

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Thursday 27th March 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, N Brown, A Doig, D Freeman, G Holland and C Lattin.

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley, 2 members of the public and Mr Stephen Cronin and Ms Sally Dixon (Durham Fringe).

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

Apologies were received from Councillors E Scott, R Friederichsen and R Ormerod. No other apologies were received.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

The Clerk highlighted that, in a personal capacity only, he is currently a Director of Durham Fringe.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 27TH FEBRUARY 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 27th February 2025 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr Rupert Benjamin updated the Council on the ongoing waste issues at Homer Terrace and advised that, after much effort on his part and with support from DCC colleagues, a lot of the waste from builders and nearby students had been reduced. Mr Benjamin advised that he would continue to monitor this situation and the Chair congratulated Mr Benjamin on his work in addressing this matter.

5. PRESENTATION BY DURHAM FRINGE ON PLANS FOR THIS YEAR'S FESTIVAL

The Chair welcomed Mr Stephen Cronin and Ms Sally Dixon to the meeting. Sally began by thanking the Parish Council for the opportunity to speak with Members at this forum today. Sally advised that the Fringe were excited to be coming back to Durham City for the fifth consecutive year.

Stephen advised that the Fringe Festival was first conceived by himself and his wife Suzanne in 2021 and had since grown to become a 7,500-ticket sales event in the art scene of Durham City. Stephen advised that it was very much his ambition to grow the Festival with a target of 10,000 ticket sales in 2025.

Stephen highlighted that the Durham Fringe Festival was extremely well run and received overwhelmingly positive feedback. Volunteers were described as friendly and helpful, contributing to a fantastic atmosphere that made the event particularly enjoyable for families in Durham.

Sally advised that the Fringe continues to significantly enhance the arts scene locally, while also raising awareness of Durham's cultural vibrancy. She quoted feedback from a London-based performer who expressed heartfelt thanks, calling the festival a "magical thing" and praising its role in showcasing Durham's uniqueness.

Stephen and Stephen both highlighted that the event also offered important personal development opportunities. A 16-year-old volunteer described the experience as "really valuable" for meeting people from around the world and developing confidence. The young volunteer said they would highly recommend the opportunity to others their age and has since gone on to gain valuable work experience in a Theatre tech role.

Sally advised that the Showcase event received particularly high praise and was described as "brilliant" by attendees. She emphasised its role in highlighting the diversity of performances and talents presented during the festival.

Stephen highlighted that, while feedback was largely positive, some constructive criticism was also received. One area identified for improvement was accessibility, with comments suggesting that current arrangements could be enhanced to better accommodate a wider range of audience needs. Stephen advised that logistical improvements were also highlighted. Suggestions included extending the Park and Ride transport services to support evening show access, which would improve public transport availability and support sustainability goals.

Sally also advised that several attendees raised the need for better toilet facilities at festival venues. Sally noted that this was a recurring theme in the feedback and would be taken into account during planning for the next edition of the festival. Sally also highlighted that street performers were well-received and brought vibrancy to the city centre. She noted suggestions for increasing the presence of these performers in public areas so that more people could enjoy their acts, even without attending a scheduled show.

Stephen advised that there was a call for more shows specifically geared toward children, reflecting demand from families. He suggested that programming for future festivals could include a dedicated family and youth schedule to meet this need. In doing so, Stephen advised that the current running costs for the Festival were approximately £160,000 and he and the team were constantly fundraising to secure this funding. Stephen thanked the Parish Council and other sponsors for their continued support with the festival and advised that he hoped to grow the festival even further across more than the existing eight venues.

Both Sally and Stephen concluded by stating that overall feedback demonstrates strong public support and enthusiasm for the Durham Fringe Festival. She expressed gratitude on behalf of the organisers for the community's engagement and the Parish Council's ongoing support.

Councillor E Ashby asked whether the Fringe had considered using the Main House in the Gala as a potential venue for performances. Stephen advised that he was delighted to have secured the studios within the Gala Theatre for this year's Festival but advised that, at this present time for the Festival, the Main House would be too large for their needs. However, Stephen advised that he hoped that the Fringe would grow to such a stage in the near future that venues of that capacity would be necessary and viable.

