City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the City of Durham Parish Council's Business Committee meeting held on 19th May 2026 at the meeting room in Clayport library, Durham. DH1 1WA.

Present: Councillors E Scott (in the Chair), E Hopgood, P Layton and M Wilkes.

Also present: Mr Adam Shanley (Parish Clerk), Paul Howard (Durham BID Manager), Miranda Warmington and Bethany Malyan-Fisher (April-11) and Louisa McLean (Durham Markets Company).

1. **Welcome and apologies**

Apologies were received and accepted from Councillors L Wilson and D Freeman. The Chair accepted that Councillor M Wilkes was attending the meeting as a substitute for Councillor D Freeman.

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 17th March 2026**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17th March 2026 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

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

None received.

5. Business viewpoints: discussion with April-11 on their new business venture in Durham City

The Chair welcomed Miranda Warmington and Bethany Malyan-Fisher to the meeting and invited them to provide Members with a presentation on the development of their business, April 11.

Miranda and Bethany explained that April 11 had been established as an independent shop and creative community space in Cottage 1 at Fowlers Yard, in the heart of Durham City. They described their ambition to create considerably more than a traditional retail outlet, providing a welcoming and distinctive space which brought together artists, makers, customers and people interested in learning new creative skills. The business had opened in November 2025 and had quickly developed into a growing hub for the creative community in Durham and across the wider North East.

They advised Members that April 11 championed the work of both emerging and established independent makers from across the North of England and Scotland.

The business provided a retail platform for a broad range of high-quality, independently produced items, including ceramics, original art and prints, textiles, stationery, decorative homeware and handmade gifts. They explained that the products were selected for their quality, individuality and craftsmanship, with an emphasis upon slow, thoughtful production and supporting independent British artists and makers.

Bethany outlined the creative and design-led element of the business, explaining that April 11 also incorporated an in-house design studio. The studio was intended to support the development of the business's own collection of printed homewares, including wallpaper, cushions and lampshades, alongside the work already stocked from other artists and makers. Members heard that this combination of retail, design and creative participation enabled April 11 to offer a distinctive proposition within Durham City and supported the wider development of the local creative economy.

Miranda and Bethany explained that workshops and events were central to the purpose of April 11. The space hosted practical creative sessions led by skilled artists and makers, enabling participants to try activities such as ceramics, painting and other traditional and contemporary craft techniques. They emphasised that the workshops were intended to be relaxed, accessible and welcoming to people with different levels of experience, including those who had not previously considered themselves artistic. The programme provided opportunities for people to learn new skills, build confidence, meet others and experience the social and wellbeing benefits associated with creative activity.

Members heard that April 11 had sought to build a genuine creative community around the business rather than operating solely as a shop. Miranda and Bethany explained that the business provided artists with opportunities to display and sell their work, participate in events and engage directly with new audiences. This was particularly valuable for emerging makers who might otherwise find it difficult to secure suitable retail space or raise awareness of their work. They considered that the collaborative nature of the business was helping to strengthen relationships between artists, customers and other creative organisations while establishing Fowlers Yard as an increasingly important destination for arts and crafts within Durham.

They also discussed the wider contribution the business was making to the city centre. By offering independent retail, exhibitions, workshops and special events within one venue, April 11 was helping to attract additional visitors to Fowlers Yard and encourage people to spend longer in Durham. Members heard that the business's events programme supported activity beyond conventional daytime shopping and complemented the Parish Council's objectives of increasing footfall, strengthening the local economy, improving Durham's appeal as a family-friendly destination and supporting the transition between the daytime and early-evening economy.

Miranda and Bethany expressed their sincere thanks to the Parish Council for the support April 11 had received through the Business Events Grant Fund. They explained that the grants had enabled the business to develop and deliver events which would otherwise have been more difficult to fund during the early stages of establishing the enterprise. The support had assisted April 11 in engaging artists,

purchasing materials, promoting activities and making creative events accessible to a wider audience.

