

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Wednesday 22nd April 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**), V Ashfield, L Brown, T Cleaver, R Cornwell, D Freeman, G Holland, R Handy, E Hopgood, C Lattin, P Layton, F Robinson, E Scott and L Wilson.

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley, 3 members of the public and Mr Simon Day, Mr Matthew Phillips, Mr Isaac Short, Mr Mark Wilkes and Ms Elizabeth Williams (co-option candidates).

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

None received.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

None received.

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.

3. TO RECEIVE WRITTEN APPLICATIONS FOR THE OFFICE OF PARISH COUNCILLOR AND TO CO-OPT A CANDIDATE TO FILL THE EXISTING VACANCY

The Clerk opened this item and outlined the procedure that would be followed during the process. Members were advised that each candidate would be invited to speak for up to five minutes in order to introduce themselves, outline their background and experience, and explain why they wished to become a Parish Councillor.

The Clerk confirmed that no questions would be taken from Members during the candidate presentations and that this part of the meeting would take place with the press and public excluded.

The Council was advised that, following the presentations, candidates would be required to be formally proposed and seconded by Members present in order to proceed to the ballot stage. The Clerk explained that only candidates who were both proposed and seconded would be included in the vote and confirmed that applicants had been notified of this requirement in advance.

Members heard that voting would take place by secret ballot and that an absolute majority of votes cast would be required in order for a candidate to be successfully co-opted.

The Clerk also reminded Members that the Parish Council was not obliged to fill the vacancy and was under no obligation to appoint any of the candidates should Members not wish to do so. Members were advised that, following the conclusion of voting, the Chair would declare the successful candidate, who would then sign the formal declaration of acceptance of office and become a full Member of the Parish Council.

Each candidate was invited to speak in alphabetical order and the Clerk read out a statement on behalf of Professor Gary Black, another co-option candidate, who was unable to attend the meeting in person.

Each candidate provided a brief presentation about themselves accordingly. Following consideration of each candidate's experience and presentation, a vote was held and the Chair declared that Mr Mark Wilkes had been co-opted as the new Parish Councillor for the Neville's Cross parish ward, having been proposed by Councillor E Hopgood and seconded by Councillor E Scott.

The Chair congratulated Mark Wilkes on his co-option and thanked all other candidates for their interest in becoming a Parish Councillor on the City of Durham Parish Council.

Mark signed the declaration of acceptance of office form and took his seat as a Parish Councillor.

The meeting was re-opened to the press and public for items 4-9.

4. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 25TH MARCH 2026

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

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None received.

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.

Consultation response to Durham County Council's proposed Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Interim Policy

Councillor L. Brown presented a report on Durham County Council's consultation regarding a proposed Interim Policy for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) outside the existing Durham City Article 4 areas. Members heard that the policy aimed to address increasing numbers of HMOs across the wider county and provide interim planning guidance while the County Durham Plan review was ongoing.

Councillor L. Brown explained that the proposed policy would introduce new planning controls across areas not currently covered by Article 4 restrictions, including part of the City of Durham parish area at Aykley Woods. Members noted that from August 2026, most HMO conversions across the county would require planning permission.

The Council heard that the proposed policy included thresholds intended to prevent over-concentration of HMOs, including restrictions where three or more of the ten nearest neighbouring properties were already HMOs and measures to prevent "sandwiching" of residential properties between HMOs or commercial uses. Applicants would also be required to provide management plans demonstrating how impacts on neighbouring residents would be addressed.

Councillor L. Brown advised that the consultation remained open until 5 May 2026 and that the Planning and Licensing Committee had prepared a draft response for Full Council's consideration and approval.

Members unanimously **approved** the City of Durham Parish Council's response to this consultation as follows:

Response to Interim HMO policy consultation

1. The City of Durham Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on this proposal. Since we were established in April 2018 we have seen over 100 full planning applications in our Parish for the conversion of homes, shops and offices into HMOs, both use class C4 and *sui generis*. This gives us an insight into the issues that arise and to the tactics deployed by developers to get planning permission.
2. Although the majority of our Parish is included in the existing Article 4 areas, the new Aykley Woods development on the site of the former Police HQ was not designated and so will be covered by the proposed new Policy.
3. Our response falls into three areas: the criteria whereby an application for an HMO should be granted or refused; the standards to be applied to any new HMOs; and the interaction between the proposed new Policy and the existing County Durham Plan and SPDs.

