

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Thursday 24th April 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, R Friederichsen, R Hanson, G Holland, C Lattin and E Scott.

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley and 5 members of the public.

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

Apologies were received from Councillor R Ormerod. No further apologies were received.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

None received.

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

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

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr Rupert Benjamin updated the Parish Council on the ongoing situation at Homer Terrace, advising that he had been working with local neighbouring students on waste issues and advised that, whilst he had had some success in addressing on-street and side waste problems, he had noticed that some waste is being disposed of into the incorrect waste bins. The Chair highlighted that the Parish Council circulates on an annual basis a leaflet to all households to raise awareness of the waste products which should go into which each waste bin.

Mr Benjamin advised that he would continue to keep the Parish Council updated on the situation at Homer Terrace.

Mr John Lowe took the opportunity to thank the current Councillors on the City of Durham Parish Council for their outstanding work on behalf of the City of Durham parish community over the last four years and also advised that it had been a real pleasure as Chair of the City of Durham Trust to work alongside the Clerk and Members. The Chair thanked Mr Lowe for his kind remarks.

5. COMMITTEE UPDATES

- **Planning and Licensing Committee**

Councillor G Holland presented the Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from meetings held on 21st March and 4th April 2025. There were no queries from Members on these minutes.

• **Environment Committee**

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

Motion by Councillors C Lattin and R Friederichsen on air quality in Durham City

Councillor C Lattin opened the discussion by highlighting the importance of clean air for the City of Durham Parish Council area and specifically highlighted key areas of the City which still experienced high levels of NO₂ levels due predominantly because of vehicle usage.

Councillor R Friederichsen echoed those concerns and expressed his view that clean air should be a human right for every resident and his intention, in supporting the proposed motion on the paper, was to see the good work the current Parish Council has started in this area, continued to be championed by the next Parish Council.

Councillor C Lattin proposed and Councillor R Friederichsen seconded the following motion:

"Given the long-standing, unacceptably high levels of air pollution across various parts of Durham city and their significant negative health and environmental impacts, the City of Durham Parish Council requests that the next Council continues the work to improve the City's air quality as a matter of priority. We urge the new Council to build on the priorities listed above for the benefit of the city as a whole whilst continuing to support the most affected residents."

Councillors E Scott and D Freeman expressed their concern that there is no protocol to tie a new Parish Council to a previous Council's direction through a motion as proposed.

Councillor D Freeman also expressed his concerns at a number of the initiatives proposed as part of the paper and background to this motion and felt that these perhaps focused on one small area of the City, as opposed to taking a City-wide look at how to address the very important issue of clean air.

Councillor A Doig advised that he felt it should be clear that, in agreeing to whatever wording of a motion on clean air, that this must be viewed as a) separate to; and b) not tie the new Council to the proposals as listed on the paper before Members. This was unanimously **agreed** by Members.

Councillor V Ashfield proposed an amendment to the motion and this was seconded by Councillor A Doig as follows:

"Given the long-standing, unacceptably high levels of air pollution across various parts of Durham city and their significant negative health and environmental impacts, the City of Durham Parish Council hopes that the next Council is aware of the request to continue the work to improve the City's air quality. We hope that the new Council reflects on the priorities listed above for the benefit of the city as a whole whilst continuing to support the most affected residents."

This amended motion was **agreed** by 7 votes in favour, 3 votes against and 1 abstention.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

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

The Chair expressed her delight at a real day of pride for our City last Thursday as we welcomed Their Majesties the King and Queen to Durham Cathedral for the Royal Maundy Service. His Majesty handed out Maundy Money to 76 men and 76 women for outstanding service in their communities. The Chair advised that it was a joy to see such a large crowd for this historic occasion. The Lord Lieutenant Mrs Sue Snowden has already been in contact with the Clerk following the event to thank both the Parish Council and representatives of the Operation Maundy Working Group for their tireless work in dressing the City with bunting and knitted displays, putting on musical entertainment and getting the businesses involved with a Royal eatery offer for visitors.

The Chair echoed those thanks and advised that the Clerk has arranged for Mrs Snowden to write directly with a letter of thanks to all those involved with this work. The Chair thanked our friends at Durham Cathedral too for a stunning and unforgettable service.