There being no further questions, the Chair thanked Stephen and Sally for their time and presentation. At this stage, Stephen and Sally thanked Members and left the meeting.

6. COMMITTEE UPDATES

• Planning and Licensing Committee

Councillor G Holland presented the minutes from the Planning and Licensing Committee meetings held on 21st February and 7th March 2025. There were no queries from Members.

• Environment Committee

Councillor C Lattin presented the minutes from the Environment Committee meeting held on 11th February 2025. There being no queries from Members, Councillor C Lattin moved on to Committee reports.

Proposals to fund the production of the Community Emergency Safety Card following the adoption of the Community Emergency Plan

Councillor C Lattin advised that, following the formal adoption of the City of Durham Community Emergency Plan, the Parish Council is now seeking to implement a key element of this plan: the Community Emergency Card.

Councillor Lattin highlighted that the Emergency Card has been developed in partnership with Durham County Council's Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU) and other key stakeholders, and is intended to provide all households with vital emergency information in an accessible, printed format. The card includes emergency contact numbers, instructions for specific emergencies, the location of safe spaces, and guidance on activating the Community Emergency Plan.

Councillor Lattin advised that the production and distribution of the Emergency Card would cost approximately £1,800, which is within the £2,000 already allocated by Members for this purpose.

It was unanimously **agreed** to a) approve funding for the production and distribution of the Emergency Card to all households in the parish; b) delegate responsibility for overseeing the production and rollout of the Emergency Card to the Parish Clerk and the Environment Committee; and c) note the forthcoming trial of the Emergency Plan by the Civil Contingencies Unit and to consider any feedback arising from this.

• **Business Committee**

Councillor D Freeman presented the minutes from the Business Committee meeting held on 21st January 2025. There being no queries from Members, Councillor D Freeman moved on to Committee reports.

Report on activities to mark the 80th Anniversary of VE Day in Durham City

Councillor D Freeman advised that Durham City will commemorate the 80th Anniversary of VE Day on 8th May 2025, joining communities nationwide in celebrating 80 years of peace since the end of World War II in Europe.

Councillor Freeman advised that the Parish Clerk has been working with partners including Durham County Council and the Durham Markets Company to organise a programme of local events reflecting the national celebrations. These include a public street party in Durham Market Place on Bank Holiday Monday, 5th May, with live musical entertainment and food vendors in attendance.

Councillor Freeman advised that, on the anniversary date of Thursday 8th May:

- The national VE Day Proclamation will be read at 9:00am, with the Clerk currently identifying a suitable city centre location due to the temporary closure of the Town Hall.
- At 12 noon, pipers across the UK will play *Celebratum*, a piece composed specially for the occasion, from the nation's highest peaks.
- At 6:30pm, the bells of Durham Cathedral and St. Nicholas Church will ring out in celebration.
- At 9:30pm, it is again proposed that the City's beacon will be lit in Durham alongside other beacons across the country, symbolising the light of peace emerging from the darkness of war.

The Clerk advised that he had been in discussions with the Charter Trust and City Freemen to explore sharing the £1,800 cost of lighting the beacon, noting that this cost was previously covered solely by the Parish Council. The Clerk advised that he is presently still awaiting a response from the Charter Trust but that he had already received a response from the Chair of the Freemen advising that the Freemen would not share the costs for lighting this beacon with the Parish Council for this anniversary.

Councillor A Doig advised that he felt that the Parish Council is obliged to light the beacon for both VE Day and VJ Day this year but expressed his desire that the Parish Council could in future agree a set of clear criteria - to sit alongside the Memorandum of Understanding the Parish Council has with the Freemen and the County Council - on the specific events at which the Parish Council shall bear the responsibility for the lighting of the City's beacon. Councillor A Doig advised that he hoped that this could be communicated to partners following this year's important anniversaries.

In agreeing that the beacon must be lit for these important anniversaries, some Members advised that they felt that there was no need to include a reception nor a VIP-attended only beacon lighting ceremony as part of these events.

It was unanimously **agreed** to a) note the report detailing the VE Day 80th Anniversary events; b) delegate full planning and budgetary responsibility for delivering these events to the Parish Clerk and c) to agree a set of clear criteria, to be communicated to partners, on the specific events at which the Parish Council shall bear the responsibility for the lighting of the City's beacon.

