

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Thursday 27th February 2025 at 7:00pm in the Main Hall of the Merryoaks Community Hall, Park House Rd, Durham DH1 3QF.

Present: Councillors S Walker (in the Chair), E Ashby, J Ashby, V Ashfield, L Brown, A Doig, D Freeman, R Friederichsen, G Holland and E Scott.

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley and 6 members of the public.

1. TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE (OR NOT) APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE FROM TODAY'S MEETING

Apologies were received and **approved** from Councillors N Brown, R Ormerod and C Lattin. No other apologies were received.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

Councillor E Scott declared an interest in item 5 regarding the Traffic Regulation Order and took no part in the discussion or vote on this item.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 22ND JANUARY 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 22nd January 2025 were unanimously agreed as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr Rupert Benjamin provided an update to the Council on his ongoing issues regarding the land next to Homer Terrace. Mr Benjamin advised that the area had been cleared of rubble for the first time in some significant time and that he was looking to gain further support from the Neighbourhood Wardens relating to the issue of waste in this area also. The Chair thanked Mr Benjamin for his ongoing work in this area and for keeping the Parish Council updated on this matter.

Ms Fiona Dryer, Ms Kay Fotheringham and Mr Bill McArdle from Climate Action Durham presented their case against the TVERF, expressing their collective concerns over the adverse impact of this facility on the climate, specifically through emissions, pollution and adverse impact on the health outcomes of those living nearby to this facility. Concerns were also expressed regarding the financial implications of this facility and locking local authorities into a significant contract when the focus should be more directed towards recycling and circular economy initiatives.

Climate Action Durham urged Members to support the motion by Councillor V Ashfield under Item 7 of the Agenda and support them in fighting this new facility.

5. COMMITTEE UPDATES

Planning and Licensing Committee

Councillor G Holland presented the minutes from the Planning and Licensing Committee meetings held on 24th January and 7th February 2025. There were no queries from Members and Councillor G Holland moved on to Committee reports.

Report on recent meeting with DCC Traffic Officers re: road user charge zone

The Chair reported on the recent meeting with DCC Highways concerning the Durham City Road User Charging Scheme.

The Chair thanked Councillors J Ashby and D Freeman for attending this meeting and advised that Parish Council representatives had expressed their strong support for the introduction of stricter traffic regulations in the city, noting the significant misuse of the medieval peninsula, particularly in the Market Place and Elvet Bridge areas.

The Chair reported that it was widely acknowledged that the problem intensified post-8pm when civil enforcement officers were no longer on duty, effectively creating an environment of unregulated vehicle access and parking.

The Chair expressed appreciation to DCC and NSL (parking enforcement) for their engagement on this matter, highlighting the collaborative joint enforcement operations carried out with Durham Constabulary during the summer and autumn of 2024.

All parties had agreed on the importance of presenting a unified stance at the upcoming DCC Highways Committee meeting, now anticipated to take place on 21st March 2025.

The Chair reported that the Parish Council representatives had expressed their strong support for increasing the access charge from £2 to £5 but had stressed the need for this to be implemented per access rather than as a daily charge. However, DCC officers had advised a more measured approach, recommending the introduction of a £5 per day charge. The Parish Council representatives had accepted this proposal on the condition that the new order would be reviewed for effectiveness approximately six months after being implemented.

It had been noted that if the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) including the £5 daily charge were approved in March, it could be enacted almost immediately. Otherwise, any further amendments would require a new consultation, potentially delaying implementation by up to nine months. However, should subsequent monitoring demonstrate that the TRO was insufficient in addressing the issue, an amendment to introduce a £5 per visit charge could be made within 18 months while maintaining the existing TRO and its benefits.

