core part of the Parish Council's work, and we continue to take that responsibility seriously. One of the most significant projects we have led on this year is the external restoration of the historic City Theatre building at Fowler's Yard. This much-loved venue is home to Durham Dramatic Society and has long been a cornerstone of our local arts scene. Through the work to gain planning consent and acquire the necessary external funding for the works, the Parish Council has not only helped to preserve an important piece of our built heritage within the Conservation Area, but also supported the future of grassroots theatre and cultural life in Durham; a really powerful example of how we can help safeguard the character of our city while enabling it to thrive.

This year we press on with a further heritage project that has really put our work on the map; that being our heritage blue plaque project. Over the last year we were delighted to focus on the amazing women's history of our City through our plaques celebrating the first female Professor of Durham University Professor Dame Rosemary Cramp as well as at 33 Claypath in our parish too - the site of considerable historical significance. 126 years ago, a Women's Hostel opened at this site to receive women who would go on to study for degrees at Durham University in the 1899/1900 academic year. It was the first opportunity for women to study on the same residential basis as men. The Women's Hostel was renamed in 1920 and would later become what we know today as St Mary's College.

Later this year, we will mark another significant individual in our City's history with a blue plaque; former Crossgate Councillor Sam Green. Sam is widely believed to be the first openly gay Councillor elected in England and the first openly gay candidate ever in an election in Great Britain. Sam's election to the City Council clearly broke a glass ceiling at a time when societal views on homosexuality were not as they are today and it is a point of great pride indeed for us that Durham City was the first place in Britain to elect an openly gay Councillor.

Planning Committee

What makes Durham so wonderful is its phenomenal World Heritage Site and our City's Conservation Area. As custodians of this medieval city of ours, it is incumbent on all of us to play our part to ensure that we cherish and preserve all that makes Durham City the great place it is.

Our Parish Council's Planning and Licensing Committee deals with literally hundreds of applications each year, involving the painstaking analysis of thousands of documents, technical drawings and much more. We are delighted to be supported with much expertise on this Committee and to have had a number of successes in preventing inappropriate development in our City, from safeguarding our greenbelt, preventing the loss of yet more family homes to stopping a developer in his tracks to ensure that a much-valued dentistry service on North Road was saved for our residents, never doubt the extraordinary impact and work of this Committee on your behalf.

Of course, these successes in planning have come in no small part thanks to the adoption of our Neighbourhood Plan. This again was a huge undertaking led by members of the Neighbourhood Plan Group – volunteers who gave hundreds of hours of their time to ensure that the future of development in our parish is decided by our community.

Finance Committee

A good Parish Council is also one which manages your money well. Whilst we have been successful in securing external grant funding to our city, over and above the management costs of the Council, the Parish Council's auditors have also commended the Parish Council for its excellent management and governance over the last financial year.

This formed part of the assessment criteria for our Quality Award and I am thrilled that this was highlighted as one of our Council's key successes.

At the same time, I am pleased that we also commit to providing financial grant support to many local community and voluntary organisations across our parish – from those which provide a hub for parts of our community to those organisations which work with and on behalf of supporting those who are most vulnerable – I am delighted that we have been able to support their work whilst also delivering on our priorities.

Conclusion

The list of work the Parish Council carries out on behalf of our residents is truly endless. While challenges arise daily in our community—as they do in any city—I believe we have come together as a parish to meet those challenges with determination, collaboration, and care. I'm incredibly proud that, since its formation, the Parish Council has proven itself to be an organisation that truly punches above its weight—consistently working hard to represent and improve the lives of those who live, work, and study here.

I'd like to end by thanking everyone who has supported and contributed to the life of our City over the past year. And above all, my sincere thanks go to my fellow Parish Councillors for their tireless voluntary service, and to our Clerk for his dedication, professionalism, and all the work he does to keep the Council running smoothly.

End of report

4. Durham Police update on the City of Durham parish area

Councillor Susan Walker welcomed Dave Clarke to the meeting and thanked him for his time in speaking with the Council. Dave began by highlighting that the two additional

officers as part of the Operation Lentil project in the City began in early April 2023 and that this additional visible presence around the City and its surrounding residential areas had been recognised by local residents.

Dave thanked the Parish Council for its provision additional funding for policing the City over the last financial years and highlighted the significant impact this has had. Dave advised that these additional officers have supported the City beat team with capacity issues and have ensured that issues were being dealt with much quicker than they were prior to the Operation.