The criteria

4. We consider that identifying existing HMOs only through mandatory and selective licensing data means that many HMOs will be missed.
5. Crucially, properties that have obtained planning permission for conversion to an HMO but have not been registered must be counted. If this is not done, a

landlord could buy a number of properties and get planning permission for them to be converted to HMOs, but only register them once all of the permissions had been granted. Clause 16.3(b) of the County Durham Plan addresses this issue. It says that applications for student HMOs will not be permitted if

there are existing unimplemented permissions for Houses in Multiple Occupation within 100 metres of the application site, which in combination with the existing number of Class N Student exempt units would exceed 10% of the total properties within the 100 metres area;

6. This clause has been used successfully in the City to block further HMOs when a landlord has left a property empty to reduce the number of HMOs counted. It should provide a model for the new interim Policy.
7. Much of the County is not subject to selective licensing so, while applications for HMOs will no doubt still come forward, the assessment will be compromised by a lack of information. We consider that the Interim Policy should be open to further sources of information as and when they become readily available.
8. Specifically, it is also probable that the register of landlords being drawn up under the Renters Rights Act will indicate whether a property is an HMO. The Government's Roadmap¹ says it will include "The property details including the full address, type of property (flat/ house), number of bedrooms, number of households/ residents and confirming whether the property is occupied and furnished, etc." The Interim Policy should be open to using this register as it will then extend coverage to the entire County. As the data will have been collected anyway it should not impose a large administrative burden. It will be a public register of property, not people, so data protection issues would not arise.
9. Properties can also be identified as HMOs if they have a Class N exemption from Council Tax due to them being occupied solely by students. This measure should also be used. We note that the Council's map of student exempt properties shows a percentage of 14.29% for Shiell Heights DH1 5TN, in the Aykley Woods development. This is in our Parish but is not currently covered by an Article 4 Direction.
10. We welcome the proposals in part (b) of the proposed policy to prevent sandwiching. We are aware that a number of local planning authorities have adopted policy approaches to prevent the "sandwiching" of residential properties between Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), and that such approaches have been successfully tested at appeal. In particular, Oxford City Council (Policy H6 of the Oxford Local Plan), Bath and North East Somerset Council (Policy H2 and its adopted HMO Supplementary Planning Document), and Birmingham City Council (Policy DM11 and associated SPD) all incorporate

¹<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/renters-rights-act-2025-implementation-roadmap/implementing-the-renters-rights-act-2025-our-roadmap-for-reforming-the-private-rented-sector>

measures to control concentrations of HMOs, including explicit or implicit sandwiching provisions alongside threshold-based assessments.

11. The effectiveness of these approaches are demonstrated through appeal decisions in Oxford, including APP/G3110/W/22/3307194, APP/G3110/W/22/3311053, APP/G3110/W/22/3296432 and APP/G3110/W/21/3280343, where Inspectors upheld refusals of HMO proposals on the basis of overconcentration and associated harm to residential amenity, and accepted the use of a broad evidence base (including licensing data) in identifying HMOs. These examples show that policies which address both concentration and sandwiching effects provide a sound and defensible basis for decision-making, and we therefore consider that the inclusion of such provisions within the Interim Policy is justified and necessary.
12. The proposals in part (a) of the proposed policy are also welcome. Again, there have been cases in our Parish where a cluster of HMOs close to a family home has caused hardship, but the HMO percentage within 100 metres has not crossed the threshold set out in Policy 16.3 of the County Durham Plan, and the planning application for a further HMO has therefore been allowed.
13. However, we consider that there is a broader “tipping point” that is passed when the percentage of HMOs within 100 metres of an application site exceeds 10%, or would exceed it if permission were given. This percentage originates in the report *Balanced Communities and Studentification Problems and Solutions*² (National HMO Lobby, 2008). Its use was endorsed in the Inspector’s report into the County Durham Plan at paragraphs 255 and 256. He described it as “a proportionate approach which can be consistently and efficiently applied in response to how any area changes over time”.
14. This is reflected in paragraphs 5.157 and 5.158 of the supporting text for the County Durham Plan. The result was clause 16.3(a) of the County Durham Plan.
15. On the basis of this evidence, we consider that an application for an HMO should also be refused if (to borrow wording from the County Durham Plan) including the proposed development, more than 10% of the total number of residential units within 100 metres of the application site are HMOs.
16. Disappointingly, the additional safeguards are not proposed to apply within the existing Durham City, Framwellgate, Newton Hall and Pity Me, or Mount Oswald, Carrville and Belmont Article 4 areas. This creates a situation where different tests are used to manage HMO concentration in different parts of the County. In practice, similar properties could be treated differently depending solely on whether they fall inside or outside an Article 4 boundary, even within the same Parish or electoral division.