The Chair also reported that the Parish Council representatives had proposed that vehicles registered on the "white list" (those exempt from charges) should be

required to reapply annually, in the same manner as residents reapplying for permits. DCC officers had advised that key organisations, such as the University and the Cathedral, had their own restricted white list, which had been significantly reduced and was now linked to the number of off-street parking spaces available to each organisation. This development was welcomed as a key takeaway from the meeting.

Regarding enforcement, it was also confirmed that vehicles accessing Elvet Bridge outside of the permitted hours (2am-10am) would automatically receive a £60 fine (reduced to £30 if paid promptly), as this would constitute a moving traffic offence. APRN cameras would be used to detect such violations, though they could not be used to enforce parking infractions due to a legal change introduced by Lord Eric Pickles in 2012.

Members thanked the Chair and colleagues for attending this meeting with DCC Officers and **agreed** that the Parish Council should support the position of DCC officers at the upcoming Highways Committee in March 2025 and to work with officers in the ongoing monitoring of the scheme.

Environment Committee

Councillor V Ashfield presented the minutes from the Environment Committee meeting held on 14th January 2025. There were no queries from Members and Councillor V Ashfield moved on to Committee reports.

Proposals to support local groups the Durham City Riverscape Community and the Wear Rivers Trust and improve the River Wear.

Councillor V Ashfield reported that the City of Durham Parish Council had allocated a fund of £5,000 for the 2024/25 financial year to support a project aimed at improving the River Wear.

Councillor V Ashfield reminded Members that this initiative had been a significant priority for the Council's Environment Committee since 2022 and had typically included both financial contributions and collaboration with the Wear Rivers Trust as part of its Durham Peninsula Invasive Non-native Species (DP INNS) project.

The project has also received support from other key stakeholders in the City, notably the University and the Cathedral, as major landowners along the River Wear.

The DP INNS project had been an ongoing effort since 2021, aimed at coordinating efforts across the project area to manage and raise awareness of invasive non-native species (INNS), particularly Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed, and Giant Hogweed. The project had already achieved various successes, including intensive survey efforts that had resulted in comprehensive maps of the project area, widespread management of the Giant Hogweed source within the Old Durham Beck system, and the establishment of an active and engaged

organisational register, with members meeting regularly for steering and operations group meetings.

Councillor V Ashfield advised that the Parish Council's Environment Committee had recently considered a funding proposal by the Wear Rivers Trust for volunteer events and school engagement. While school engagement had been welcomed and consistently funded since 2022, Councillor V Ashfield reported that the Committee had determined that priority should be placed on volunteer recruitment and activities.

Councillor V Ashfield advised that the Committee Chair has now requested that the Parish Council funds the printing and distribution (within the DH1 postcode area) of an information and volunteer recruitment leaflet, at a total cost of £1,800 (excluding VAT).

Additionally, Councillor V Ashfield highlighted that the Committee had expressed support for the recently established Durham City Riverscape Community (DCRC) Group. The group, comprising 213 members, had been dedicated to preserving and enhancing the River Wear's beauty throughout Durham City. Councillor V Ashfield advised that their efforts have ensured the riverscape remained an attractive and functional space for residents, visitors, and wildlife alike.

In addition to their well-publicised monthly litter-picking events, the group has facilitated discussions on ideas, visions, and creative solutions for addressing challenges affecting the City's most significant natural asset.

Councillor V Ashfield advised that the Environment Committee had approved the following funding proposals submitted by the DCRC:

- 1. Insurance for the activity (£112)** – Essential for the group to continue operating as an organised entity.
- 2. Long reach poles and hooks (3 units) (£282)** – Required to retrieve inaccessible litter due to challenging terrain.
- 3. Printed logos on Hi-Vis vests (50 units) (£175)** – Aimed at fostering group identity and encouraging responsible litter disposal.
- 4. Tear-drop flags (2 units) (£300)** – To publicise group activities and increase visibility.
- 5. Disposable rubber gloves (£132)** – Necessary for protection against contaminated litter.
- 6. Sustainable dispensers for antibacterial gel (£113)** – Environmentally friendly and cost-effective alternative to disposable dispensers.