The Chair also congratulated the 2,500 bikers who revved their way through the City as part of this year's annual Easter Egg run. The Chair advised that this event was an enormous success which saw Easter Eggs being delivered right across the region to children in hospital this Easter. A hugely worthy cause which also raises funds for charities such as the Teenage Cancer Trust, Stray Aid, Feeding Families, Miles for Men and the Northumbria blood bikes amongst others. Terrific work all involved!

The Chair thanked the Clerk and the Durham Markets Company for the exceptional work they are doing in arranging events to mark the VE Day anniversary in May. On 5th May, the Chair reminded Members that the Parish Council will be jointly hosting a community street party in the Market Place. On the 8th May Veterans will be joining colleagues at the Durham Rowing Club for a special display on the River Wear and the Clerk is also liaising with Durham Fire and Rescue on a quiet and dignified lighting of the beacon.

The Chair expressed her shock and concern at the serious attack on prison guard officers at HMP Frankland some weeks ago. The Chair noted that the local press is reporting that this is being reviewed at the very top of Government and advised that this acts as a further reminder of the dangerous and dedicated service of our

public sector and emergency services. The Council sent best wishes for good health and healing to the officers involved.

The Chair thanked local authorities in the LA7 who have already responded to our letter relating to the Tees Valley Energy Recovery Facility. The Chair advised that the Clerk has been liaising with Alan Patrickson at DCC regarding a follow-up meeting to his correspondence and the Environment Committee have particularly stressed a desire to speak with Alan on ways in which the Parish and Town Council sector can support DCC and others in recycling work. The Chair advised that she found it appalling that the North East lags so far behind other regions in its recycling figures and we must all work together to see a change to this.

The Chair encouraged all Members to read the recent appeal decision circulated by the Clerk yesterday relating to a further C3 to C4 application. In addition to our success in preventing the change of use for the Dentist on North Road, the Chair advised that this appeal decision comes as very welcome news and is a strong indication of the hard work and effort undertaken by our Planning and Licensing Committee in resisting further loss of family homes and primary facilities.

Finally, the Chair asked all Members, whether retiring, returning or unreturned after May 1st, to please join the Council for its annual meeting of the parish on 21st May. The Chair advised that she will present an annual report of the work all Members have helped to deliver over the last year and the wider term of this Parish Council and advised that she was also aware that residents will wish to express their appreciation to you all.

7. PARISH COUNCIL EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Members unanimously **approved** the adoption of the following external communications strategy:

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Introduction

The City of Durham Parish Council has a duty to communicate and engage effectively with its residents, partners, employees and stakeholders.

The aim of this strategy is to align our communications objectives to the overarching priorities of the Parish Council and ensure that our brand represents a forward-thinking and ambitious voice for our City as a Council focused on delivering excellent services to our residents.

Achieving the Parish Council's aims and objectives requires good communication with every individual, group and organisation we work with. Without proper co-ordination it would be difficult to make sure messages communicated by the Parish Council are consistent and accurate.

If communication is managed effectively, the Parish Council can create and seize opportunities to communicate with partners and the public and build an accurate and positive reputation beyond our Quality Award status as an organisation.

This strategy illustrates our aim to consistently deliver effective communications to our residents and partners and highlights that good communication is the responsibility of both officers and elected Parish Councillors on the Parish Council.

Purpose

The purpose of this strategy is to strengthen community engagement and communication with all residents, partners and businesses within the City of Durham Parish area.

In adopting this strategy, the City of Durham Parish Council commits to:

- Facilitate community engagement by both informing and engaging with residents through a variety of different medias on the services and events we deliver.
- Promote and build a positive environment and a strong sense of community within the City.
- Focus on current issues whilst also looking forwards and embracing new thinking and ideas.
- Inform residents what action the Parish Council is taking on their behalf and how their precept is spent.
- Where no conflict of interest is likely to arise, to promote the work of other organisations which the Parish Council considers provide benefit to residents.

