

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the City of Durham Parish Council's Business Committee meeting held on Tuesday 18th November 2025 at 11:00am in meeting room 1.01 at Clayport library, 8 Millennium Place. Durham. DH1 1WA

Present: Councillors E Scott (Chair), P Layton, S Walker, E Hopgood, V Ashfield and L Wilson

Also present: Mr Adam Shanley (Parish Clerk), Mr Benedict Douglas, Mr John Lyons, Mr Richard Turner Mr Alan Patrickson as well as Mr Paul Howard (Durham BID) and Mr Graham Soult (Canny Insights).

1. Welcome and apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors D Freeman and R Handy. The Chair **accepted** that Councillor S Walker was attending the meeting as a substitute for Councillor D Freeman and that Councillor V Ashfield was attending the meeting as a substitute for Councillor R Handy.

2. To receive any declarations of interest from members

None received.

3. To receive and approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 2025

The Committee considered the minutes of the Business Committee meeting held on 16 September 2025. No amendments were proposed. The minutes were unanimously confirmed as a true and accurate record of proceedings and were **agreed**.

4. To receive any public participation comments on the following agenda items.

The Clerk confirmed that no members of the public had registered to speak in advance of the meeting. The Chair noted that invited external contributors would address the Committee under the relevant agenda items.

5. Presentation by Mr Benedict Douglas on a Proposal to Revive the Durham City Show in 2026

The Committee received a detailed and comprehensive presentation from Mr Benedict Douglas on a proposal to revive the Durham City Show, an event which historically operated in the city from the mid-1940s until the early 2000s. Mr Douglas explained that the proposed revival would take place in September 2026, provisionally scheduled for Sunday 13 September, and would be hosted at Durham Town Hall, subject to confirmation of final arrangements.

Mr Douglas outlined the core objectives of the proposed event, emphasising its role as a community-building initiative intended to bring together residents from across the city through shared participation in horticulture, produce growing, handicrafts and creative skills. He noted that such events historically fostered social connection, reduced isolation and strengthened community resilience by celebrating everyday skills and encouraging informal interaction between residents of different backgrounds and ages.

In addition to social benefits, Mr Douglas highlighted anticipated economic impacts, particularly the potential to increase footfall in the city centre on a Sunday during September, a period which currently has relatively limited programmed activity. He noted that the event would support local producers, traders and hospitality businesses by attracting visitors into the city centre and encouraging extended dwell time. Environmental benefits were also emphasised, including the opportunity to promote sustainability, food growing, allotments and nature-based activity through partnerships with local gardening groups and environmental organisations.

The Committee was informed that significant preparatory engagement had already taken place. Support in principle had been received from Durham Town Hall management, Visit County Durham, Durham Markets Company, local allotment associations including North End and St Margaret's, community gardening initiatives, the Women's Institute, Durham University representatives and a range of individual residents. Mr Douglas outlined a proposed steering group comprising individuals with experience in event organisation, marketing, horticulture, community engagement and communications, including representatives with lived experience of the original Durham City Show.

Mr Douglas presented indicative costings, estimating overall start-up costs in the region of £3,000, covering venue hire, insurance, display materials, publicity and ancillary costs. He advised that ticket pricing would be kept as low as possible to maximise accessibility, with free entry proposed for exhibitors, and that modest ticket income, sponsorship and stallholder contributions could enable the event to become self-financing over time. Members discussed issues including the appropriateness of charging for entry, the importance of city-centre location to capture passing trade, sponsorship opportunities, and the balance between Parish Council support and external funding.

The Committee welcomed the ambition and thoroughness of the proposal and recognised its alignment with community, economic and environmental objectives. It was noted that any financial contribution would require further consideration as part of the Council's budget-setting process and would need to be supported by a formal funding request.

The Committee **agreed** to note the proposal positively and to consider it further once detailed funding and governance arrangements were submitted.

6. Presentation on Jazz Festival 2026 Plans

The Committee received a detailed presentation from Mr John Lyons, Mr Richard Turner and Mr Alan Patrickson regarding proposals to establish a Durham Jazz Festival in October 2026. The presenters outlined their professional backgrounds and collective experience in music promotion, festival delivery, photography, arts management and cultural programming, noting that they had been developing the proposal over several months with advice from established jazz festivals and sector specialists.

The presenters explained that the proposed festival would run over three days in late October 2026 and would aim to position Durham as a recognised regional centre for jazz, sitting between small local events and major national festivals. The artistic vision emphasised diversity in musical styles, performer demographics and formats, combining local, national and international artists while encouraging collaboration between visiting performers and North East-based musicians.

