Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Wednesday 25th March 2026 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**), L Brown, T Cleaver, R Cornwell, D Freeman, R Handy, E Hopgood, C Lattin, P Layton, F Robinson, E Scott and L Wilson.

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley and 2 members of the public.

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

Apologies were received from Councillors V Ashfield and G Holland.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

None received.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 25TH FEBRUARY 2026

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th February 2026 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None received.

5. BITESIZE COUNCILLOR TRAINING – PARISH COUNCIL SCHEME OF DELEGATION

The Chair advised Members that she wished to introduce a new initiative at the beginning of meetings of Full Council, whereby brief, bite-sized training updates would be provided to support Councillors in their roles and responsibilities. The Chair noted that this approach would assist in maintaining a consistent understanding of key governance principles and strengthen effective decision-making across the Council.

The Chair then delivered an overview of the Council's Scheme of Delegation, outlining its purpose as a framework established under the Local Government Act to enable the efficient and timely conduct of Council business.

Members were advised that the scheme ensures that decisions are taken at the most appropriate level, balancing operational efficiency with democratic accountability, with strategic and policy matters reserved for Full Council determination.

The Chair highlighted that the Scheme of Delegation confers defined responsibilities upon the Parish Clerk, including his statutory roles as Proper Officer and Responsible Finance Officer. The Clerk is authorised to manage the day-to-day administration of the Council, implement decisions, and ensure compliance with legislative and procedural requirements, whilst maintaining transparency through regular reporting of delegated decisions to Council or Committee meetings.

The Chair further outlined that delegated powers extend across key functional areas, including general administration, financial management within approved budgets, staffing matters in accordance with Council policies, and the management of Council land and property. Provision is also made for the Clerk to act in cases of urgency or emergency, subject to appropriate consultation and subsequent reporting, thereby ensuring continuity of service and responsiveness to unforeseen circumstances.

Members were reminded that, whilst delegation is essential for operational effectiveness, it remains underpinned by the principle of openness, with the expectation that Members, the press, and the public are kept appropriately informed of decisions taken under delegated authority. The Chair advised that the Clerk would always bring back a decision made in writing to the next Full Council meeting so that Members may ratify this accordingly.

The Chair highlighted that it is in very rare circumstances where a decision is needed to be taken outside of the usual schedule of meetings and reminded Members that they have a right to request an extraordinary meeting of the Council if they feel that the issue is so urgent and important, that it cannot wait until the next scheduled meeting.

There were no queries from Members following the Chair’s presentation. The Chair thanked Members for their continued support in upholding this important Scheme of Delegation.

6. COMMITTEE UPDATES

- **Planning and Licensing Committee**

Councillor L Brown presented the Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from the meetings held on 6th and 20th February 2026. There being no queries from Members, Councillor L Brown moved on to Committee reports.

County Durham Plan Houses in Multiple Occupation Interim Policy

Councillor R Cornwell presented a report on the proposed HMO Interim Policy; as presented to the last DCC Cabinet meeting.

Councillor R Cornwell presented a report to Members regarding the County Durham Plan Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Interim Policy , advising that Cabinet, at its meeting on 18 March 2026, had approved a proposal to undertake a six-week public consultation on a new interim planning policy. It was explained that the purpose of the policy is to respond to emerging concerns about the increasing number of HMOs across parts of County Durham not currently covered by existing Article 4 Directions, and to provide a clear policy framework pending the wider review of the County Durham Plan.

Members were informed that HMOs, defined as properties occupied by three or more individuals from separate households sharing facilities, provide an important source of affordable accommodation but can give rise to planning challenges where concentrations become excessive. Councillor Cornwell outlined that the proposed interim policy seeks to ensure that such developments contribute to mixed and balanced communities, whilst safeguarding residential amenity and maintaining appropriate living standards.

The meeting was advised that, under current national planning regulations, smaller HMOs may be created without planning permission unless permitted development rights are removed through an Article 4 Direction. Existing Article 4 controls already apply within defined areas of Durham City; however, evidence indicates that HMO numbers are increasing outside these areas. In response, Durham County Council has approved a further Article 4 Direction covering the remainder of the county, which will come into effect on 17 August 2026, requiring planning permission for most new HMO conversions.