Objectives

- To promote the Parish Council's brand consistently
- To enhance and promote the reputation, image and beliefs of the Parish Council
- To be proactive in communications
- To provide inclusive and accessible communications
- To provide clear, regular, reliable, timely and accurate communications using a multi-channel approach but focused on a 'digital-first' approach
- Ensure all staff understand the Parish Council's priorities, brand and how their role contributes to the overall aims of the Council
- Ensure Councillors are kept informed and engaged
- Identify any training requirements for either staff or elected Members

Our communication principles

Through all communications we ensure:

- we are resident-focused, informative and positive, actively promoting local democracy and involving our residents and businesses in decision-making where possible

- the messages we send are transparent, consistent, accurate, clear and timely and in keeping with the Parish Councils' overall strategy
- we provide an open, professional, fair and efficient service to our media where we are honest and proactive
- we always aim to support and protect the reputation of the Parish Council, its staff and elected Parish Councillors
- our communications are always legal and adheres to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (published in March 2011)

Proactive engagement and communications

It is the responsibility of everyone working within the City of Durham Parish Council to identify newsworthy items; these will include a range of Parish Council activities and decisions. It is the responsibility of the Parish Clerk and the Chair of the Parish Council to make the decision as to whether or not a press release should be issued on any given topic.

Handling media enquiries

The Parish Clerk co-ordinates all formal media enquiries to the Parish Council. Members and Parish Council staff who are directly approached by the media should not attempt to answer questions themselves without establishing the full facts. If Members are in any doubt they should consult the Parish Clerk and the Chair of the Parish Council.

The Parish Council should not pass comments on leaks, anonymous allegations or allegations about individual staff or Members. The phrase "no comment" should not be used as a response to a media enquiry. The City of Durham Parish Council is open and accountable and should always try to explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry.

Managing negative issues

From time to time the Parish Council may need to respond to negative issues. It is important that these situations are managed carefully so as to limit the potential for negative publicity.

Members should alert the Parish Clerk as soon as a potentially negative issue which may attract media interest is known. They should not wait until contact is made by the media.

Members and staff must be prepared to work together to prepare holding statements, other information and carry out research even if no media have contacted the Parish Council about an issue.

Should the issue relate to a formal standards complaint against a particular elected Member, the Parish Council cannot interfere in this process – this is managed through Durham County Council – nor should the Parish Council or any other Member make any public comment as to the detail of the issue or the process by which this is being dealt with.

Correcting inaccurate reporting

Should the media publish or broadcast something inaccurate about the Parish Council, a quick decision needs to be taken on any action necessary to correct it. The issue should be discussed with the Parish Clerk and Chair of the Parish Council to decide what action is appropriate. This could be a letter or press release, a conversation with the journalist concerned, a personal letter to the editor or, in exceptional cases, legal advice sought.

It should be noted that in the case of minor inaccuracies which have little or no impact on the message being conveyed, it can sometimes be counterproductive to complain; each case should be judged individually.

Occasionally the Parish Council will get something wrong. In these cases, damage limitation is the key – this can usually be achieved by admitting the mistake, apologising and stating how the Parish Council will learn from the error or put it right.

Press releases

The use of press releases is a key technique for publicising Parish Council activities, decisions and achievements. The work of the City of Durham Parish Council is very often subject to significant media attention, largely because of the nature of the parish we represent and all Members and staff should be mindful of this.

An official Parish Council release is made on behalf of the Parish Council as a whole; it will be written and issued by the Parish Clerk once agreed with the Chair of the Parish Council and (where required) the Chair of a relevant Committee of the Parish Council.

Official Parish Council releases will follow a corporate style appropriate for the media being targeted and a central record will be maintained. All releases will accurately reflect the corporate view of the Parish Council, contain relevant facts and will always include an approved quotation from an appropriate Parish Councillor.

Parish Council press releases will not promote the views of specific political groups, publicise the activities of individual Parish Councillors, identify a Member's political party or persuade the general public to hold a particular view.

Interviews

Any member of staff or elected Member who is contacted by a journalist requesting an interview in their capacity as a representative of the Parish Council should refer the matter to the Parish Clerk.

The situation and the information required by the journalist will inform the choice of person put forward for interview. Officers should never give their opinion on specific Parish Council policy but must keep to the corporate line and key

messages, their role being to provide expertise and factual knowledge only in support of the Parish Council's approved and agreed policies.