The total funding request from the DCRC amounted to £1,067.

Councillor V Ashfield advised that both groups had confirmed that their activities would be covered by their own insurance policies and that they bore sole

responsibility for carrying out necessary risk assessments and procedures. They had also acknowledged that any funding received from the City of Durham Parish Council will be formally recognised in all promotional literature and online materials.

Councillor V Ashfield presented the report for Members to approve the funding requests as follows:

- Wear Rivers Trust: £1,800 for the production and distribution of an information and volunteer recruitment leaflet.
- Durham City Riverscape Community: £1,067 for the activities outlined above.

Councillor A Doig expressed concern at funding the insurance element of the request from the Durham City Riverscape Community as it had long been a tradition of the Parish Council that the Council did not fund core funding. Members felt that the activity carried out by the group was worthy of the Parish Council's full support and therefore **agreed** (by 8 votes in favour, 1 against and 1 abstention) to fund each group to the total amounts and for the activities set out within the report.

Business Committee

Councillor D Freeman presented the minutes from the Business Committee meeting held on 19th November 2024. There were no queries from Members however Councillors V Ashfield and E Ashby expressed their ongoing disappointment that this Committee only met once every two months.

Finance Committee

Councillor A Doig presented the minutes from the Finance Committee meeting held on 15th January 2025. There were no queries from Members and therefore Councillor A Doig moved on to Committee reports.

Response to recent Section 106 application by DCC for a 20mph scheme outside St. Oswald's school.

Councillor A. Doig reported that the Parish Council had recently been consulted on a new Section 106 application submitted by Durham County Council's Traffic Assets Division. This application sought funding from the Elvet and Gilesgate division's Section 106 funds to support the installation of a part-time advisory 20mph speed limit in the vicinity of St Oswald's Church of England Primary School.

Councillor A Doig advised that the Parish Council's most recent Finance Committee had met to discuss this application and had submitted the following response which was **approved** (retrospectively) at this Full Council meeting by Members:

Thank you for consulting the Parish Council on this Section 106 application by Durham County Council for the installation of a part-time advisory school 20mph

scheme in the vicinity of St Oswald's Church of England Primary School. The City of Durham Parish Council writes to express its wholehearted support for this proposal.

Firstly, the Parish Council wishes to commend both Durham County Council and St Oswald's school for bringing forward this long-awaited initiative to improve pedestrian safety on Church Street. As the main route to and from the University's main campus as well as the location of the school along this road, Church Street is one of the busiest pedestrian streets in the City. The safety of school children and other pedestrians is of paramount importance and we fully support any measures which enhance road safety in our community.

Whilst the Parish Council has consistently advocated for a permanent 20mph speed limit running the entirety of Church Street, the Parish Council recognises the statutory and budgetary constraints which have influenced this proposal. In 2013, the Department for Transport provided revised guidelines on the **Setting Local Speed Limits (DfT Circular 01/2013)**, encouraging traffic authorities to consider introducing more 20mph limits over time, and over a larger number of roads. However, it also advises that 20mph limits are most appropriate where the mean speed (85th percentile) is already at or below 24mph. At present, we understand that the mean speeds on Church Street exceed this limit and therefore a 20mph speed limit covering the entirety of Church Street would only be possible with further (costly) traffic calming measures.

Notwithstanding this, and in considering the existing road layout, comprising side roads, accesses, parking and restrictions, current pedestrian usage and vehicle movements, the Parish Council appreciates that the introduction of physical traffic calming features to slow traffic down would likely to be inappropriate as they are generally aimed at maintaining lower speeds where an excess problem is present.

Additionally, the Parish Council recognises that there are minimum length requirements for the implementation of a standalone speed limit and Church Street falls short of these requirements. Considering this, a legal permanent speed limit could only be implemented if it included a wider area and this would certainly impact traffic flow and emergency response times in these city centre locations.

