

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Wednesday 25th June 2025 at 7:00pm in the Main Hall of the Merryoaks Community Hall, Park House Rd, Durham DH1 3QF.

Present: Councillors V Ashfield, G Bignardi, L Brown, T Cleaver, R Cornwell, D Freeman, R Handy, G Holland, E Hopgood, C Lattin, P Layton, F Robinson, E Scott, S Walker and L Wilson.

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley, 8 members of the public and Mr Mark Anslow and Jacqui Toase (Durham County Council).

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

Apologies were received and **accepted** from Councillor F Robinson.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

Councillor E Scott declared an interest in the grant application from Artickoke and took no part in the discussion or vote on this application.

Councillor S Walker declared an interest in the grant application from Durham Woodland Cemetery and took no part in the discussion or vote on this application.

Councillor C Lattin declared an interest in the grant application from the Friends of Pelaw Woods and took no part in the discussion or vote on this application.

Councillor P Layton declared an interest in the grant applications from Alington House and St. Oswald's Institute and took no part in the discussion or vote on these applications.

Councillor L Brown declared an interest in the grant application from Durham Woodland Cemetery and took no part in the discussion or vote on this application.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 28TH MAY 2025

The minutes of the annual meeting of the Council held on 28th May 2025 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr Rupert Benjamin provided the meeting with an update on the waste situation at Homer Terrace and advised that he continues to take action as and where he can and took the opportunity to welcome some progress with students managing their waste in this area. Mr Benjamin advised that, with the students soon to move out, he would monitor the situation in this area and would look to report back to the Council in 3 months' time. The Chair thanked Mr Benjamin for his ongoing efforts and for this update.

Ms Debbie Hills took the opportunity to thank the Parish Council at the point of the meeting where the grant application for the Friends of Pelaw Woods was approved.

5. COMMITTEE UPDATES

• Finance Committee

Councillor S Walker presented the minutes from the Finance Committee meeting held on 14th February 2025. There being no queries from Members, Councillor S Walker moved on to Committee reports.

Report on financial position of the Parish Council at the start of Financial Year 2025-26

Councillor S Walker presented a report outlining a carried forward balance of £97,439 from 2024-25, supplemented by a VAT rebate of £7,654, totalling £105,093 in funds entering FY 2025-26. Members noted that £36,330 was ringfenced for specific projects and that £18,763 required reallocation or movement to reserves.

Councillor S Walker advised that the Parish Council's Finance Committee met on 20th June 2025 and Committee Members had **agreed** to recommend the reallocation of funding as follows, taking account of underspent budgets:

- £3,000 was moved from the Improving the River Wear budget, leaving approx. £4,300 remaining in this budget for FY25-26.
- £5,000 was moved from the (fundraising support) staffing budget in relation, leaving £8,750 in this budget for FY25-26 (of which up to £3,750 is already earmarked).
- £13,000 was added to the Council's events budget (taking account of upcoming Autumn events as well as the Christmas light switch on).
- £2,000 was added to the administration of the Council budget.
- £7,181 was added to the small grants budget, taking into account the demand for grants this financial year.
- £3,000 was added to the business events grant fund this financial year.
- £2,000 was added to the contingencies budget.

Councillor V Ashfield welcomed that the Parish Council is currently in a healthy financial situation and requested that £2,000 be reallocated to the Environment Committee's planting budget for FY 2025-26. Members agreed that this requested funding could be drawn from contingency funding during the year should this be required.

Members unanimously **agreed** to the recommended reallocation of budgets as set out in the report provided.

Report on grant applications from local community and voluntary organisations for Financial Year 2025-26

The Clerk reminded Members that, at the January meeting of the Full Parish Council 2023, Councillors formally agreed to allocate £15,000 of the budget for 2025/26 towards grants for local and voluntary organisations.

The Clerk advised that the grant funding window opened on 1st April 2025 and this has been advertised on social media, the Parish Council's website, through the local press and through direct e-mails.

The Clerk reminded Members that organisations were asked to apply by mid-June 2025 in order that the Finance Committee may consider this at its meeting in June and make a recommendation to Full Council in June. Once approved, all grant payments will be made at the end of June 2025.