They advised that the grant funding had provided benefits beyond the individual events supported. The activities had introduced new customers to the business and Fowlers Yard, increased awareness of the makers represented within the shop and helped develop a regular audience for future workshops and creative events. They considered that the funding had demonstrated the positive impact relatively modest grants could make when directed towards independent businesses seeking to organise events which benefited both the business itself and the wider city. The Parish Council's Business Events Grant Fund had been established specifically to support one-off business events capable of increasing footfall, encouraging customer engagement and contributing to the vibrancy of Durham City.

Miranda and Bethany concluded by reflecting positively upon the progress April 11 had made since opening and their ambitions for its continued development. They wished to expand the programme of workshops and events, strengthen relationships with artists and makers, develop the in-house collection and continue establishing April 11 as an inclusive destination for creativity within Durham. They reiterated their appreciation to the Parish Council for recognising the importance of independent businesses and for providing practical support through the grant scheme during an important period of growth.

Members thanked Miranda and Bethany for their informative presentation and congratulated them on the progress made in establishing April 11 as a distinctive independent business and creative hub. The Council welcomed the contribution the business was making to Fowlers Yard, the city's cultural offer and the wider local economy, and noted with particular appreciation the positive impact of the Business Events Grant Fund in supporting creative activity, attracting visitors and providing opportunities for local and regional artists.

6. Report by Louisa McLean on the 175th Anniversary of the Durham Markets Company

The Chair welcomed Louisa McLean from Durham Markets Company to the meeting and invited her to provide Members with a presentation on the programme of events being organised to commemorate the 175th anniversary of Durham Markets Company.

Members noted the historic importance of Durham Market to the city's commercial, cultural and civic life and welcomed the opportunity to hear about the celebrations planned to mark this significant milestone.

Louisa began by outlining the history of Durham Markets Company, explaining that the organisation had been at the heart of Durham City since 1850 and continued to play an integral role in supporting independent traders, attracting visitors and contributing to the vitality of the city centre. She reflected on the Market's evolution over the past 175 years, highlighting its resilience in adapting to changing shopping habits whilst retaining its character as one of the city's most recognisable and valued institutions.

She explained that the anniversary celebrations were intended not only to celebrate the Market's rich heritage but also to showcase its continuing importance to the local economy and encourage new generations to visit and support independent businesses within the Market Hall.

Members heard that a comprehensive programme of events had been developed to celebrate the anniversary throughout the year, culminating in a free three-day "Through the Decades" Weekender celebrating the history of Durham Market from its Victorian origins through to the present day. Louisa explained that the programme would feature live music, historical displays, family entertainment, vintage attractions, heritage exhibitions, themed performances and interactive activities designed to appeal to visitors of all ages.

The celebrations would provide an opportunity to showcase the Market's heritage whilst increasing footfall within both the Market Hall and the wider city centre.

Louisa provided further detail on the planned Heritage Day, explaining that this would focus specifically on the history of Durham Market and its contribution to the development of Durham City over the last 175 years. The event would include historical exhibitions, archive material, opportunities to learn about the Market's past and activities celebrating the traders, communities and generations of residents who had helped shape the Market's long history. She explained that preserving and promoting this heritage formed an important part of ensuring that the Market remained relevant and valued for future generations.

Louisa expressed her sincere thanks to the Parish Council for its continued support of Durham Markets Company over many years and, in particular, for approving a Business Events Grant of £1,500 towards the Heritage Day celebrations. She explained that the grant funding had provided valuable support in helping to deliver an ambitious programme of heritage activities and had enabled the organisers to enhance the quality and scale of the event for residents and visitors alike. She commented that the Parish Council's continued investment in business events had demonstrated its commitment to supporting the city centre economy, celebrating Durham's heritage and encouraging increased footfall for independent businesses.

Members welcomed the presentation and congratulated Louisa and the wider Durham Markets Company team on developing an ambitious programme of anniversary events. The Council recognised the significant contribution Durham Market continued to make to the city's economic and cultural life and welcomed the opportunity for residents and visitors to celebrate 175 years of one of Durham's most important historic institutions.