Media coverage of council meetings

Provision is made for members of the media to attend Parish Council and Committee meetings. During meetings, Members and staff should be mindful that any comments and messages are put across in a manner which gives the journalist an accurate picture rather than relying on the journalist's interpretation of what may be a complex issue.

Where a meeting of the Parish Council and its Committees includes an opportunity for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by the Parish Council's Standing Orders. Both the media and the public are entitled to film and record council meetings held in public.

Information Requirements

Should the Parish Council receive a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 on a topic on which there is correspondence (written or email), that correspondence will normally have to be disclosed unless it is exempt. The fact that the disclosure may prove embarrassing would not, in itself, prevent disclosure. In addition, care should be taken when processing personal data.

The Data Protection Act 2018 prevents the use of personal information other than for the purposes for which it was supplied. Members should bear this in mind when using any personal data which may be supplied to them by their constituents. The Parish Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law.

The Parish Council cannot disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Parish Council's standing orders, under contract or by common law. Parish Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the code of conduct adopted by the Parish Council, a copy of which is available via the Parish Council's website: <https://cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk/important-documents-and-policies/>

Important guidance to Members

The City of Durham Parish Council's communications with the media will always seek to represent the corporate position and views of the Parish Council as a body. If the views of Parish Councillors are different to the Parish Council's corporate position and views, it is the responsibility of every Councillor to make this distinction clear and Members must always make clear that they are speaking in an individual capacity and not on behalf of the Parish Council.

Subject to the obligations on Parish Councillors not to disclose information referred to in the "Freedom of Information and data protection" section and not to misrepresent the Parish Council's position, Parish Councillors are free to communicate their position and views.

Councillors should not make personal statements that could damage the reputation of the Parish Council, or have a negative impact on partnerships with other organisations, or on the credibility of the Parish Council or other Members.

All individual Councillor communications should:

- be lawful
- be cost effective
- be objective
- be even-handed
- be appropriate
- have regard to the Parish Council's policies, particularly our Equality and Diversity Policy
- be issued with care, particularly during periods of heightened sensitivity (e.g. during election campaigns).

Methods of communication and engagement

The Parish Council will use a variety of methods based on what reaches people most effectively:

Parish Council's office	Residents will be asked to book an appointment to meet with the Parish Clerk either via our website or at the front desk at Clayport library. All meetings with residents should generally always include at least one relevant Councillor depending on the issue.
Correspondence (general)	The Council will respond promptly to all external correspondence requiring a reply. External consultations will be acknowledged and responded to within the consultation period.
Parish Council meetings	All meetings (including Committees) are open to the public and press and advertised on the Parish Council's website, Agendas and minutes are available to all electronically (NB: Agendas are circulated and published at least 3 working days in advance of the meeting, excluding the date of publication and the date of the meeting – a statutory requirement).
Annual parish meeting	The annual meeting of the City of Durham parish is for all residents to come together to discuss whatever aspects of community life they wish and for the Parish Council to showcase its work over the last year. This will usually be held on the third Wednesday of the month of May at 6:30pm at an appropriate and

	accessible location within the City of Durham parish area. The date, time and location of the parish meeting will be advertised online, via the noticeboards around the parish and, from 2025, via an invitation flier through each household door within the parish area.
Parish Council website	The Parish Council website is updated by the Clerk. It is the responsibility of all Councillors to check the site regularly for any issues of inaccuracy or omissions and to inform the Clerk who is the website controller.
Social media	The Parish Council has its own Facebook page, controlled solely by the Parish Clerk, with over 2,000 active followers and has proven to be an excellent tool for online engagement. Members should contact the Parish Clerk should they wish to have anything published on the Facebook page. The Facebook page should not be used as an alternative to the Parish Council's website which should be the one-stop shop for all information about Council events and services. The Parish Council has also adopted a Social Media Policy which governs how this page is managed.
Noticeboards	The Parish Council does not own any noticeboards within the parish area. However, the Clerk has the contact details for all key holders of all the existing noticeboards within the parish area and – for events such as the date of the annual meeting of the parish as well as a photo and contact details of all Parish Councillors – will make use of these noticeboards, subject to the approval of their respective owners (in most cases this is DCC).
Parish Council newsletter	A quarterly online newsletter will be produced by the Clerk in conjunction with a selected Working Group. This will be in addition to the monthly Neighbourhood Warden report. In addition, a hard copy newsletter will be produced once per year and distributed in October as a "Year in Review" of the work of the Parish Council. This will coincide with the "<i>What to do if you have a local issue in Durham...</i>" annual leaflet in order to keep delivery costs to a minimum.