The Clerk advised that Members have been provided with the full details of all applications. Members considered the merits of each application and unanimously **agreed** to allocate funding as follows, taking into account the additional allocation of grant funding agreed in the earlier item on the Agenda:

Organisation	Project	Amount requested	Amount agreed by Full Council
Alington House	To re-establish a garden group within Alington House, growing fruits and vegetables which the volunteers can take home and encouraging wellbeing by working in the outdoors. Since Covid we had a volunteer project from Ingeus repair access and build a seating area which our users enjoy but many have expressed an interest in gardening again and we are looking for funds towards extra accessible planters (we had raised beds built but these are down steps that are uneven) and plants	£750	£750

Artichoke	A grant from City of Durham Parish Council would enable us to engage Parishioners in a curator-led tour of the festival before it opens to the public, with opportunities to meet the creative team, learn about the artworks and celebrate Lumiere as a community. We will target communities who are underserved by creative activities and who face barriers to taking part, including low-income families. We have strong links with local schools and community groups, and we would work with City of Durham Parish Council to identify priority communities to engage in the tour. We will also work with the Parish Council to promote volunteering opportunities to Parishioners during the festival. Lumiere volunteers guide audiences and provide information about the artworks, meeting new people, developing their confidence and gaining a sense of community pride and belonging.	£1,000	£0
Durham Hospital Radio	The station has an item of equipment which urgently needs repairing at a cost of £1570. Also a contribution of £1430 against our annual running costs would be extremely beneficial.	£3,000	£1,570
Durham Scratch Choir	New printer to print all the music sheets for our choir	£250	£300

Durham Woodland Cemetery	Apart from a ring-fenced grant from Durham Crematorium Fund for 5 memorial benches for each of the glades in the cemetery our funds barely cover even our basic expenses (insurance etc). Our income prior to the covid pandemic came primarily from the hire of the lodge at the Woodland cemetery by families wishing to hold funeral services and memorials. Sadly the lodge has suffered severe storm damage to the roof, for the repair of which we have been quoted around £7000. We are intending to apply to Point North for a grant to help with this repair. We will then be able once again to hire out the lodge to bereaved families as mentioned. As a newly formed group of trustees we are also looking at various ways whereby we can raise regular funds including a possible nominal annual subscription from our membership. In the meantime, we would like to promote the Cemetery and provide information leaflets for funeral Directors and the general public. We are eager to attract volunteer working parties who would assist in the conservation of the area and keep it in good order. We would also like to improve the facilities offered by the lodge. Other than that, we depend upon donations and gift aid.	£500	£500
Friends of Pelaw Woods	We require materials - wood, drains, tools. To date this year we have purchased wood, a pond liner and new scythes. We also hire a contractor to cut the grass in autumn in specific locations. Over the last 4 years we have been spending donations generated by the former Chairman opening his private garden. These reserves are now spent. The current bank balance is £64. The proposed grant will fully fund us for the forthcoming 12 months.	£350	£350

Seven Stories	The Tiger Who Came to Tea touring exhibition from Seven Stories, The National Centre for Children's Books, delivers an unforgettable in-centre experience for children and their grown-ups — combining nostalgia, photo opportunities, and interactive fun. This will increase family footfall, dwell time, and social media buzz this summer. Supported by the Seven Stories unique story telling free to families throughout the day. We will also run book donations weekly whilst this exhibition is in Two Tales supporting books into communities.	£6,000	£2,700
St. Nicholas Community Forum	SNCF DELI COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT: SNCF commenced a community garden project January 2025 – the SNCF Deli Community Garden Project. Our aim is to provide a space where the local community can work together to grow chemical free produce throughout the year and share gardening skills and knowledge. The area is inclusive, child friendly and supports the environment and wildlife. By May 2025 we have 15 regular gardeners, mostly novices, but also wider community support from many other people within the local area who get involved when they can, help as needed with larger jobs, give donations of tools, plants and advice. We promote the project through local forums to encourage other residents to get involved and have linked with the University and students are welcome to join when they can. The community garden has already become something more than a communal space to grow produce. It is flourishing into a space of wellbeing, creativity, growing social connections and friendships. There are opportunities for everyone involved to share and learn gardening, woodwork, produce growing, environment, nature and wildlife skills and knowledge.	£2,964	£2,964

