City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the City of Durham Parish Council's Business Committee meeting held in the Waiting Room, Redhills Durham Miners Hall Flass Street. DH1 4BE at 11:00am on Tuesday 21st July 2026

Present: Councillors E Scott (in the Chair), R Handy, P Layton and E Hopgood.
Also present: Mr Adam Shanley (Parish Clerk), Mr Lee Smuthwaite (Durham City PubWatch), Ms Joan Crump (Durham Folk Festival) and Sgt Caroline Dickenson and colleague (Durham Police).

1. **Welcome and apologies**

Apologies were received and accepted from Councillor L Wilson.

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 19th May 2026

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th May 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. Proposal to support this year's launch of Best Bar None in Durham City

Sergeant Caroline Dickenson, representing the Licensed Economy Team, delivered a detailed presentation on the proposed reinstatement of the Best Bar None scheme for Durham City. She outlined that Best Bar None is a national accreditation scheme supported by the Home Office and the alcohol industry, designed to promote responsible management and operation of licensed premises.

Sergeant Dickenson highlighted the key benefits of bringing the initiative back to the city, including improved safety standards, reduced crime and disorder within the night-time economy, enhanced customer reassurance, and stronger collaborative partnerships between licensed venues, the police, and local authorities. Furthermore, she reported that significant progress had already been made in preparation for the rollout, with a number of police officers now fully trained up as qualified assessors for the scheme.

Following the presentation, Lee Smurthwaite, Chair of the Durham City PubWatch scheme, provided additional context on behalf of local operators. He confirmed that there is widespread support across the local licensed trade to roll Best Bar None back out in Durham, noting that venue operators are eager to demonstrate high operational standards and contribute actively to a safer evening environment.

He highlighted that funding support had already been offered by the Durham Business Improvement District (BID) to help launch the initiative, and expressed hope that the Parish Council could allocate £2,000 toward the scheme within the current financial year to assist with implementation and administrative costs.

During the discussion that followed, Committee Members expressed their strong support for the reinstatement of the Best Bar None scheme in Durham City. Members commended the proactive collaboration between Durham Constabulary, the Durham City PubWatch scheme, and local stakeholders, acknowledging that the initiative would deliver tangible benefits for public safety, local businesses, and visitors to the city centre.

6. Discussion with Ms Joan Crump on the plans for the upcoming Durham Folk Festival 2026

The Committee received a comprehensive presentation from Ms Joan Crump, Founder of the Durham Folk Festival, outlining the strategic plans, artistic program, and operational framework for the upcoming Durham Folk Festival 2026.

Ms Crump detailed the core objectives of the festival, emphasizing its commitment to celebrating and preserving traditional music, song, and dance while providing an inclusive platform for both established folk artists and emerging local talent. The presentation highlighted that the 2026 festival aims to expand its footprint across Durham City, utilising a combination of historic indoor venues, outdoor public spaces, and local licensed premises to create an accessible, city-wide celebration.

In her address, Ms Crump outlined the anticipated economic, social, and cultural benefits that the event will deliver to Durham. She explained how the festival will serve as a key driver for local tourism, drawing visitors from across the region and further afield, which in turn will generate significant footfall for local retailers, hospitality businesses, and accommodation providers. Beyond the financial impact, Ms Crump emphasized the community dimension of the festival, detailing plans for interactive participatory workshops, educational outreach programs, and free outdoor street performances designed to foster civic pride, social cohesion, and cross-generational engagement.

Following the presentation, Committee Members engaged in a detailed discussion and expressed their enthusiastic and unanimous support for the initiative. Members praised Ms Crump and the festival organizing committee for their dedication and vision, acknowledging that the festival represents a vital addition to Durham City’s annual cultural calendar. During the deliberations, Members noted that the timing and ethos of the event align closely with the local authority’s broader strategic priorities regarding community wellbeing, cultural enrichment, and city centre vitality.