Press releases	Where the Parish Council decides to use external media to promote significant points of interest, local issues or achievement, it will issue a press release to the local media. The Parish Clerk will maintain an up-to-date list of media contacts.
Community events	The Parish Council will host ad hoc community consultations seeking to hear resident's views on specific issues or developments.
Surveys and Feedback	These are a key component of listening and it is important that the Council acts on the information gathered. At the annual meeting of the parish, attendees will be asked to complete a survey seeking their views on the main issues within the parish and how the Parish Council can improve its services. Similarly, ahead of the budget-setting process for the forthcoming financial year, the Parish Council will issue a parish-wide survey on resident priorities in October of each calendar year.
Fliers and leaflets	From time to time, the Parish Council will distribute fliers and leaflets to help advertise events or other work within the parish area. This is in addition to the regular "<i>What to do if you have a local issue in Durham...</i>" annual leaflet and the "Year in Review" annual hard copy parish newsletter (both distributed in October).

Review of this strategy

Full Council will review this strategy on an annual basis in May at its annual meeting of the Council.

End of report

8. PROPOSED OPERATIONS BETWEEN MAY ELECTIONS AND THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

Members **agreed** the following operational arrangements between the May elections and the annual meeting of the Parish Council, noting that all prospective candidates for the Parish Council should also receive a copy of these arrangements:

- All elected Members will be provided with a copy of the Good Councillors guide, the latest copy of the Council's Code of Conduct, the Durham City Neighbourhood

Plan and '*Looking Forward*' document as well as copies of the Council's Strategy and Budget for 2025/26.

- To ensure that all elected Members sign their Acceptance of Office and Declaration of Interests Forms, the Clerk will be available to get these to you and signed on one of the following dates: **2nd May, 6th May or 12th May**. Please contact the Clerk via email at parishclerk@cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk in order to arrange a mutually acceptable time on these days to meet and do this.
- For all retiring Members or those unelected following the 1st May local elections, the Parish Clerk shall be archiving your .gov.uk email accounts from 7th May 2025. This will mean that you will no longer have access to this email account. Members must not retain any personal information (such as email addresses, addresses, etc) from constituents on personal devices or otherwise, if they hold this solely through their capacity as a Parish Councillor and through their Parish Council email account, in accordance with GDPR.
- The existing Committee structure shall remain in place (i.e. Planning and Licensing Committee, Environment Committee, Business Committee, Personnel Committee and Finance Committee) until the annual meeting of the Parish Council on Wednesday 28th May.
- No Parish Council Committees shall sit during the month of May.
- The annual meeting of the parish shall take place on Wednesday 21st May 2025 at 6:30pm.
- A timetable of future meetings of each of the Parish Council's Committees shall be agreed at the annual meeting of the Parish Council on Wednesday 28th May 2025. Members are asked to arrive at Merryoaks Community Hall at 5:30pm on 28th May 2025 so that a photographer may take Members' official Parish Council photographs. All Members must attend this please and are encouraged to wear smart attire for this photograph.
- The Council has now agreed to delegate responsibility for any urgent matters, between the May elections and the annual meeting of the Parish Council, to the Parish Clerk.
- Members are asked to note that the Clerk shall be on annual leave between 2nd – 12th June 2025.

End of report

9. FAREWELL REMARKS BY RETIRING COUNCILLORS

Councillors E Ashby, J Ashby, N Brown, R Hanson and R Friederichsen took the opportunity to thank all colleagues on the Parish Council for their collective work and good comradery over this term of the Parish Council, highlighting particularly a number of successes over that period. All Members wished the Parish Council and its Members and staff well into the future.

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking all those Members retiring at this election for their hard work and dedicated service to the City of Durham Parish Council community. The Chair highlighted specific projects she was particularly delighted to work with colleagues on and she felt that this had been a really excellent and successful term of the Parish Council.

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

Signed,

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

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council
(28th May 2025)**