Together we have cleared the site and planted a large variety of vegetables and herbs, all are growing successfully. We plan to further develop the community garden; to maximise produce growing space and the potential for more members of the local community to be involved. We would like to apply for funding to purchase staging for the existing polytunnel in the garden (we are currently using makeshift shelves which limit the growing area), a greenhouse where we can grow more produce all year round and a small shed which will be custom made to be accessible and green, using reclaimed wood and a sedum roof. The shed will be used to safely store away tools under cover and resources that can be used by our community gardeners (seeds, gardening guides, etc). This will help us maximise use of the space we have.

We are requesting support for Stage Two of the garden development – polytunnel staging, a greenhouse (which includes greenhouse structure, installation, materials to prepare the base, internal staging, automatic window open system and gutter and water butt to utilise rainwater), a small green roof shed and seed trays/plant pots for planting.

The SNCF Deli Community Garden has Public Liability Insurance and comprehensive risk assessments for all activities. All necessary requirements are in place for student volunteering opportunities through Durham University volunteer platforms.

We are a new member of Social Farms & Gardens and look forward to working towards their vision: 'People and communities reaching their full potential through nature-based

	activities as a part of everyday life' and have joined the RHS Grow With It national programme to get year-round community growing support.		
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St Cuthbert's Hospice	Our gardens continue to be a focal point of the hospice and are enjoyed by our patients and visitors. 2025 is an extra special year because we have been chosen to be the recipient of the "Hospice Garden" which will be showcased at the Chelsea Flower Show in May. Afterwards it will be rebuilt in our grounds for the benefit and enjoyment of everyone who visits us. The additional garden will improve our grounds and continue to provide sensory stimulation and therapeutic benefits not only to our patients but to everyone who visits. The grant would be used to improve the site/garden and complete essential repairs which will contribute to our grounds being a welcoming and peaceful place for all who visit them. We anticipate at least 1000 would visit our gardens which includes patients, families, carers, health care professional, staff, volunteers and the public.	£4,250	£0
St Margaret's Centre	To purchase IT equipment (3 x laptops) to help us deliver activities, training and support.	£1,047	£1,047
St Oswald's Institute	Renovation of kitchen to include: isolation of gas supply; creation of serving hatch with food warmer below; provision of electric refreshment preparation and food reheating facilities, in line with C. of E. 2030 net zero target, for e.g. providing soup and Warm Space, and other community functions.	£5,000	£12,000
Total:			£22,181

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 28th May 2025 as follows:

Firstly, a big thank you to everyone who attended the recent councillor training sessions organised by our Clerk. If you missed any, do not worry – more sessions will follow. Please do take a moment to read the planning training document, and I am pleased to be working with the Clerk on a new licensing guide – more on that soon.

Huge thanks to Cllr Holland for representing us so effectively at the Central & East Area County Planning Committee. The proposed conversion of Hallgarth Care Home into another PBSA was unanimously refused – a great result. We will keep a close eye on what happens next.

I am also pleased to hear that Councillors Lattin and Ashfield's landlord appeal scheme is moving forward and that the Environment Committee will be funding extra waste collections as a result. This is great news for our residents, especially as we aim to avoid a repeat of the waste issues seen in 2021.

A quick reminder: please use your official .gov email accounts for council business, and always submit apologies in advance if you cannot attend meetings – nominating a substitute helps keep us quorate and effective.

You will have seen the announcement about the Elvet Park consultation taking place next Tuesday. This site has been neglected for too long, so I hope residents and stakeholders will share their views. It is frustrating the old toilet block is still to be marketed, despite years of pressure.

On a more celebratory note, I am delighted that HM The King has appointed Mrs Sue Snowdon as a Dame Commander of the Royal Victorian Order for her outstanding service as Lord-Lieutenant of County Durham. Congratulations also to all the County Durham recipients including Patricia Barker from our Parish – we are proud of you all!

Finally, heartfelt thanks to Cllr Liz Brown for her fantastic service as Mayor over the past year. Liz, you did us proud. We warmly welcome Gary to the role and wish him every success.

7. PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH AN EDITORIAL WORKING GROUP TO SUPPORT THE PRODUCTION OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S NEWSLETTER

The Chair reported that, in April 2025, the Parish Council adopted its External Communications Strategy, which commits the Council to producing a quarterly newsletter in addition to its existing monthly Neighbourhood Warden report and the annual Chair's report. The strategy identifies the newsletter as a key vehicle for informing residents, partners, and stakeholders about the Parish Council's activities, promoting local democracy, and strengthening community engagement.

The Chair highlighted that the newsletter serves an important role in raising awareness of the Parish Council's work, enhancing transparency, and fostering a more informed and active community. While residents can subscribe online to receive digital copies, at least one edition each year—specifically the October issue—will be printed and delivered to households in the Parish area. The cost of printing and delivering each edition prohibits all four issues from being circulated in hard copy, but efforts will continue to ensure wide access to the publication.

To support this work, the Chair proposed that an Editorial Working Group be established with the following aims:

- To identify and gather content for the newsletter;

- To ensure the tone, balance, and messaging align with the Council's External Communications Strategy;
- To review draft editions prior to publication;
- To promote the newsletter to residents and stakeholders;
- To consider and incorporate resident feedback;
- To operate in a fair, inclusive and non-partisan manner.

The Working Group was agreed to comprise no fewer than three elected Members (with representation from all political groups) and the Parish Clerk, who will serve in an advisory and editorial capacity. It will meet at least quarterly, prior to each newsletter's publication.

Members unanimously **agreed** to the establishment of the Editorial Working Group, adopted the Terms of Reference as set out, and appointed Councillors V Ashfield, R Cornwell, C Lattin, G Holland, L Brown and (as a reserve Member) R Handy as Members of the Group, alongside the Clerk.

8. PLANNING EVENTS TO COMMEMORATE THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF VICTORY OVER JAPAN DAY

The Clerk reminded Members that the 80th anniversary of Victory over Japan (VJ) Day, which marks the official end of the Second World War on 15 August 1945, represents an important national and local moment of remembrance and tribute.

The Clerk also reminded Members that the Parish Council has previously taken a lead in organising commemorative events, including for VE Day and D-Day anniversaries.

The Clerk outlined the significant historical importance of VJ Day, noting the diversity of the Commonwealth's Fourteenth Army, the scale of conflict across the Asia-Pacific, and the enduring impact of the sacrifices made by both Armed Forces personnel and civilians.

The Clerk confirmed that the Council had agreed a provisional budget of £1,000 for VJ Day commemorations. Following on from this, a full programme of events was proposed as follows:

- A commemorative service at Durham Cathedral on Friday 15 August 2025, with invitations extended to veterans, local dignitaries, schools, and residents.
- The Cathedral to be lit red in honour of the anniversary.
- A special exhibition of items from the DLI and archives to be hosted at The Story, coordinated in partnership with the Clerk.
- A public film screening of *Unbroken*—which tells the story of a WWII POW in Japan—to take place in the City during August.
- A civic reception in the Durham Room at County Hall, followed by the ceremonial lighting of the Durham City Beacon in the evening.

The Clerk also reported that the Durham City Freemen Charitable Trust has pledged £2,000 toward the reception and beacon lighting and will cover the cost of the beacon's operation. The Chair thanked the Trust for its generous support

and Members **agreed** to accept this kind offer as well as the offer of further funding towards beacon lighting events marking important national anniversaries, etc.

Members unanimously **approved** the full schedule of commemorative events and **agreed** to delegate all associated budgetary and logistical responsibilities to the Parish Clerk.

9. PROPOSAL TO PROVIDE FUNDING TO THE DURHAM CITY SAFETY HUB

The Chair highlighted that the Parish Council has played a central role in supporting the Durham City Safety Hub since its inception in February 2022, contributing £10,000 per year for each of the past three years. The Chair reminded Members that in agreeing its 2025/26 budget, the Council had again allocated £10,000 to the Hub, in recognition of its ongoing importance to community safety—particularly for women and vulnerable individuals in the night-time economy.