To approve the annual events plan for the City of Durham Parish Council during financial year 2025/26

Councillor D Freeman advised that events continue to be central to the work of the Parish Council's Business Committee; offering valuable opportunities to bring residents together, promote civic pride, and support the local economy. Councillor D Freeman advised that events also play a key role in raising the Parish Council's profile and encouraging footfall in the City, directly benefiting local businesses and the hospitality and retail sectors.

Councillor D Freeman advised that the Parish Council has allocated £30,000 in its 2025/26 budget to support events via the Business Committee, in line with its ongoing commitment to funding accessible, high-quality community initiatives.

The Clerk further highlighted that the Personnel Committee has requested the creation of a Gantt chart to monitor personnel input into events planning and the approval of this plan will assist him in meeting that requirement.

Councillor D Freeman noted that the Clerk and the Business Committee had worked closely with local stakeholders, including charities, cultural organisations, and business representatives, to ensure this year's events are inclusive, vibrant, and offer value for money.

Members unanimously **agreed** the events plan for 2025/26 as follows:

Event name 2025/26	Date of event	Potential Parish Council contribution	Notes
VE Day event	Thursday 8th May 2025	£2,500	Looking at street party in Durham Market Place on Bank Holiday and part-funding for a beacon lighting event on 8th May in line with national protocol - requires additional funding from Charter Trust / Freeman
Durham Pride	Saturday 24th - Sunday 25th May 2025	£5,000	Previous contribution of £3,000 but costs have increased significantly and there may be a shortfall in DCC funding for this event.

			AS supporting Mel find alternative sponsorship. Impressed by level of exposure and credit to sponsors.
Durham Regatta	Saturday 14th - Sunday 15th June 2025	£1,500	Same contribution as last year. Impressed by level of exposure and credit to sponsors.
Durham FRINGE Festival	Wednesday 23rd July to Sunday 27th July 2025	£5,000	Same contribution as last year. Impressed by level of exposure and credit to sponsors.
Durham DUCK race	Provisionally looking at 5th October 2025	£3,000	Previously committed this amount for event which did not take place in 2024. Durham BID applying for funding and leading on this event.
Durham City Children's Book Festival	TBC but usually last weekend in August	£1,000	Usual contribution of £3,500 however footfall stats from 2024 show little impact on footfall figures from this event and newly announced Seven Stories apparently going to support/ lead on this in future.
VJ Day Event	Friday 15th August 2025	£1,000	Not delivered previously but recognised by the recent Business Committee as equally as important as VE Day and therefore the Committee is keen to host an event to mark this important anniversary.
Uniformed Services Day	TBC but usually first Friday in November	£1,500	Same contribution as last year. Impressed by level of exposure and credit to sponsors.
Remembrance Sunday	Sunday 9th November 2025	£4,500	Parish Council is the civic host for this event.
Christmas events	Throughout	£5,000	Contribution primarily focused on supporting the Christmas Festival. Suggest

	December 2025		reduction from £7,000 (2024) to £5,000 (2025) - other partners need to contribute, e.g. BID, DCC.
Lunar New Year 2026	Saturday 17th February 2026	£1,000	Same contribution as last year. Impressed by level of exposure and credit to sponsors.
		Total: £31,000.00	

7. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 27th February 2025 as follows:

- The Chair reported her thanks to all those involved in planning for the forthcoming Royal Maundy Service at Durham Cathedral. Members were informed that extensive security and operational arrangements were underway to ensure a fitting welcome to Their Majesties upon their visit to the City.
- The Chair further reported that progress was finally being made on the long-awaited retail unit at Mount Oswald. Members were advised that, subject to planning approval by Durham County Council, a 3,000 sqft Asda Express would be opening on The Drive opposite South College. The Chair welcomed this proposal, noting that residents in the Mount Oswald area had expressed strong interest in seeing this unit occupied.
- The Chair advised that she had represented the Parish Council at a recent meeting of Durham County Council's Highways Committee in relation to a proposed Traffic Regulation Order introducing a new road user charge zone. The Parish Council had supported further restrictions on the peninsula to address displaced and inconsiderate parking. The proposal was unanimously approved by the Committee despite objections from parents at the Chorister School. The Chair confirmed that the Council would continue to work closely with DCC to ensure appropriate monitoring and enforcement of the new restrictions.
- Thanks were extended to Claire Murray-Kemp for her work on submitting a strong Section 106 grant application for the installation of three sedum-roofed bus shelters in the Elvet and Claypath areas. The Chair expressed gratitude for her efforts, along with thanks to SNCF and the Elvet Residents Association for their support with the project. The outcome of the application is awaited with interest.
- The Chair reported that Durham County Council would be hosting a series of drop-in consultation events in Elvet during the week commencing 7th April. These events would focus on the proposed redevelopment of Elvet Park. The Parish Council would be participating actively in the consultation,