Members were pleased that the Parish Council had been able to support the Heritage Day through the award of a £1,500 Business Events Grant, recognising the positive benefits the celebrations would bring to Durham City.

7. Report by Mr Paul Howard on the work of Durham BID

The Chair welcomed Paul Howard, Durham BID Manager, to the meeting and invited him to provide Members with an update on the work of Durham BID.

Paul Howard reported that Durham City continued to perform strongly despite the challenging national retail environment. Members heard that the latest data showed city centre footfall had increased by 7.5% over the previous twelve months, reflecting growing confidence in Durham as a destination for shopping, hospitality, culture and tourism.

He explained that this increase in visitor numbers was translating into tangible benefits for local businesses, with cafés, restaurants, retailers, visitor attractions and hotels all reporting stronger levels of trade. Hotel occupancy rates were also continuing to rise as more visitors chose Durham as a short-break destination, and demand for commercial premises within the city remained exceptionally strong, with significant interest from independent businesses and new operators looking to establish themselves in Durham.

Paul commented that these figures demonstrated the resilience of Durham's economy at a time when many town and city centres nationally continued to face considerable challenges.

Members were provided with an update on Durham BID's programme of events for 2026 and heard that considerable work had been undertaken to develop activities capable of increasing footfall and encouraging visitors to spend longer within the city centre. Paul Howard highlighted the forthcoming Enchanted Durham LEGO Trail, which would take place between 1st and 15th August 2026. Paul explained that the trail had been designed to provide a free activity for families during the school holidays, encourage exploration of the city centre, increase dwell time and generate significant regional publicity through an extensive marketing campaign.

Paul also updated Members on Durham BID's continued commitment to supporting major cultural events within the city. He advised that the BID Board had considered funding applications for both Durham Pride and the Durham Fringe Festival, recognising the substantial contribution both events made to increasing visitor numbers, supporting BID levy-paying businesses and enhancing Durham's reputation as a vibrant cultural destination.

Members heard that Durham Pride was expected to attract around 10,000 visitors across its two-day programme, whilst the Durham Fringe Festival continued to grow year-on-year, with the 2026 festival expanding to eleven venues and almost 300 performances, further strengthening Durham's cultural offer during the summer months. Paul Howard emphasised that Durham BID remained committed to working alongside event organisers and partners to maximise the economic impact of these festivals for city centre businesses.

Paul also advised Members that progress remained frustratingly slow on both the STACK Durham development and the wider Milburngate scheme. Whilst there continued to be considerable interest in both developments and their long-term contribution to the city centre economy, work had not progressed as anticipated.

Paul expressed the view that both schemes remained strategically important to the future growth of Durham City and that Durham BID would continue working proactively with all parties to support their successful delivery.

Members thanked Paul for his presentation.

8. Proposal by Councillor E Hopgood on a new Durham City walk social media initiative.

The Chair invited Councillor E Hopgood to present a proposal for a new social media initiative aimed at promoting walking routes and encouraging greater exploration of Durham City.

Councillor E Hopgood explained that the proposal had been inspired by a similar initiative she had experienced whilst visiting China, where curated walking routes promoted through social media had successfully encouraged visitors to explore beyond the main tourist attractions and discover lesser-known streets, businesses and places of interest. She considered that a comparable initiative could be developed for Durham City, making use of high-quality photography, mapped walking routes and engaging online content to showcase the city's unique heritage, green spaces, independent businesses and hidden gems.

Members heard that the concept would involve creating a dedicated social media page featuring a series of themed walks across the city, supported by photographs, historical information, points of interest and suggested routes. Councillor E Hopgood explained that the initiative would encourage visitors to spend longer in Durham, increase circulation throughout the city centre and direct people towards areas and businesses which might otherwise be overlooked. She believed the project had the potential to complement the work already being undertaken by Durham BID, the Parish Council and other partners to increase footfall and strengthen the city's visitor economy.