In recognising these constraints on the local traffic authority, we would invite Durham County Council to join us in further lobbying central Government to ensure that all roads adjacent to primary schools can be designated as 20mph zones, that the minimum length requirements be reviewed and that appropriate funding is allocated to local authorities to achieve this vital safety improvement.

On the application itself, we understand that the costs originally associated with this scheme may have been reduced to circa. £20,000. Before final approval of this funding application, we would appreciate confirmation of the total amount of funding now being sought and would particularly welcome the use of solar-powered signage as opposed to signs that rely on power from the grid. A solar-powered solution aligns better with our environmental commitments and will

contribute to reducing carbon emissions associated with the scheme's implementation.

The Parish Council also acknowledges concerns regarding the potential increase in emissions caused by vehicles slowing down and speeding up within the proposed advisory zone, particularly given that Church Street is already identified as an area of air quality concern. As such, the Parish Council is delighted to be proactively working with DCC's public transport team on its own Section 106 proposal to install new green roof bus shelters in the area. These shelters will play an important role in carbon capture and mitigating air quality issues. We look forward to submitting a funding bid for this initiative in due course and trust that Durham County Council will give this its full support.

We very much look forward to working with the County Council on the delivery of this proposal and would particularly be interested to learn more about how the effectiveness of this scheme is to be monitored once installed.

Thank you once more for consulting us on this proposal.

End of response

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided an update on matters arising since the last Full Parish Council meeting as follows:

The Chair extended thanks to all involved in the Lunar New Year event in the Market Place and confirmed that a wash-up session had been arranged. The Clerk has put forward a proposal for an organised bonfire event for next year following complaints about private firework displays. The Chair noted that DCC is recruiting a new International Officer who may take a leading role in future planning.

The Chair welcomed the news that The King and Queen are set to visit Durham Cathedral for the Royal Maundy Service on 17th April 2025. The visit was specifically requested by His Majesty, and extensive planning is currently underway.

The Chair was pleased to note that the redevelopment of the DLI Museum has progressed, with the steel structure now visible. The Parish Council wished all involved in the project well.

The Chair welcomed DCC's decision to proceed with negotiations for acquiring the Milburngate development, recognising that a Council-led intervention may be necessary to complete the site.

The Chair reminded Members of the official opening of the Rushford Court development, the new site for Hild & Bede College, on 12th March 2025 and encouraged attendance.

The Chair noted that the pre-election period begins on 20th March 2025 and reminded Members that the Clerk would not be taking on additional casework related to election canvassing.

The Chair thanked DCC for hosting a candidate information session for prospective Parish Councillors, acknowledging that this rendered the Parish Council's planned drop-in session unnecessary.

The Chair noted that the Clerk does not attend election counts by personal choice. All newly elected Councillors will receive an invitation from the Clerk to complete their acceptance of office and register of interests forms on 5th May 2025.

The Chair expressed gratitude to CDALC Larger Councils Forum for supporting the Parish Council's motion to introduce public health as a fifth licensing objective. The motion will now be considered by CDALC's Executive Committee.

The Chair thanked the Mayor, Councillor Liz Brown, for inviting all Members to the annual Mayor's Civic Dinner on 14th March, in aid of Feeding Families and StrayAid.

7. MOTION BY COUNCILLOR V ASHFIELD ON THE TEES VALLEY ENERGY RECOVERY FACILITY

Councillor V Ashfield presented a report setting out her concerns relating to the proposed Tees Valley Energy Recovery Facility.

Councillor V Ashfield advised that this facility had agreed in 2019 by four Tees Valley councils (Redcar and Cleveland, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, and Stockton), alongside Darlington, Durham County, and Newcastle City Councils.

Councillor V Ashfield set out that this project involved the construction of a new incineration facility in Teesside (Grangetown, Stockton), with an anticipated commercial operation date of no earlier than 2029. The authorities had signed a 29-year operating contract.