having already submitted a letter of support for the associated S106 funding bid.

- Members were reminded that the Parish Council's annual community grants window would be opening in April. The Chair advised that the Clerk would be circulating further details to local community and voluntary groups in due course. The Chair reaffirmed the Council's commitment to supporting local initiatives through this funding programme.
- Finally, the Chair reminded Members that the next Full Council meeting would be the final meeting of the current Council term ahead of the Local Elections in May. It was noted that the agenda would be kept light and an opportunity would be given for any retiring Members to offer farewell remarks.

8. REPORT FROM THE 'OPERATION MAUNDY' PLANNING GROUP

The Clerk reported that the Operation Maundy Planning Group had met on 4th March 2025 to discuss preparations for the upcoming Royal Maundy Service at Durham Cathedral on 17th April. The Clerk echoed the group's delight at the news of Their Majesties' visit—the first such Maundy visit to Durham since 1967—and agreed on the importance of extending a warm civic welcome.

The Clerk advised that the visit would be limited to a service at Durham Cathedral, during which His Majesty would present specially minted Maundy money to 152 recipients—76 men and 76 women—selected for their Christian service across the Province of York, as well as Wales and Scotland.

The Cathedral was noted to be preparing for a spectacular event, with the group acknowledging the Cathedral's strong track record in hosting significant national services.

The Clerk reported the following key updates and actions from the meeting:

- A road closure would be in effect on the peninsula from 6:00am on 17th April. The Clerk had been tasked with drafting a letter for businesses, to be reviewed by the police and other partners. He was also following up with DCC on when the closure might be lifted.
- Musical entertainment had been scheduled in the Market Place to encourage footfall and atmosphere. Colin Wilkes had booked singer Paul Skerritt for a morning performance, and the Clerk had arranged for the North Tyneside Steel Band to perform from 1:30pm. The Clerk was also liaising with the police and DCC to confirm that performances would not interfere with formal timings.
- Royal-themed decorations around Prince Bishops Shopping Centre were being explored by Julie Marshall.
- The Clerk had begun designing welcome posters for shopfronts and was working with Paul Howard on additional visual elements, including painted window displays. Drafts would be circulated and costs confirmed.

- Bunting for Saddler Street and Silver Street was being handmade by local WI groups and was scheduled to be installed on 10th April by Keith Dawson. The Clerk would liaise with partners to ensure no disruption to CCTV coverage.
- The Clerk also reported on plans for knitted displays, Frontages in Bloom, and a Royal-themed breakfast and Afternoon Tea promotion, led by Durham BID.
- Jet washing of the peninsula had been confirmed by DCC, with additional hanging baskets also being arranged.
- Promotional work would be jointly developed by the Parish Council and Durham BID. Members were reminded that for security reasons, the timing of the royal arrival could not be published.

The Clerk confirmed that the group would continue to meet virtually each Tuesday, with a final in-person meeting scheduled for Tuesday 15th April.

It was unanimously agreed to a) note the Clerk's report, and b) delegate all planning and budgetary responsibility (within the allocated £1,000 budget) for the delivery of Operation Maundy activities to the Parish Clerk.

In doing so, Members took the opportunity to thank the Clerk for all of his exceptional work on planning for this event.

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.

9. GOOD CITIZEN OF THE YEAR 2025 NOMINATIONS

Members **agreed** to award the Good Citizen of the Year 2025 Award to: Ashleigh White, Andrea Cairns, Matthew Booth, Kirk Thiis and Antony Waterson and Martin Hiles.

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
24th April 2025