²<https://hmolobby.org.uk/39articles.pdf>

17. This policy effectively recognises that Policy 16 alone is not sufficient to manage clustering and its impacts on residential amenity. That recognition should be applied consistently. There is no clear planning rationale for limiting these additional safeguards to areas outside Durham City, particularly given the well-documented impacts in and around the City. A consistent approach across the County would provide greater clarity for both applicants and residents, and avoid any perception of unequal treatment between communities.
18. There are also concerns regarding the robustness of the Interim Policy at appeal. Applying different concentration tests in different parts of the County risks decisions being seen as inconsistent and therefore unreasonable. Inspectors place significant weight on consistency, particularly where similar forms of development arise in comparable contexts. Within Durham City and its surroundings, decisions would rely solely on Policy 16 as part of the adopted plan, whereas elsewhere these additional, lower-weight tests would apply. This selective approach could be challenged, which would weaken the Council's position at appeal. Extending the Interim Policy to the Article 4 areas around Durham City would support a consistent approach and strengthen decision-making.
19. Policy 16 will continue to apply across the County as part of the development plan, with the Interim Policy acting as an additional material consideration. There is therefore no conflict in applying these additional tests within the Durham City area as complementary safeguards.
20. There is therefore a clear case for extending the Interim Policy to include the Article 4 areas around Durham City. This would ensure a consistent approach, strengthen the policy at appeal, and provide more effective control of HMO concentrations across the County.

Standards to be applied to any new HMOs

21. We welcome the proposal in part (c) of the draft policy to require a management plan.
22. The tables in paragraph 1.13 of the explanatory text are labelled *Table 1a. Minimum space standards for HMOs*, *Table 2b. Minimum space standards for HMOs* and *Table 3. Other Amenity Requirements*. These should be renumbered as *Table 1a*, *Table 1b* and *Table 2* in order to match the Policy wording.
23. Paragraph 1.13 says that the standards are consistent with licensing requirements and Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS). It should also state that it is consistent with Policies 29 (Sustainable Design) and 31 (Amenity and Pollution) of the County Durham Plan. This will make the Interim Policy more robust if challenged.
24. The space standards set out in Table 1 are higher than those appertaining in the existing Article 4 area. This we welcome. However, Policy 16.3 of the County Durham Plan applies county-wide. Applications for student HMOs could

come forward in areas such as Aykley Woods in our Parish, and also in surrounding villages such as Langley Moor, Meadowfield, High Shincliffe and Bowburn, once the County-wide Article 4 Direction comes into force on 17 August 2026. The consequence would be that different space standards would apply to HMOs in different parts of the County. This is not acceptable. No justification is offered for having lower standards of accommodation for Durham students, nor can there be one. The space standards in the existing Article 4 area should be raised to match the improved standards proposed for the rest of the County.

25. It might be argued that different standards should apply to student HMOs and those intended for other classes of tenant. This was considered by Inspector J Somers in Appeal Decision APP/G3110/W/18/3219520³, a case in Oxford which has a policy similar to Durham's restricting HMOs based on the number in the vicinity. The relevant paragraph in the decision reads:

10 Moreover, whilst I note comments from the Appellant that Policy HP7 is 'crude' and aimed at student housing and that working professional housing should be treated differently; it would not be possible in planning terms to control the type of tenant given there is no distinction between professional and student accommodation in the planning regulations.

Interactions with other policies

26. When the Interim Policy comes into force, planning officers will have to navigate its requirements with those of the existing County Durham Plan and the Housing Needs SPD.
27. Since County Durham Plan Policy 16 applies throughout the County, it could in theory be relevant to HMO applications anywhere, and certainly will be in the villages adjacent to Durham City. There might also be student HMOs near the County's FE Colleges: Bishop Auckland, Derwentside, East Durham and New College Durham. The proposals we have made should minimise any conflict between Policy 16 and the Interim Policy.
28. In 2024/25 there were 208 students living in rented accommodation outside the DH1 postcode sector. 120 of these were in DH7 (Langley Moor / Meadowfield / Brandon and surrounding towns/villages), 76 in DH6 (Bowbrun / Coxhoe) and 12 in other DH postcodes.
29. The Interim Policy sets out a minimum floor area for a single bedroom of 9.5m². The Housing Needs SPD has different requirements depending on whether or not there would be a net increase in the number of residential units. If there was an increase then the NDSS would apply (7.5m²), otherwise the

³<https://acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/ViewDocument.aspx?fileid=32463131>

NDSS would be a guide to best practice. Presumably the Interim Policy would supersede this, which we welcome.