Councillor V Ashfield advised that the projected cost of the incinerator had exceeded £300 million, raising concerns over its financial viability and that the UK Government had proposed stricter environmental standards and charges on incineration emissions through the Emissions Trading Scheme, which could lead to significant additional costs for councils from 2028.

Councillor V Ashfield also advised that two participating councils, Newcastle and Stockton, were already reconsidering their involvement in the project.

Councillor V Ashfield expressed her concerns that recycling rates in the North East (31.2%) were the lowest in England, significantly trailing behind Wales (over 65%).

In addition, the 29-year contract would lock local authorities into producing high volumes of waste, particularly plastic, to sustain the incinerator, disincentivising recycling initiatives.

Councillor V Ashfield also expressed her concerns at the health impact of this facility on residents living nearby and advised that she was frustrated that public engagement on the project had been limited.

Councillor V Ashfield proposed the motion as set out in the report.

Councillor R Friederichsen expressed his strong support for this motion and echoed the concerns expressed by Councillor V Ashfield. Councillor R Friederichsen advised that he felt that this facility was contrary to the aims of County Durham to become Net Zero by 2050.

Councillor A Doig advised that he was concerned at the length of the contract DCC appeared to be signing up to with this facility.

Councillor D Freeman expressed his strong opposition to this motion and urged Members to vote against this as this facility had undergone the most rigorous regulatory scrutiny, including through the planning process where a Government Inspector had approved the proposal. Councillor D Freeman advised that there was no genuine alternative to this facility, which will deal with waste from 1.5 million homes in the North East. Councillor D Freeman highlighted that the only genuine alternative would be landfill and this is looking likely to be banned by the UK Government.

Councillor E Scott echoed the remarks of Councillor D Freeman and advised that these facilities were heavily regulated and the existing incinerators would come to the end of their working lives/ not meet current UK standards by 2026.

Councillor E Ashby proposed an amendment to the motion and this was seconded by Councillor V Ashfield. The amended motion was as follows:

"Given the UK Government's proposal to introduce new charges for sending waste to incineration, the City of Durham Parish Council requests Durham County Council to review the finances and other factors associated with the TVERF and re-evaluate, in conjunction with the six other signatory authorities, whether this delivers the most cost-effective and environmentally sustainable method of handling residual waste. The City of Durham Parish Council further agrees to copy this request to the other local authorities involved as well as the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) for consideration at their next meeting."

This motion was **agreed** by 6 votes in favour, 3 against and 1 abstention.

8. REPORT ON THE RECENT 'MAKING SUICIDE EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS' CONFERENCE

The Chair provided a report on the recent 'Making Suicide Prevention Everybody's Business' conference, hosted by Durham County Council on 18th February 2025.

The Chair advised that this event was aimed at raising awareness, fostering a shared ambition, and refining a comprehensive suicide prevention strategy. The Chair advised that this event brought together public health experts, emergency

service representatives, academics, and individuals with lived experience to discuss the current suicide landscape and actions required to address the issue.

The Chair expressed her gratitude to those involved in arranging this Conference and stressed some key takeaways from this event. Specifically, that this had reinforced the urgency of suicide prevention efforts and the importance of community-wide engagement.

The Chair advised that attendees had been encouraged to take an active role in implementing the revised strategy and fostering a culture of support and awareness.

The Chair also highlighted the need for additional support specifically for men, as well as increased mental health first aid training within the community and advised that, through her work with Merryoaks Community Hall, she would be looking to pursue some initiatives of this kind.

In noting the content of this report and thanking the Chair for representing the Parish Council at this event, Members unanimously **agreed** to support ongoing efforts to enhance suicide prevention initiatives within the community and the Clerk **agreed** to arrange mental health first aid training for all new Members post-May's election.

