

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the Business Committee meeting held on Tuesday 16th September 2025 at 11:00am via Zoom

Present: Councillor Elizabeth Scott (in the Chair), Councillor David Freeman, Councillor Ellie Hopgood, Councillor Phil Layton, Councillor Rory Handy and Councillor Les Wilson.

Also present: Mr Adam Shanley (Parish Clerk), Mr Graham Soult (Canny Insights), Leah Newman (Durham Wine Week), Annabelle Chambers (Durham Police PCSO) and Gemma Ivison (Apex Radio Systems).

1. Welcome and apologies

None received.

2. Declarations of interest

None received.

3. To receive and approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 10th July 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 10th July 2025 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. Public participation

The Clerk confirmed there were no registered public participants for this meeting. The Chair noted that invited external contributors would speak under their respective agenda items.

5. Report on Business Events Grants – including discussion with Leah Newman on the launch of Durham Wine Week

The Clerk reported that, following the Committee's decision on 10 July to accelerate decision-making and delegate approvals up to £1,500 to The Clerk and Chair, uptake of the Business Events Grant had markedly increased. The application form had been moved online and supported by proactive social media, which together had improved accessibility and turnaround.

Since the July meeting—when £500 was approved for St Cuthbert's Hospice—the Council had approved a further six applications, bringing total allocations to £6,350 against the £8,000 budget.

Owing to strong demand and further live bids (including from Vino at Riverwalk and April Eleven at Fowler's Yard), The Clerk recommended virement of £4,838 from the City Events budget to augment the grants scheme and reserving a further £5,000 to support a city jazz festival now progressing in development. Members noted the rationale and the strategic benefit of leveraging events that drive quality

footfall and spend. Decisions on the two live applications would be taken under existing delegation unless any substantive objection emerged.

Leah Newman briefed Members on Durham Wine Week. She outlined her professional background (WSET Diploma) and the policy context around UK alcohol duty changes increasing costs for quality wine, reinforcing the case to support venues that champion responsible, sustainable wine offers. Operationally, the model mirrors Newcastle Wine Week: customers purchase a £14.99 wristband unlocking a dedicated, branded list across participating venues for ten days, with offers spanning by-the-glass, bottle and flights at venues' discretion; the value proposition is designed so most customers recoup the wristband cost within one to one-and-a-half glasses.

Recruitment of venues was in full swing and expected to continue to the start date (10 October). At the time of the meeting 27–29 venues were anticipated, including Vino, Crush, Market Hall, Coviello, Notch, Curious Mr Fox, parts of the Zen group and the Rabbit Hole, with suppliers providing trade-supported discounts and Durham BID's marketing team (Georgia) assisting on promotion. The Chair and

The Clerk commended the scale and pace of mobilisation and the quality of marketing, noting potential to emulate the success of Restaurant Week in supporting a struggling hospitality sector by lifting quality and spend. Leah confirmed she would circulate her deck and website links via The Clerk after the meeting.

6. Proposal to support expansion of the City's ShopWatch initiative – discussion with Gemma Ivison (Apex) and Annabelle Chambers (Durham Police)

Annabelle (Durham Neighbourhood Team) and Gemma (Apex) set out the current ShopWatch/PubWatch framework linking circa 65 daytime and night-time economy participants, CCTV, and police via a shared radio net. They evidenced the operational benefits: immediate alerts of known offenders (e.g., a suspect leaving Tesco and being intercepted on North Road following radio call-outs), improved staff safety, visible deterrence at store entrances, better reporting of incidents to build evidential trails, and coordinated responses that have contributed to reductions in theft and anti-social behaviour.

Alongside radios and the WhatsApp back-channel, officers are using Community Protection Warnings/Notices and Criminal Behaviour Orders to tackle persistent offenders, with city-centre exclusion used where justified; this has incentivised engagement with housing and drug/alcohol services among repeat offenders when opportunities to offend are removed.

Members discussed gaps in coverage. Annabelle highlighted charity shops (often lacking CCTV) as frequent targets for theft of clothing and confirmed their enthusiasm to join the scheme. The Clerk noted Outdoor Market traders' recurring concerns and suggested allocating devices to them as well; Annabelle cited a

specific trader who would benefit, noting the market manager has a single radio but cannot provide comprehensive coverage.

The Clerk summarised the Council's previous "catalyst" funding which had demonstrated value and urged a similar, time-limited approach this year. Based on indicative costs, the allocated budget should fund approximately seven to eight radios. With Members' support, The Clerk will place a proposal to Full Council next week to fund 7–8 additional handsets prioritising charity shops and selected outdoor traders, and will coordinate with Annabelle and Gemma to confirm the final list and secure best pricing. The Chair agreed this approach.