Members were informed that the festival would incorporate not only headline concerts but also educational activity, including workshops and masterclasses for emerging musicians, alongside pop-up performances in cafes, bars and independent venues. This approach was intended to ensure city-wide engagement, create a visible “festival atmosphere” and generate economic benefit for hospitality and retail businesses. Potential venues discussed included the Gala Theatre, Redhills, university spaces, smaller independent venues and, subject to agreement, parts of the Cathedral precinct for specific performances.

The presenters outlined extensive preparatory engagement, including consultation with Jazz North, regional promoters, venue operators, business groups and previous festival organisers. A financial model had been developed identifying an overall funding requirement of approximately £25,000, with plans to secure income through Arts Council England grant applications, sponsorship packages, ticket sales and business partnerships. The importance of maintaining affordable ticket prices while ensuring musicians were fairly paid was emphasised.

Members discussed the value of grassroots cultural initiatives, the importance of free or low-cost entry elements to broaden audiences unfamiliar with jazz, and opportunities for collaboration with local businesses and organisations. The Committee welcomed the professionalism of the proposal, the strength of planning to date and the potential cultural and economic contribution to the city.

The Committee **agreed** to welcome the proposal in principle, to encourage its continued development, and to consider any future request for support within the context of the Council's events strategy and available resources.

7. Report by Graham Soutl on the Filling of Vacant Premises in the City

The Committee received a comprehensive update from Mr Graham Soutl on activity relating to vacant premises and retail demand within the city. Mr Soutl reported that demand from independent and national retailers remained strong, with a steady flow of enquiries despite wider economic pressures, but that opportunities were constrained by a shortage of suitable premises and delays to major redevelopment schemes.

Graham outlined recent enquiries from food, beverage, retail and service operators, including businesses seeking larger floorplate units that are currently scarce within the city centre.

Graham highlighted ongoing discussions relating to premises on Silver Street, Riverwalk, North Road and the Market Place, noting that while some units remained vacant, many were subject to long leases or redevelopment uncertainty, limiting short-term opportunities.

Updates were provided on specific premises, including 17 Silver Street, where interest had been expressed but significant refurbishment costs remained a barrier, and Durham Coins, where relocation options were being explored to enable business expansion while retaining a city-centre presence.

Graham also discussed the strategic challenge of over-concentration of food and drink uses and the importance of maintaining a balanced retail mix to support daytime footfall.

Members discussed licensing issues, including concerns about "vertical drinking" venues, and the impact of redevelopment delays on business confidence. The Chair and Members emphasised the importance of securing high-quality anchor retailers to counter negative perceptions about retail decline.

The Committee **agreed** to note the report and to continue supporting proactive engagement with landlords and potential occupiers to improve the vitality and diversity of the city centre and thanked Graham for his report.

8. Report on the Work of Durham BID

The Committee received a verbal update on the work of Durham BID from Mr Paul Howard, including recent marketing campaigns, business

engagement initiatives and support for city-centre events. Members noted the BID's role in coordinating promotional activity, supporting traders during challenging trading conditions and amplifying city-wide events through consistent branding and communications.

Discussion highlighted BID involvement in campaigns such as Small Business Saturday, collaborative marketing initiatives, and support for seasonal activity including Christmas events. Members acknowledged the value of BID-led footfall analysis, digital promotion and liaison with businesses across different sectors.

The Committee recognised the importance of continued collaboration between the Parish Council and Durham BID to maximise impact and avoid duplication of effort. The Committee **agreed** to note the update and to continue constructive liaison with Durham BID.

6. Events report

The Committee received a detailed verbal report from the Clerk on recent and forthcoming events activity within the city, encompassing Remembrance weekend arrangements, delivery of Lumiere 2025, Christmas planning and early preparations for Lunar New Year celebrations.

With regard to Remembrance weekend, the Clerk reported extensively on the planning and coordination required to ensure the safe and dignified delivery of commemorative events and reported that this year's event had been widely agreed as a tremendous success. The Committee formally thanked everyone involved in the planning and coordination of this event.

Turning to Lumiere 2025, the Clerk advised that close coordination had taken place to ensure that Lumiere infrastructure installation did not conflict with Remembrance events. He reported that a pragmatic solution had been agreed whereby build-out activity would not commence until after the conclusion of Remembrance commemorations, with Palace Green identified as the primary installation zone. This approach had enabled both events to proceed without compromise to safety, dignity or operational integrity.