Councillor E Hopgood advised that she would be willing to lead the project on behalf of the Parish Council, working closely with Georgia at Durham BID to develop and manage the content. She explained that photographs and other material could be gathered collaboratively and that the initiative could be delivered using existing social media platforms without any financial cost to the Parish Council. The only commitment required would be her own time in developing the content and coordinating the project with Durham BID.

Members welcomed the innovative proposal and recognised the potential benefits of using social media to encourage visitors and residents to explore more of the city, increase dwell time and support businesses across a wider geographical area. The Committee agreed that the concept aligned well with the Parish Council's objectives of promoting tourism, supporting the local economy and celebrating Durham City's heritage and attractions.

The Chair thanked Councillor E Hopgood for bringing forward the proposal and welcomed the enthusiasm shown for the initiative.

It was **agreed** that Councillor E Hopgood should work up the concept into a more detailed proposal, including examples of the content and delivery approach, for consideration at a future meeting of the Business Committee. Members indicated their support in principle for the initiative and looked forward to considering the detailed proposal in due course.

9. Events report – to include a proposal to support a new Lego (Brickworks) Festival during August 2026.

The Clerk presented a report seeking Members' support for the delivery of a new Enchanted Durham LEGO Trail, to be coordinated by Durham BID between 1st and 15th August 2026 as a major free family attraction during the summer school holidays.

The Clerk explained that the proposal had been developed in partnership with Durham BID and Durham County Council and would transform Durham City into an interactive trail featuring professionally designed LEGO sculptures displayed across participating businesses and venues throughout the city centre. The event was intended to encourage families to explore the city, increase visitor footfall, support local businesses and independent retailers, and strengthen Durham's reputation as a leading family destination during the summer holidays.

Members heard that visitors would be able to follow a trail map, locating LEGO sculptures displayed within participating shops, cafés, attractions and hospitality venues whilst collecting clues and engaging with a range of themed activities. The event would be entirely free to participate in and would encourage families to spend longer within the city centre; discover areas they may not ordinarily visit and support local businesses throughout the trail. Businesses taking part would receive promotional support through printed trail maps, digital marketing, social media campaigns and visitor information, with host venues benefiting from increased footfall and significant regional publicity.

The Clerk advised that the proposal centred on the hire of the nationally recognised Brick Fairytales exhibition, featuring a collection of large-scale LEGO sculptures inspired by classic fairy tales. Members heard that the exhibition had been successfully displayed at venues across the country and would provide an engaging, high-quality visitor experience capable of attracting families from across the North East.

A comprehensive marketing campaign had been developed to promote the event, targeting family audiences throughout County Durham, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Teesside and Darlington through social media advertising, school engagement, local and regional media, tourism partners and family influencers. The campaign aimed to reach more than 150,000 people, generate substantial online engagement and significantly increase city centre footfall during the traditionally quieter summer holiday period.

Members were informed that the total project cost was estimated at £33,000, with Durham BID contributing £10,000, Durham County Council providing £5,000 together with a refundable £10,000 deposit, and the proposal requesting an Events Grant of £8,000 from the Parish Council. The Clerk explained that the project budget also included provision for branding, visitor maps, marketing, insurance and contingency arrangements, with additional sponsorship opportunities available to local businesses to further enhance the event.

The Clerk concluded that the proposal aligned closely with the Parish Council's objective of supporting events that increased footfall, encouraged visitors to spend

longer within the city, supported the local economy and provided free, inclusive activities for residents and visitors. Members welcomed the ambition of the project, recognising the significant benefits it would bring to Durham City during the summer holidays, particularly in attracting families, supporting independent businesses and enhancing the city's visitor offer.

Members unanimously **approved** a contribution of £8,000 towards the delivery of the Enchanted Durham LEGO Trail, recognising the significant economic, tourism and community benefits the event would bring to Durham City.

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

21st July 2026 – 11:00am
15th September 2026 – 11:00am
17th November 2026 – 11:00am

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

Signed,



Chair of the Parish Council's Business Committee
(21st July 2026)