To support the planning and execution of the event, the Committee formally considered a request for financial support towards the festival's operating costs. Upon consideration of the project's projected outcomes and community value, Committee Members agreed to allocate a grant of £5,000 to the Durham Folk Festival 2026 from the current financial year's budget.

The funding will contribute towards core operational expenditure in relation to family-free event (also supported by Durham BID), including artist fees, public safety infrastructure, and event promotion, ensuring the event remains accessible to the wider public.

7. Report from the Chair on the most recent meeting of the University's Community Engagement Task Force's economic sub-group

The Chair provided a brief report on the latest meeting of Durham University's Economic Sub-Group of the Community Engagement Taskforce—recently renamed "Pound". Chaired by Helen Kelt, the meeting brought together key representatives and the session focused primarily on the County Durham visitor economy, strategic partnerships, and methods to leverage local enterprise alongside university collaboration.

The Chair advised that Visit County Durham's Michelle Gorman delivered a comprehensive briefing on behalf of Visit County Durham, detailing the regional visitor economy's growth and strategic frameworks. Data for 2024 revealed that County Durham welcomed 21.56 million visitors—a 7% increase from 2023—generating £1.38 billion in overall visitor spending (up 11.7%) and supporting 13,795 full-time equivalent jobs.

The Chair highlighted that analysis of sectoral distribution showed that the highest visitor expenditure occurred in food and drink, followed by attractions, shopping, and accommodation. Crucially, while overnight visitors comprised only 8% of the total visitor volume, they generated 43% of the total economic impact.

The Chair also highlighted that, despite positive county-wide growth, local performance variations were noted. Durham City currently underperforms in visitor night stays and associated employment compared to other sub-regions, with the Vale of Durham continuing to lead in visitor volume and financial impact. Addressing the shortfall of local accommodation capacity was identified as a critical priority to convert day visits into higher-value overnight stays.

The Chair advised that the group is also reviewing active economic programs including the "Welcome to Durham" initiative, accessibility training, and green tourism schemes. Opportunities to integrate Durham University operations with local enterprise were highlighted, particularly around applying research, increasing local business participation in university procurement, and encouraging staff and student local spending.

8. Events report – to include a briefing on the upcoming Enchanted Lego trail as well as a discussion on an October 2026 event.

The Clerk presented a detailed update regarding the upcoming city events program for the 2026/27 financial year, beginning with the Durham Fringe Festival, scheduled to take place from 29th July to 2nd August 2026 with a Parish Council contribution of £5,000. The Clerk highlighted that the Durham Fringe is anticipated to be a major success this year, with organizers actively targeting ticket sales exceeding 10,000.

Following the Fringe, the report outlined the remaining schedule of events planned for the year. Throughout the entire month of August 2026, the Legoland trail is scheduled to run, supported by a proposed £8,000 allocation. This will be followed in autumn by the Durham Folk Festival from 18th to 20th September 2026 with an allocated £5,000, and the Durham Jazz Festival taking place from 23rd to 25th October 2026 with a £3,000 contribution.

Moving into late autumn and winter, Remembrance Sunday will be observed on 8th November 2026 with £6,000 allocated, followed by the Christmas light switch-on during the last weekend in November 2026 with a £3,000 contribution, the Christmas Festival in early December 2026 allocated £5,000, and concluding with the Lunar New Year celebration in mid-February 2027 with a £1,000 contribution.

During the presentation, the Clerk drew attention to an unconfirmed slot listed as "TBC" on the schedule for early October 2026, which had a potential budget of £2,000 attached. The Clerk noted that this provisional Autumn event required further review by the Committee. Following a discussion on programming priorities, the Committee agreed that the £2,000 sum initially earmarked for the unconfirmed October event should instead be reallocated towards enhancing the festive offerings for the Christmas events later in the year.

9. Dates of future meeting(s) of this Committee:
15th September 2026 – 11:00am
17th November 2026 – 11:00am

Signed,



Chair of the Parish Council's Business Committee
(15th September 2026)