Councillor Cornwell further highlighted key elements of the proposed interim policy, including the introduction of thresholds to prevent over-concentration of HMOs and measures to avoid the "sandwiching" of residential dwellings between HMOs or non-residential uses. It was noted that the policy also requires the submission of management plans and sets expectations regarding accommodation standards in order to mitigate impacts on neighbouring residents and ensure acceptable living conditions.

In addition, Councillor Cornwell outlined a number of key considerations which had informed the Parish Council's developing position . It was noted that reliance solely on licensing data to identify existing HMOs may lead to underestimation, and that properties with planning permission but not yet implemented should also be taken into account. Reference was also made to the potential use of wider data sources, including council tax student exemptions and forthcoming national landlord registers, to strengthen the evidence base.

Members were advised that, whilst there was support for the proposed measures to address clustering and sandwiching, consideration should be given to applying a broader and consistent threshold approach, including a 10% limit of HMOs within a 100-metre radius. Concern was raised that the interim policy, as proposed, would not apply within existing Article 4 areas, which could lead to inconsistencies in decision-making and weaken the Council's position at appeal. It was suggested that extending the policy across all relevant areas would provide greater clarity and robustness.

Councillor Cornwell also highlighted the importance of consistent accommodation standards across the County, noting that higher space standards proposed within the interim policy should be applied uniformly. The interaction between the interim policy and existing planning policies and supplementary planning documents was also raised, with an emphasis on ensuring alignment and clarity in their application.

Following consideration of the report, Members unanimously **agreed** to note the contents of the report and the associated Cabinet decision, **agreed** to engage positively with the forthcoming consultation and instruct the Planning and

Licensing Committee to prepare a draft response to the interim policy for consideration and approval at the April meeting of Full Council.

The Chair thanked Councillor Cornwell for his extensive analysis and report on this important issue.

- **Environment Committee**

Councillor C Lattin presented the Environment Committee minutes from the meeting held on 10th February 2026. There being no queries from Members, Councillor C Lattin moved on to Committee reports.

Proposal to establish a new City of Durham Partner of the Year Award.

Councillor C Lattin presented a report to Members regarding a proposal to establish a new City of Durham Partner of the Year Award.

In presenting her report, Councillor Lattin advised that draft criteria for the award had previously been circulated; however, feedback received from Members indicated that the criteria were considered overly prescriptive and may inadvertently restrict the inclusive and celebratory nature of the award. It was therefore reported that there was a clear preference for a simpler and more flexible approach that better reflects the overarching aim of recognising positive contributions to the parish.

In this regard, Councillor Lattin outlined that Members had expressed strong support for aligning the new award more closely with the established Citizen of the Year Award framework. This approach would focus on recognising outstanding commitment to parish life, including significant contributions to community activity, support for others, and achievements that benefit the wider community, whilst allowing appropriate discretion in determining recipients.

Members were further advised that it was proposed to replace the previously drafted detailed criteria with a concise statement recognising outstanding contributions made by organisations, groups, charities, social enterprises, public bodies, or businesses that have demonstrably benefited the City of Durham parish. It was noted that, consistent with existing arrangements, there would be no requirement for the organisation to be based within the parish, provided that a clear positive local impact could be evidenced, nor would the award be restricted to a single recipient in any given year.

Councillor Lattin also outlined the proposed nomination and selection process, advising that nominations would be submitted by Parish Councillors and supported by a brief written statement. Nominations would remain confidential and be considered by Full Council in closed session, with the outcome determined by secret ballot and any organisation receiving a straight majority of votes being declared the recipient. It was further noted that the presentation of the award would take place at the Annual Meeting of the City of Durham Parish in May.

Councillor C Lattin advised Members that the proposal to introduce a Partner of the Year Award replaced an earlier proposal to establish a Best Landlord Award. It was reported that, following further discussion, a clear consensus had emerged that the Parish Council should not introduce a separate landlord award at this stage. Instead, it was agreed that the Council would support and promote the existing student-led scheme, utilising the allocated budget to raise awareness and encourage greater participation among students. Members noted that this approach would strengthen the existing arrangements without creating duplication or unnecessary complexity.