In relation to Christmas planning, the Clerk confirmed that the Christmas Festival would proceed broadly in line with previous years, in partnership with Durham University and Durham Markets Company. He reported that discussions were ongoing regarding potential future relocation or reconfiguration of elements of the Christmas offer within the Cathedral precinct from 2026 onwards, subject to agreement on commercial and operational arrangements.

The Committee was also updated on preparations for the city's Christmas Lights Switch-On, including coordination with performers, sponsors and safety partners, and on the continuation of Christmas Frontage Awards as

a means of encouraging business participation and enhancing the city centre's festive appearance. Members acknowledged the importance of these initiatives in supporting footfall and trader confidence during the key trading period.

Looking ahead, the Clerk advised that early liaison had commenced regarding Lunar New Year celebrations, with a modest budget already allocated. He emphasised the importance of forward planning to secure performers, infrastructure and sponsorship, and to ensure appropriate cultural representation and community engagement.

The Committee thanked the Clerk for the comprehensive report and acknowledged the complexity of event delivery. The Committee **agreed** to note the report and provisionally agreed to support the following events in FY 2026-27 at a total cost of just over £45,000:

Event name (2025/26)	Date of event
Durham Pride	May-26
Durham Regatta	May 16-17th 2026
Durham FRINGE Festival	Jul-26
August event - Walking with dinos	Aug-26
Durham Folk Festival	18th - 20th September 2026
Durham Jazz Festival	October 2027 (forward planning for finance March 2027)
Monster takeover/ LED drummers/ Cathedral showing weekend	Early October 2026
Remembrance Sunday	Sunday 8th November 2026
Christmas light switch on	Last weekend in November 2026
Christmas Festival	Early December 2026
Lunary New Year 2027	Feb-27

7. Dates of future meeting(s) of this Committee:

20th January 2026 – 11:00am

17th March 2026 – 11:00am

19th May 2026 – 11:00am

Due to the confidential nature of the following items, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and the public were excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in 3 paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the LGA 1972 Act and section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. At this point in time the press and the public were asked to leave the room.

8. Discussion on Business Committee work programme/ strategy / budget for 2026/27

The Chair highlighted that the aim of the Parish Council's strategy is to give local residents, Councillors and Officers a clear understanding of what the council is trying to achieve and how it intends to deliver its aims and objectives.

The strategy sets out what the areas of development or change the Council intends to focus on over the next year outlining those areas of service that are identified as priority aims and objectives.

The Clerk reminded Members that the City of Durham Parish Council has five overarching priorities for our area:

1. Being an ambitious voice for the city
2. Enhancing the physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish
3. Upholding the Neighbourhood Plan and representing the parish on planning matters
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.

Councillors were reminded that the Parish Council has agreed to formulate its strategy for 2026/27 ahead of the budget setting process in November 2025.

As part of this, all Parish Council Committees are being asked to agree their priorities for the forthcoming financial year so that this can feed into the Parish Council's budget agreement.

Committee priorities

The following priorities were agreed for the Business Committee in 2026/27:

Business Committee

Council priorities 2026/27	Business priorities 2026/27	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
1. Being an ambitious voice for the city	Engaging with local businesses, including improving the visitor economy	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
2. Enhancing physical and mental wellbeing	Promoting responsible and environmentally sound businesses	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy

of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish		
3. Upholding the neighbourhood plan and representing the parish on planning matters.	Supporting new businesses and attempting to fill empty units across the City and promoting the overnight stay economy/ businesses across the city	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish	Marketing Durham as a place to visit, particularly the overnight stay sector	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy Theme 5: A City with a modern and sustainable transport infrastructure
	Promoting footfall in the city centre and encouraging a variety of businesses to ensure wide range of choice for visitors.	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.	Reducing food miles by encouraging the use of local suppliers and emerging green technologies and services	Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy Theme 6: A City with an enriched community life

Following on from this discussion, Members unanimously agreed to recommend the following budget for its work in FY 2026/27 to Full Council in November:

Business Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Increasing footfall through events	
Hosting events in Durham City (Remembrance Sunday, Christmas events, D-Day Anniversary, miscellaneous).	£45,000.00
Sponsoring community events with local businesses – a specific focus on improving the early evening economy	£15,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Improving shop frontages in the City	
Christmas Frontage Awards (previously under Environment Committee)	£1,500.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2026-27 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£61,500.00

In closing the meeting, the Chair expressed her sincere thanks to Mr Graham Soult for his years of work with the Parish Council and paid particular tribute to his work in supporting the vitality and viability of the City centre. This was echoed by the Committee.

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. Soult'. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council's Business Committee
Tuesday 20th January 2026