Dave advised that Operation Lentil also included funding from both the Police and Crime Commissioner in the form of a Community Engagement Officer Ashleigh White as well as University in the form of Ken Judd. Dave advised that this additional resource is having a noticeable impact in addressing anti-social behaviour around the City.

Dave also highlighted the efforts of the Police in securing a Public Spaces Protection Order for the City against nuisance begging and anti-social behaviour. Dave thanked colleagues within DCC for their support with this initiative and for securing this – Dave expressed his hope that this would also be an additional tool for the Police to be able to combat anti-social behaviours.

Dave highlighted that he has established a City Operation Group – made up of many partner organisations in Durham City – and who routinely meet to address issues of concern. Dave advised that this Group is made up of University, Parish Council, County Council, third sector and church representatives and the Group's purpose is to work collaboratively with a care-first approach at all times in supporting individuals but also ultimately to ensure that there is also enforcement against any persistent anti-social behaviour and crime.

Dave took the opportunity to thank the Parish Council and local residents for their ongoing support with this Operation and time will tell what difference this makes for the City in addition to the work already being done by the Parish Council and others on the Safety Hub.

A number of residents attending the meeting thanked Dave Clarke and his team for their work and agreed that this additional visible presence was really having a positive impact on the City.

Councillor Walker highlighted the excellent work which Dave Clarke delivers on the City's behalf and thanked Dave for his presentation and his wider work in the community.

5. Questions from members of the public

Mr John Pacey expressed his concerns about the poor condition of Princes Street and asked if the County Council would soon be resurfacing this. Councillor Elizabeth Scott advised that she was aware that there were a number of issues relating to the structural integrity of part of Princes Street and that it is a top priority for the County Council to address this issue and they were working towards a solution on this.

Mr Simpa Carter advised that he was a lead member of the Hemp Garden Association and that the Association has been doing a lot of upkeep of part of Elvet Green and he hoped that the Parish Council could come along and see the work of his Association as

well as support them in making the best possible use of the site. Mr Carter advised that he had heard that plans were to be presented to the community for some form of new play park area in this location and he had concerns about this. The Chair thanked Mr Carter and his group for their work in this area and advised that the Parish Council will be kept updated as plans for this site progress but that the Parish Council had already submitted a supporting letter for the S106 funding application.

Ms Janet George took the opportunity to thank the Parish Council for all its work in the community and expressed her view that the community really felt listened to and their concerns acted upon since the Parish Council came into being. The Chair thanked Ms George for this feedback.

A resident named Greta raised concerns that the Gala Theatre has now closed on a Monday, advising that she understood that the County Council needed to make savings but felt that those savings often impacted on more elderly residents than any other demographic. She asked if the Parish Council would help to lobby to have the Gala re-opened on a Monday. The Chair advised that the Parish Council would follow this up on Greta's behalf.

Mr Stephen Ashfield expressed his concerns in relation to the new Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) to tackle nuisance begging in Durham City. Mr Ashfield expressed concerns that this adversely impacted some of the most vulnerable people in society and, as a resident of the parish, used his right to request a formal poll of the parish on this issue so that residents could give their views on this new PSPO through a democratic process. Dave Clarke highlighted the care-first approach that he and his officers take in response to anyone begging in the City and the Chair also highlighted that there is a lot of support available for individuals who need extra help. A number of residents also expressed their support for the PSPO during a debate on this question. Residents were asked to vote on the formal request for a poll of the parish and one resident only voted in favour of this. The poll of the parish was therefore not progressed.

Mrs Esther Ashby asked if the Parish Council had had any engagement with the new Administration at Durham County Council and whether, at this stage, it was clear if any decisions coming forward may have a financial impact on the Parish Council. The Chair advised that the Parish Council looks forward to a good working relationship with the new Administration and, at this stage, it was not clear what their priorities would be in relation to the City and any subsequent effect this may have on the City of Durham Parish Council or any projects the Parish Council may wish to progress.

Mr Kevin Creaghan took the opportunity to thank the Parish Council for their excellent work in encouraging the County Council to trim the trees back at Highgate which now affords the viewing platform at the train station a most spectacular view of the Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site.