Councillor Lattin further advised that, in light of this position, consideration had been given to broadening the scope of recognition beyond a single sector. It was proposed that the Parish Council introduce a new Partner of the Year Award to recognise an organisation that had made a positive contribution to life within the City of Durham parish. Members noted that this approach would enable the Council to acknowledge a wider range of contributions, including those relating to community wellbeing, environmental improvements, and the overall quality of life in the city.

Members unanimously **agreed** to adopt the simplified criteria for the Partner of the Year Award, aligned with the principles of the Citizen of the Year Award, and further **agreed** to invite nominations for eligible organisations for consideration at the April meeting of Full Council.

Proposal to support students at Houghall College to showcase their work at Chelsea Flower Show 2026

Councillor C Lattin presented a report to Members regarding a proposal to support floristry students from Houghall College in showcasing their work at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2026.

Councillor C Lattin warmly congratulated the students on their success; advising that the Houghall students had been selected to exhibit at this prestigious international horticultural event, which attracts significant public attendance, industry professionals, and global media coverage, and that the opportunity represented a substantial platform for students to demonstrate their creative and technical abilities.

Councillor C Lattin informed Members that the students would design, construct and present a floral installation within the Great Pavilion, responding to the theme "Floristry Laboratory." Councillor Lattin highlighted that participation in the event would provide a unique and potentially once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for learners, supporting their professional development, confidence, and future career prospects within the horticulture and floristry sectors.

Members noted that the total estimated cost of delivering the project was £15,457, with significant financial and in-kind contributions already secured from the Royal Horticultural Society and the College. Despite this support, a funding gap remained, and additional contributions were being sought to ensure full participation by all students, particularly in relation to accommodation, travel and materials. It was also noted that a number of costs were being mitigated through sustainable sourcing of materials and other forms of practical support.

Councillor Lattin reported that the Environment Committee had considered the proposal and recognised its strong alignment with the Council's priorities, including the promotion of environmental awareness, civic pride and support for young people within the parish area. Members further noted the wider benefits of the project in showcasing the region's creativity and expertise on a national and international stage.

It was therefore recommended that the Council approve the allocation of £3,000 from the Environment Committee's planting budget underspend for the current financial year to support the students' participation. Members were advised that this contribution could be met from existing budget provision and would not require additional funding.

Members unanimously **approved** the allocation of £3,000 from the Environment Committee's planting budget underspend to support Houghall floristry students in delivering their installation at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2026.

- **Business Committee**

Councillor E Scott presented the Business Committee minutes from the meeting held on 20th January 2026. There were no queries from Members on these minutes but Councillor E Scott took the opportunity to highlight the contributions of Graham Soult over several years and thanked him for his work with the Parish Council.

As Members were aware, Graham's work contract ends with the Parish Council at the end of the financial year and the Clerk has arranged for a Durham Markets voucher to be sent to Graham as a thank you for all he has done for the Council.

- **Finance Committee**

Councillor S Walker presented the Finance Committee minutes from the meeting held on 14th January 2026. There were no queries from Members on these minutes.

7. CHAIR'S UPDATES

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 25th February 2026, as follows:

The Chair placed on record her sincere thanks to the many volunteers who had supported planting activity in the previous autumn, noting the positive impact seen in areas including the A167, Elvet, Gilesgate Bank and Neville's Cross, and expressing the Council's intention to repeat this work later in the year.

The Chair informed Members that the Parish Council would be hosting an event to mark the opening of the new footpath and gate at Observatory Hill, undertaken in partnership with the Observatory Hill Research Group and Ustinov College. It was noted that this location represents one of the most important viewpoints of the World Heritage Site and that the Mayor, Gary Hutchinson, would be in attendance to formally cut the red ribbon.

The Chair took the opportunity to congratulate the Mayor on a successful recent fundraising event in aid of St Cuthbert's Hospice, noting his distinctive and highly engaged approach to civic duties.

The Chair also expressed sincere thanks to Jez Light of Durham County Council for his many years of work supporting major cultural events in the City, including Durham Pride, the Durham Brass Festival and the Christmas Markets, and noted that his departure would be a significant loss to the authority and the wider cultural sector.

