

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council Finance Committee held on Wednesday 13th May 2026 at 11:00am via Zoom

Present: Councillors S Walker (in the Chair), L Brown, R Cornwell, E Hopgood, E Scott and V Ashfield.

Also present: Parish Clerk A Shanley.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received and **accepted** from Councillor L Wilson. The Chair accepted that Councillor R Cornwell was attending the meeting as a substitute for Councillor L Wilson.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

None received.

3. TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 16th MARCH 2026

The Chair introduced the minutes of the previous meeting for approval. Members confirmed that the minutes were an accurate record of proceedings subject to one amendment. Councillor E. Hopgood advised that the minutes did not record her submitted apologies for absence or the attendance of Councillor D Freeman as her substitute. The Clerk agreed to amend the minutes accordingly before finalisation. Subject to that amendment, the minutes were **approved**.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None received.

5. REPORT ON THE FINANCIAL POSITION OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

The Chair invited the Clerk to present the financial position of the Parish Council following the conclusion of the 2025/26 financial year. The Clerk provided a detailed overview of the Council's finances, explaining that the Council had concluded the year with £114,054 held in its bank accounts. He advised that a Value Added Tax reclaim totalling £7,060 had subsequently been submitted, bringing the effective closing position for the financial year to £121,114.

Members were reminded that the Council's reserves policy required the retention of £45,000 in general reserves and that a substantial election reserve had also been maintained to meet future electoral costs. The election reserve stood at £27,555 at year end and would be supplemented by a further £5,000 contribution during the current financial year. The Clerk explained that these funds were necessary to prepare for future contested elections and any costs associated with casual vacancies.

The Committee considered the position of ring-fenced and earmarked reserves. The Clerk explained that funds raised through the Green Move Out initiative could only legally be used for the purposes outlined within the fundraising appeal and therefore remained restricted. A carry-forward balance of £5,510 remained available to support the forthcoming Green Move Out campaign. Members were advised that previous years'

initiatives had been highly successful and that landlord contributions had increased significantly due to proactive engagement by Members. The Committee also noted that £10,400 remained available from a donation made by the Freeman's Charitable Trust towards beacon events and that these funds remained restricted to the agreed purpose.

The Clerk outlined a number of committed carry-forward budgets from the previous financial year. These included underspends within staffing budgets, heritage project allocations, planting commitments and outstanding office accommodation costs. Members noted that some funding had already effectively been committed despite invoices not being received until the new financial year. Examples included the Houghall College Chelsea Flower Show project and ongoing heritage initiatives being developed through the Environment Committee.

Members formally commended the Clerk on the management of the Council's finances. Councillor V. Ashfield praised the accuracy of the year-end budget position and noted that the Council had successfully delivered a substantial programme of projects whilst maintaining appropriate reserve levels. Members agreed that the financial position reflected effective planning and sound budget management.

The Committee also reflected upon the revised budget-setting process which had been introduced during the previous year. The Clerk advised that moving the budget-setting timetable forward to November had significantly improved the process, reduced pressure and allowing more strategic discussion before final decisions were made. Members agreed that the revised approach had worked well and should be repeated in future years. Councillor V. Ashfield noted that strategic planning exercises should similarly be brought forward to ensure that budgets were informed by agreed priorities.

The Committee then considered pressures emerging within current budgets. Particular attention was given to the Business Events Grant Fund. The Clerk reported that the scheme had already generated significant interest from local businesses and had helped strengthen the Council's reputation within the business community. Members heard that £6,500 had already been allocated, with further applications and commitments bringing anticipated expenditure to approximately £9,000 from the £15,000 annual budget. The Clerk highlighted positive feedback received from businesses and reported that new enterprises were increasingly approaching the Council for support.

In considering the available financial headroom within the budget, Councillor E. Hopgood proposed that the unallocated funds be transferred to the Business Events Grant budget where there was clear demand and where expenditure could be demonstrated to generate tangible benefits for the city. Members discussed the proposal and, having noted the healthy contingency position already held by the Council, **agreed** that the available funding should be allocated to support business event initiatives.

6. SECTION 106 APPLICATION - DURHAM ARCHERY AND LAWN TENNIS CLUB - PADEL COURT AND TWO ALL WEATHER COURTS

The Chair introduced the Section 106 funding application submitted by Durham Archery and Lawn Tennis Club seeking £90,000 towards the creation of a padel court and improvements to existing tennis facilities.

The Clerk outlined the proposal and explained that a draft Parish Council response had been circulated for consideration. Members discussed the application in considerable

detail. Whilst there was broad support for initiatives which increased participation in sport, physical activity and healthy lifestyles, concerns were expressed regarding the quality and detail of the application. Members noted that the submission provided very limited information and failed to identify clearly which Section 106 funding allocation was being targeted. It was acknowledged that this made it difficult to assess whether the proposal satisfied the criteria attached to any particular legal agreement.

A lengthy discussion took place regarding the likely planning implications of the proposal. Members identified potential concerns relating to noise, floodlighting, traffic generation, ecology and the impact upon nearby residential properties. Councillor R Cornwell reported feedback received from local residents, including concerns about light pollution and the possible disturbance arising from padel tennis activity. It was acknowledged that padel tennis generated higher noise levels than conventional tennis and that appropriate mitigation measures would need to be carefully considered through the planning process.

Members also discussed concerns relating to traffic and parking arrangements. The Chair reported comments received from individuals associated with the tennis club who feared that a successful facility could attract significantly increased visitor numbers, placing additional pressure on local roads. Other Members considered that the overall capacity of the site naturally limited the scale of activity which could occur.

Following discussion, Members **agreed** that the Parish Council should support the principle of increased sporting opportunities and therefore support the proposal in principle. However, Members were clear that such support should be expressed without prejudice to any future planning application. The Committee **agreed** that any subsequent planning application would require detailed scrutiny, particularly regarding floodlighting, noise impacts, ecological considerations and the effects on neighbouring residents.

7. UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE COMMUNITY CENTRE SUPPORT WORKING GROUP

The Chair invited an update on the work of the Community Centre Support Working Group. The Clerk reported progress regarding the grant awarded to Alington House for the replacement of historic windows. Members were reminded that funding of approximately £33,000 had been approved for the project together with additional support towards professional fees.

The Clerk advised that work had progressed in preparation for the planning application and that a heritage statement had been prepared to facilitate the planning process. Discussions had also taken place with specialist contractors regarding delivery of the project. Members were informed that the works presented a number of technical challenges due to the location and condition of the windows. The preferred approach would involve specialist contractors undertaking the work using harness systems rather than extensive riverside scaffolding, thereby reducing costs and complexity.

Members noted that whilst progress was slower than originally anticipated, the project remained on course to proceed during the current financial year. The Clerk explained that responsibility for progressing the planning application now largely rested with the Trustees of Alington House.

The Committee also discussed arrangements for releasing grant funding. Members agreed that the Parish Council should retain strict oversight of expenditure and that funding should not be released as a single upfront payment. Instead, payments should be linked to verified project expenditure.

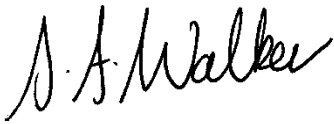
The Committee thanked the Clerk for his report and progress on this project to date.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Wednesday 17th June 2026 – 11:00am

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

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. A. Walker', written in a cursive style.

Chair of the Parish Council Finance Committee
17th June 2026