Mr Creaghan also thanked the Parish Council for their work and involvement in the project to improve the cemetery at Providence Row next to the Sands. The Clerk highlighted that Councillor Victoria Ashfield had been leading the work on this project and the Chair thanked Mr Creaghan for this feedback and everyone involved in this work.

6. City of Durham Good Citizen 2025 awards

The Chair of the Parish Council presented the City of Durham Good Citizen 2025 awards to the Parish Council's chosen recipients, as follows:

Andrea Cairns

Our first recipient this evening is Andrea Cairns. Andrea's award is presented to her not only in her professional capacity as the Events and Customer Services Manager at Durham University, but for a lifetime - over 20 years - of service to the wellbeing and vibrancy of our City.

To say that Andrea goes well above and beyond the call of duty would be an understatement and this is reflected in the multitude of awards which her team at Durham University have either won or been shortlisted for under her leadership and support; from a North East Tourism Award, Service Excellence Team of the Year Professional Services Award and much more. Indeed, the City's Christmas Festival – the biggest retail event in our City's calendar and one which Andrea works 11 months on each year in addition to her day-to-day role – was recently rated as one of the best in the UK.

Andrea is completely central to the success of this 3-day festival and it is fitting that she receives this award following that accolade by Which Magazine last year. She is in Durham before the sun comes up when the festival is on, coordinating literally every aspect of the festival's delivery with her team in order to ensure that the 20,000+ visitors who come into our City leave having had an unforgettable experience and – crucially – spent their hard-earned money in our City's businesses. Through a series of events Andrea helps to deliver so well – from matriculation, graduation ceremonies, Lunar New Year, the Christmas Festival and so many more, it is hard to quantify her impact on the City's economy as a whole.

In addition to this, Andrea is a key contact internally within the University and stepped up to be the University's representative for both Durham BID and as a key point of contact for the delivery of the City's Durham Fringe Festival too. She is a transformative figure, tirelessly and endlessly making the case for further University involvement and investment in City events and her knowledge and experience have proven to be completely invaluable. There is nobody more deserving.

Matthew Booth

Our second award recipient is Matthew Booth. It is difficult to describe all of the things Matt and the team at Northern Deli and Store did for us here in the City. The business was set up as a community interest company and acted as a hub from which Matt sold products and goods

created by talented local artists/ individuals who do not have the capital to set up on their own but Matty wanted to support them in finding the confidence and capital to set up their own business.

At Northern Deli and Store, Matt provided a free-of-charge meeting space for community groups such as Climate Action Durham, he hosted a play barn in-house to give stressed out parents some rest and recuperation, he provided a free-of-charge home for our amazing Durham Pointers, during the North East Mayoral election Matt facilitated a hustings in his premises to bring democracy to local residents. In the 25th hour in the day Matt seems to find, he also chaired Durham BID and constantly looked at opportunities with partners to host events for families and act as an anchor for the high street.

When residents bemoaned the loss of Patisserie Valerie in Prince Bishops, Matty dived in and set up a new offering in that large premises which thrived as The Cafe at the Quarter. Similarly, following the loss of Robinsons on North Road, Matt took all the stock and equipment and quickly set this up in-house at Northern Deli. With the closure of the

Town Hall, Matt dived to my aid at short notice and hosted the Mayor's coffee morning as part of last year's Christmas Festival.

Finally, he quite literally got our Coach Friendly status as a City over the line within minutes when our Clerk contacted him. One of the criteria was for discounted food and drink for coach drivers who bring thousands of tourists into Durham every year - Matt's business offered a 20% discount and he took the hit on this - his answer to our Clerk at the time was "anything to promote our city".

There is simply no barrier he cannot overcome. We could not think of anyone more deserving for this award - Matt is a HUGE inspiration and we are delighted to award him this year's award.

Martin Hiles

Our third recipient of the evening sadly could not be with us this evening. Typically, Martin Hiles is away in another part of the world putting his water expertise to practical use. I am delighted that his colleague Tim Hudson is able to collect this award on his behalf.

When Martin re-located from Shrewsbury to Durham, he chose this city because of our river. Martin has always been an expert in water - lakes and rivers especially. Hence his frequent trips to Ghana to help them maximise the use of their waterways for transportation of goods and people. He was shocked to see the state of the River Wear. He decided on action: he believed that regular litter picking along the river banks and also from the river itself was something he could organise.