Members were updated on preparations for the unveiling of a blue plaque in honour of the late Mo Mowlam, with confirmation that the event would take place on 15 June. It was noted that distinguished guests including Jean Mowlam, Adam Ingram and Hilary Armstrong would be in attendance. Members were also advised that Richard Coles was unable to attend due to prior commitments but had conveyed his best wishes and thanks for the invitation.

The Chair recorded her thanks to Councillors Liz Brown, Roger Cornwell and Grenville Holland for their attendance and contribution at the recent public hearing relating to the Hallgarth Care Home appeal, noting that the hearing had been particularly lively and that the outcome was awaited.

Members were reminded that the Parish Council would be seeking to co-opt a new Member at the next meeting and that the vacancy had been duly advertised. The Chair also reminded Members that the next meeting of the Planning and Licensing Committee would take place on Thursday 2 April, noting specifically that this was not Good Friday, and that the Committee would consider its response to the latest application relating to the Prince Bishops Place redevelopment.

In addition, the Chair reported that Durham University had informally approached the Parish Council to discuss next steps in relation to the Hild/Bede redevelopment, following confirmation that the University and its preferred development partner had parted company.

An update was also provided on parking arrangements at the University Hospital of North Durham, with Members noting that the Trust's Chief Executive, Steve Russell, had written to confirm that a temporary agreement had been reached with Durham County Council to allow use of its car park, thereby releasing approximately 150 spaces at the hospital. The Chair advised that the Clerk had responded to seek further assurances regarding the delivery of the proposed new car park as part of the A&E development, and to request that further measures be considered to promote use of the Park and Ride service.

Finally, the Chair reminded Members of the forthcoming Durham City Riverscape community litter pick, scheduled to take place at 10.00am on Saturday 4 April, and encouraged participation where possible.

8. ASSERTION 10 – DIGITAL AND DATA COMPLIANCE FOR THE 2025/26 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR)

The Clerk presented a report to Members regarding Assertion 10 – Digital and Data Compliance for the 2025/26 Annual Governance and Accountability Return

(AGAR). Members were advised that Assertion 10 represents a new requirement within the Annual Governance Statement and brings together digital infrastructure, accessibility, and data protection into a single assurance, requiring the Council not only to comply with relevant legislation and best practice but also to demonstrate that such compliance is active, embedded and subject to ongoing review.

The Clerk outlined that Assertion 10 requires the Council to confirm that appropriate arrangements are in place for the secure and lawful handling of information. This includes the use of a .gov.uk domain for the Council’s website and email communications, compliance with recognised website accessibility standards, and adherence to the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. Members were advised that, whilst these requirements are not new in themselves, the assertion formalises the need for consistent application, documentation and supporting evidence.

Members were informed that a comprehensive review of the Council’s current arrangements had been undertaken. The Clerk highlighted that the Parish Council already utilises a .gov.uk domain and official email addresses for all Members and officers to ensure that Council business is conducted through secure and accountable channels.

Moreover, the Council’s website meets WCAG 2.2 AA accessibility standards, supported by appropriate tools to identify and address accessibility issues, alongside the publication of an accessibility statement and clear reporting mechanisms for users.

The Clerk further advised that a detailed data audit and mapping exercise had been completed to identify the personal data held by the Council, the purposes for which it is processed, how it is stored, and who has access to it. Members noted that this work confirmed that the Council processes only limited amounts of personal data and that appropriate controls, processes, and procedures are in place, with roles and responsibilities clearly defined to ensure compliance.

In relation to data governance, Members were advised that, following advice received from Breakthrough Communications, it had been clarified that the Parish Council, as a corporate body, is the Data Controller for the purposes of data protection legislation. This clarification ensures that accountability for compliance rests with the Council collectively, supported by appropriate operational arrangements.

The Clerk reported that a comprehensive suite of policies and procedures had been developed and presented for consideration, including a Data Security Breach Policy, Subject Access Request procedure, Consent Form, Records Retention Policy, Information Technology Policy and a Use Your Own Device Policy. Members were advised that these documents collectively establish a robust and practical framework governing the management of information, including incident response, individual rights, lawful processing, data retention, appropriate use of technology and associated risks.