The Chair provided a detailed background to the Hub's establishment, which followed the award of Safer Streets and Safety of Women and Girls at Night (SWaN) funding. Though initial plans to operate the hub from a city centre retail unit proved impractical, a successful partnership with St. Nicholas Church enabled the project to proceed from that location.

The Chair reported that, since its launch, the Safety Hub has proven to be a valuable and, in some cases, life-saving facility, operating on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday nights from 9pm to 3am. It supports individuals experiencing a wide range of vulnerabilities, including intoxication, mental health crises, and general welfare concerns. Notably, incident data shows that female-related interventions consistently outnumber those involving males, with no recorded instances of spiking or sexual offences.

Mr Mark Anslow advised that, due to ongoing financial constraints, the Hub has now ceased operations on Wednesday nights. Mark also advised that the revised annual running cost for maintaining operations on Friday and Saturday nights is approximately £69,000.

Durham County Council (DCC) and the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office have already pledged continued funding for 2025/26, and Mark advised that discussions with Durham BID and Durham University around future funding are ongoing.

Members expressed their desire to see the Wednesday operation of the City Safety Hub relaunched through further financial support from Durham University. The Chair also reaffirmed the Parish Council's wider ambition to see the night-time economy contribute to long-term funding of this hub.

Members unanimously reaffirmed their commitment to the project and **agreed** to provide £10,000 to support the Safety Hub's operation in the 2025/26 financial year.

10. REQUEST TO SUPPORT THE MAYOR'S CHARITY APPEAL

The Clerk advised that the Parish Council has received correspondence from the Mayor's PA at Durham County Council on behalf of the newly elected Mayor of Durham City Councillor Gary Hutchinson, asking if the Parish Council would consider supporting the mayor's charity appeal this year.

Following his election as Mayor in May 2025, Councillor Gary Hutchinson announced that he would be supporting St. Cuthbert's Hospice in the City of Durham parish area; a charity close to his heart.

The Clerk advised that no specific amount has been requested in the letter from the Mayor's PA and any offers of a donation will be gratefully received and acknowledged and any donations will be provided to the charity.

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council has previously supported the past Mayors' appeals with a donation of £500.

Members unanimously **agreed** to support the Mayor's Charity Appeal for St. Cuthbert's Hospice with a total donation to the appeal of £500.

11. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND APPOINTMENT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S CLIMATE LEAD

The Clerk reminded Members that, in February 2022, the Parish Council had agreed to establish the role of a Climate Lead for the City of Durham Parish Council. To support with the understanding of the responsibilities of this role, a set of Terms of Reference for this position were also established.

The Clerk reminded Members that this role and these Terms of Reference must be reviewed on an annual basis at the Council's annual meeting.

Members unanimously **agreed** the Terms of Reference for the Climate Lead role and also unanimously **agreed** to appoint Councillor V Ashfield as its Climate Lead for the ensuing year of the Parish Council; as proposed by Councillor C Lattin and seconded by Councillor R Cornwell.

12. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND APPOINTMENT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S ARMED FORCES CHAMPION

The Clerk reminded Members that, in June 2023, the Parish Council had agreed to establish the role of an Armed Forces Champion for the City of Durham Parish Council. The Clerk advised that this role was primarily a ceremonial role where the postholder may represent the Parish Council at such events as the Remembrance Day parade and all other events with a main focus on the past and present contributions of the armed services. This role involves working with the Clerk and partners on the organisation of these important events.

The Clerk reminded Members that this role and the Terms of Reference associated with this role must be reviewed on an annual basis.

Members unanimously **agreed** the Terms of Reference for the Armed Forces Champion role and also unanimously **agreed** to appoint Councillor E Scott as its Armed Forces Champion for the ensuing year of the Parish Council; as proposed by Councillor D Freeman and seconded by Councillor L Brown.

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.

13. MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING RELATING TO THE DURHAM CITY BEACON

Members considered the existing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the County Council, Durham City Freeman and the City of Durham Parish Council and **agreed** that this ought to be reviewed at the earlier opportunity.

Members also **agreed** to delegate full responsibility of this task to the Clerk and the newly appointed Armed Forces Champion for the City of Durham Councillor E Scott.

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

Signed,



**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council
(23rd July 2025)**