He developed partnerships with groups who had a stake in the river - notably the Durham Paddlesports Club and the Rowing Club. Together they agreed on action and gave themselves a name: The Riverscape Community. Now, after nearly three years, this body of people, supported by university volunteers and good numbers, turn out on the first Saturday of every month to clear litter on and beside the river. He submitted bids to the Parish Council who are proud to support this work. These have enabled the Riverscape Community to develop a logo, get leaflets printed and buy equipment, such as long handled litter pickers.

Martin is also silver-tongued and persistent and has now got the support of several businesses along the river, notably the Radisson, Revolution and Inshanghai. Not only do they often help in the removal of rubbish but he also persuaded them to provide refreshments to the volunteer teams. He has worked with the Fire and Rescue services to ensure safety on and off the river. The organisation is going from strength to strength and contributes greatly to the endless job of keeping the river as clear as possible and looking attractive for residents and tourists alike.

His concern for his adoptive city extends to its overall safety and resilience. Martin has been a key member of the Community Emergency Plan team, working to develop the plan for Crossgate. His help and support have been invaluable in ensuring the successful adoption of the Emergency Plan for the City. Durham is a cleaner safer and better place because of Martin and his initiatives.

Ashleigh White

Our next award recipient is one of our youngest award recipients ever and that is Ashleigh White.

This award, recognising Ashleigh's fantastic work in Durham City as a Durham PCC funded Community Safety and Engagement officer, showcases the value of partnership working and the impact on our communities of using agile thinking and innovation, to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour, making Durham City a safe place for those who work, visit and live in it.

By facilitating and funding this role, Durham Agency Against Crime and the Durham Police and Crime Commissioner clearly recognise the needs of diverse and complex communities and the need to provide an enhanced service to protect Durham City as not only a historic World Heritage Site, but also one of the country's top university cities. The role brings key partners together to create a collaborative environment, promoting safety and confidence in the police.

Not only has Ashleigh been instrumental in producing an evidence base that saw the implementation of the Public Space Protection Order, she also manages the Op Lentil collaboration, that uses additional funding for police officers from the Parish Council to enable a visible presence in the night time economy, reducing alcohol related antisocial behaviour and vulnerability in our vibrant city. She acts as the conduit between Durham University and Durham County Council ASB officers, ensuring that any persistent noise and antisocial behaviour is addressed quickly and robustly, with feedback given to those who are victims of the nuisance behaviour, ensuring that they are satisfied with the response to their complaint and that their concerns are being taken seriously.

Ashleigh also runs the City Operational Group, bringing together key partners to address vulnerability in the transient community and to ensure that individuals are not only supported and signposted to treatment, but also held to account for any antisocial behaviour, through criminal and civil procedures. This has seen a dramatic reduction in complaints from businesses and a feeling that the town is safer from the thugs and thieves that were making their lives a misery.

Kirk Thiis and Antony Waterson

Our final recipients of the evening are two people who need absolutely no introduction at all I'm sure. Our terrific Neighbourhood Wardens Kirk Thiis and Antony Waterson. As we have heard this evening, our partnership with Durham County Council has been critical in the delivery of many environmental initiatives across the parish area since the Parish Council's inception in 2018. At the coalface of all of this work are these two amazing young men who are a constant and reassuring presence in our City. As part of our Service Level Agreement with DCC to deliver an enhanced Neighbourhood Warden service to our City, Kirk and Ant do a simply incredible job. Each month we receive a report on their work and we are totally blown away by the scope of their role.

From the very start of their work with us they have thrown heart & soul into their jobs & gone way beyond expectations. From helping the homeless, dealing with environmental issues, enforcing our City's new Public Spaces Protection Orders, addressing low level anti-social behaviour, being the first on scene at a major incident in the City, helping to clear drains during recent rain storms we have experienced, these guys are simply worth their weight in gold and cannot do enough for the City.

Residents are constantly reporting positive feedback from their monthly reports and their swift action on issues which are most important to our residents.

I dread to think what condition our City would be in were it not for the efforts of Kirk and Ant. They make us as an organisation look super-efficient and are regularly rated highly in consultations with residents about the performance of the Parish Council.

This is a joint nomination as they are both equally great and I could think of nobody else more deserving than these two guys. We cannot thank them enough.

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

Signed by Councillor Susan Walker
Wednesday 20th May 2026