The Clerk particularly stressed that Assertion 10 represents an ongoing governance requirement rather than a one-off exercise, and that the policies and procedures introduced should be regarded as living documents, subject to regular review and refinement in response to legislative, regulatory and operational changes.

Members **noted** the completion of the data audit and the implementation of appropriate controls and processes, **agreed** that the Council is in a position to confirm compliance with the requirements of Assertion 10, and formally **adopted** the suite of policies presented, thereby embedding these arrangements within the Council's governance framework in support of the 2025/26 AGAR submission.

9. REPORT BY THE COMMUNITY CENTRE WORKING GROUP ON PROPOSED FUNDING ALLOCATION FOR 2026/27

Councillor E Scott presented a report to Members on behalf of the Community Centre Support Working Group regarding the proposed allocation of funding for 2026/27.

Members were reminded that the Community Centre Support Scheme had been established to strengthen community infrastructure within the parish and that, following an Expressions of Interest process, three organisations had initially been invited to submit full applications. Councillor E Scott reported that St Giles Church had since withdrawn from the process due to capacity constraints, with the option to re-engage in future funding rounds.

Members were advised that two full applications had been received and were now under consideration. Councillor Scott outlined that the application from Alington House Community Association focused on improving the long-term energy efficiency and sustainability of the building through a "fabric-first" approach.

Proposed works included the installation of a zoned smart heating system, replacement of inefficient single-glazed windows, roof repairs and additional insulation. It was noted that the total project cost was estimated at £55,903, with a request of £30,000 from the Parish Council, and that the works were intended to secure the long-term viability of what was described as the only remaining community centre located within the heart of Durham City.

Members were further advised of the application submitted by Waddington Street United Reformed Church, which had been revised from its original proposal. The current application sought support for internal improvements to enhance accessibility and usability, specifically the replacement of worn carpets and the upgrading of the building's audio system.

The total cost of these works was estimated at £7,066.88, and it was noted that the project was deliverable within a short timeframe. Whilst the revised proposal did not directly address energy efficiency, Members were advised that the organisation continued to explore solar panel installation separately.

Councillor Scott also updated Members on proposals relating to the Durham City Theatre. It was noted that, given the scale of investment required to secure the theatre's long-term future, direct funding through the Community Centre Support

Scheme was not considered appropriate. Instead, Members were advised that the Council had sought to appoint a specialist fundraising and bid-writing contractor to pursue external funding opportunities. Two bids had been received following a public advertisement of the opportunity: one in the sum of £5,000 and a second in the sum of £15,960. Members noted that both proposals demonstrated relevant experience in securing funding for cultural and community projects, with differing approaches, scope and cost.

Councillor E Scott advised that the Working Group had considered the applications and proposals and recommended as follows:

1) That the allocation of £33,703 be allocated to the Alington House scheme (full cost of the 4 x replacement windows plus costs of the planning application).
2) That the application by Waddington Street URC not be accepted at this funding round given the change in scope from the EoI stage.
3) That the remaining funding of £6,297 be re-allocated to the small grants scheme and that Waddington Street URC and other organisations be encouraged to apply through this open funding scheme.
4) That the Council approves the appointment of Contractor A to progress the City Theatre bid.

Members unanimously **agreed** all of the recommendations, as set out above, from the Community Centre Working Group.

10. REPORT FOLLOWING THE PARISH CLERK'S ANNUAL APPRAISAL

The Clerk left the meeting for item 10 of the Agenda. The Chair reported that the Personnel Committee had undertaken the Clerk's annual appraisal and regarded his performance as outstanding, particularly highlighting his work with partners and his recent Public Service Award.

The Chair advised that the Clerk has been tasked with producing an annual calendar of City events for the website. The Chair also reported that the Personnel Committee has instructed that all new projects - outside the Council's agreed budget and strategy – must be reported and approved by Full Council before progressing through Committee stage.

Councillor G Holland also reported that he would like the Council to undertake a pay review of the Clerk's salary in light of his outstanding performance.

The Clerk rejoined the meeting at the end of this discussion.

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.

11. CITIZEN OF THE YEAR 2026 NOMINATIONS

Members **agreed** to award the Good Citizen of the Year 2026 Award to: Julie Marshall, Stuart Lloyd and Win Coleman.

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
(22nd April 2026)