7. Report by Graham Soult on the filling of vacant premises in the City

Graham Soult presented his periodic "Retail Cupid" update covering activity since June, including maintenance of a live web summary of key available units to support enquiries, and recent engagement with Prince Bishops' asset team. He urged improved public-facing communications (hoardings/boards) to explain the redevelopment pause so visitors understand the context, and confirmed that meaningful retail openings there are unlikely before c.2030, though early conversations with retailers should continue.

Graham advised that he has facilitated further introductions, including with senior contacts at M&S and Waitrose, to explore a quality convenience-format anchor for the redeveloped scheme. He also outlined active requirements, including a national retailer seeking c.4,000 sq ft and a leisure operator (escape room, 3,000–6,000 sq ft), but noted a shortage of suitably-sized prime units city-wide despite strong demand. Recent activity includes interest in Riverwalk (constrained by a landlord preference for food/drink), two new indie enquiries (including one discouraged from opening another barbers), and support to a potential independent country clothing operator from Alnwick exploring a future Durham presence and possible short-term pop-up in Prince Bishops. He noted signs of buoyancy: a new café opening at the former Maple Patisserie, VINO's imminent opening, and the former Oodles unit under offer.

Councillor P Layton stressed the strategic value of securing an M&S Food or similar offer, citing lost footfall after the previous M&S closure, and The Chair concurred that even a food-only format would be welcome. Graham agreed there is a gap in convenience food provision for evenings/weekends.

The Clerk cautioned against further "vertical drinking" uses, remarking that Riverwalk's stance had deterred a high-quality Danish furniture retailer well-suited to Durham's demographic; he also commented on possible future users for 19 Silver Street (Mother Mercy proposed at ground floor; an HMO application for upper floors subject to appropriate soundproofing) and observed informal market intelligence that the former Barclays could become a boutique hotel, though viability would require a small, higher-end model.

Councillor D Freeman urged continued assistance to Prince Bishops tenants seeking continuity through demolition and redevelopment; Graham acknowledged unit-size constraints and suggested a gradual rebalancing away from over-concentration of hospitality would help accommodate retail demand.

The Chair thanked Graham for his extensive report and work.

8. Report on the work of Durham BID

A separate formal BID report was not tabled. However, during Item 5 Members noted the positive role of Durham BID in supporting Durham Wine Week marketing and amplification. The Clerk and the Chair both commended the quality and consistency of the campaign materials seen to date and the constructive liaison with BID personnel (Georgia). Any further matters relating to BID would be picked up at a future meeting or via liaison outside the meeting as required.

9. Events report – planning for Remembrance Sunday 2025 and Christmas events

The Clerk reported on Remembrance Sunday planning and insurer requirements. Insurers have requested a formal contract between the Parish Council and Durham County Council (DCC) setting out respective responsibilities before confirming event cover. The Clerk is pursuing this with DCC and has reiterated that, should the static Spitfire display proceed, DCC must take full logistics and liability for that element; the previous suggestion that the Parish simply “purchase” the display while assuming all risk was not acceptable.

Following police safety advice and in order to maintain emergency egress during crowded commemorations in the Market Place, the Spitfire—if used—would be relocated to Millennium Square rather than the Market Place. Coordination with Lumiere, given this is a Lumiere year, has produced a pragmatic installation plan that leaves Palace Green as the only area with infrastructure and schedules build-out from 14:30 on the day, i.e., after the usual conclusion of the Remembrance event.

The Clerk has also secured, via DCC’s events team, images of County Durham Victoria Cross and George Cross recipients to enable a striking light-projection display (similar to the earlier King Charles installation at Clayport Library), which is expected to generate positive coverage. Members noted the Durham City Remembrance Fundraising Dinner on 4 October still had tickets available.

Turning to Christmas, The Clerk confirmed that this year’s Christmas Festival will proceed with the University and the Markets Company as in previous years, while discussions continue about potentially moving the operation within the Cathedral precinct in 2026 subject to agreement on commercial arrangements. Members also noted in-train preparations for the city’s Lights Switch-On, and early liaison for Lunar New Year activity (for which a small budget is in place). The “Uniformed Services Day” concept remains under discussion and may or may not run this year; if not, c.£1,500 could remain available.

10. Dates of future meetings

Tuesday 18 November 2025 at 11:00.

There being no further business, the Chair thanked all attendees for their contributions and closed the meeting.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Scott'. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

**Chair of the Parish Council's Business Committee
(18th November 2025)**