9. REPORT ON COUNTY DURHAM ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS' FORUM MEETING

The Chair presented the following report from the recent meeting of CDALC from 20th February 2025:

1. CDALC Executive Committee Report

A verbal report highlighted recent committee meetings, including financial updates and policy changes. The Executive Committee emphasized ongoing efforts to support local councils and improve governance structures.

2. May 2025 Local Elections

An overview of the upcoming local elections scheduled for 1 May 2025 was presented. Key points included nomination deadlines, voter registration dates, and election procedures. Councils were encouraged to attend training sessions on election management. Details Can be found here:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance-candidates-parish-council-elections-england>

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/elections2025>

<https://cdalc.info/members-area/elections/>

3. Government Consultations & Devolution White Paper

Updates were provided on various government consultations, including:

- **Strengthening Standards and Conduct Framework** – Proposal for a mandatory code of conduct and potential powers for local authorities to suspend councillors for misconduct.
- **Local Audit Reform** – Strategies for improving local audit processes and accountability.
- **Remote Meetings & Proxy Voting** – Review of legislation allowing councils to conduct meetings remotely.
- **Local Authority Funding Reform** – New approaches to funding allocations and resource management.
- **English Devolution White Paper** – Potential impacts on local governance structures and enhanced roles for town and parish councils.

4. Workplace Recycling Regulations (Environment Act 2021)

New regulations coming into effect from 31 March 2025 will require workplaces to separate dry recyclables, food waste, and black bin waste. Local councils must ensure compliance by implementing appropriate waste management practices. (Not especially pertinent for CODPC.)

5. Addressing Alcohol-Related Harm Through Licensing Laws

We presented a proposal to advocate for amendments to the Licensing Act 2003. Key recommendations included adding a public health objective to licensing regulations and lobbying for policy changes to mitigate alcohol-related harm. This was approved after some discussion.

6. Partnership Working with Durham County Council (DCC)

- **Durham County Local Networks** – Updates on replacing Area Action Partnerships with Local Networks, scheduled for implementation post-May 2025 elections. The new boundaries will require new arrangements for Parish representation with one Parish representative from Belmont Parish, City of Durham, Framwellgate Moor Parish, Pitlington Parish, Sherburn Village Parish, and Shincliffe Parish for the proposed Durham Local Network. CDALC would like each Parish Council group to decide amongst themselves which council should provide their representation.
- **Register of Interest Forms** – Proposed updates to the system to enhance transparency and compliance. These will be ready in time for the newly elected councillors to complete.

7. Housing Allocations Policy Review

John Kelly from Durham County Council provided insights into proposed changes to housing allocation policies, focusing on improving fairness and accessibility. He urged councils and councillors to respond to the consultation which can be found here:

<https://letstalkcountydurham.co.uk/en-GB/folders/socialhousingpolicyreview> .

If CODPC is to respond it should be noted that the deadline for submissions is 12 March 2025.

8. Martyn's Law (Counterterrorism Measures)

Graham Wakeman and Andy Bailey discussed the impending Martyn's Law, which will introduce stricter security requirements for public venues. Councils were advised to prepare for compliance with counterterrorism measures, including risk assessments and emergency response planning. They are available for consultation with Parish Councils and community groups for free. (Audrey to forward on contact details.)

End of report

In thanking the Chair for representing the Parish Council at this meeting, Members warmly welcomed that CDALC's Larger Council's Forum had **agreed** to approve the City of Durham Parish Council motion on health as a licensing objective and recommend this to its Executive Committee at this meeting.

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 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.

10. REPORT FOLLOWING ANNUAL STAFF APPRAISAL WITH THE PARISH CLERK

The Council received and **approved** the report following the annual staff appraisal with the Parish Clerk and **agreed** that the Clerk should proceed with formal training on public safety for events.

The Council also **agreed** that a formal salary review should take place following the formation of the new Parish Council in May 2025.

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

Signed,



**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council
(27th March 2025)**