30. The proposed Interim Policy differs from the requirements of the Parking and Accessibility SPD. We suggest that the Policy simply refers to the SPD.

End of response

• Environment Committee

Councillor C Lattin presented the Environment Committee minutes from the meeting held on 10th February 2026. There were no queries from Members.

7. CHAIR'S UPDATES

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

- The Chair began by thanking everyone who had put themselves forward for the recent co-option vacancy on the Parish Council and commented positively on the manner in which the process had been conducted. The Chair stated that the exercise had represented an excellent example of local democracy in action and formally welcomed Mark Wilkes as the newest member of the Parish Council.
- The Chair reminded Members and residents that the Annual Meeting of Electors would take place on Wednesday 20 May at 6:30pm at the Durham University Business School building. The Chair advised that invitations would shortly be distributed to residents across the parish and encouraged attendance in order that residents could hear more about the work of the Parish Council over the previous year. It was also noted that the meeting would include the presentation of the Council's Citizen of the Year awards together with wider community recognition.
- The Chair further reported that the organisers of Durham Pride were arranging a special launch event at the Radisson Blu Hotel on 14 May. Members heard that tickets were priced at £30, including a welcome drink, food and entertainment. The Chair encouraged anyone interested in supporting the event and demonstrating the Parish Council's support for Pride within the city to contact The Clerk.
- The Chair also expressed delight at the recent announcement that the Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site had been named the leading UNESCO site in the United Kingdom, surpassing other nationally significant heritage locations including Edinburgh, the City of Bath, Blenheim Palace and the Palace of Westminster. The Chair remarked that the recognition served as an important reminder of the unique heritage of Durham and the responsibility shared by residents and civic leaders alike in safeguarding and promoting the city.
- Members were reminded by the Chair that the Mo Mowlam blue plaque unveiling ceremony would take place on 15 June at 1:30pm at Trevelyan College. The Chair noted that full event details had already been circulated

by The Clerk and requested that all invitations and RSVPs be returned no later than 1 May. The Chair reported that the Council was particularly pleased to be welcoming Baroness Hilary Armstrong and former Northern Ireland Minister Sir Adam Ingram to Durham for the unveiling ceremony and commented that the occasion was expected to be a significant and prestigious civic event.

- The Chair also formally thanked the Parish Council's Planning and Licensing Committee for the detailed work undertaken in relation to the Prince Bishops redevelopment application. Members heard that the Committee had carried out extensive analysis before submitting its letter of support. While acknowledging that redevelopment of the site would inevitably involve a further period of disruption within the city centre, the Chair commented that the proposals represented a potentially once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine and secure the future of an important city centre site within an increasingly difficult national retail environment.
- The Chair expressed significant concern and disappointment regarding the recent announcement that approximately 600 jobs were expected to be lost from the County Durham and Darlington Healthcare Trust over the next two years. The Chair further advised that the Parish Council was still awaiting a response to its correspondence regarding the now seemingly delayed expansion of Accident and Emergency services at University Hospital of North Durham. Members heard that the developments would come as a considerable blow to Durham residents and the Chair emphasised that the Parish Council would continue to lobby strongly on these issues given the importance of healthcare provision and the wellbeing of residents.
- Finally, the Chair informed Members that The Clerk would be taking annual leave during the following week, with the exception of attendance at the Planning and Licensing Committee meeting on Friday. Members and residents were therefore requested to direct any urgent matters to the Chair during that period.

8. PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A WORKING GROUP TO REVIEW THE PARISH COUNCIL'S STANDING ORDERS, FINANCIAL REGULATIONS, COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE AND COUNCIL POLICIES

Members were asked to consider the formation of a dedicated, time-limited Working Group to undertake the annual review of the Parish Council's core governance documents.

The Clerk highlighted that this included the Council's Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Committee Terms of Reference, and various Council Policies.

The Chair explained that the purpose of the review was to ensure that all governance documents remained current, legally compliant, and reflective of best practice in Parish Council operations. Although not a statutory requirement, the Council had a well-established practice of reviewing these documents annually to maintain high standards of governance, transparency, and accountability.

The Clerk advised that the Working Group would be tasked with reviewing each document in detail; taking advice from the Clerk on any relevant legislative changes since the last review in 2025; identifying any sections requiring amendment or clarification; and bringing forward recommended revisions to a future meeting of the Parish Council for formal adoption.

The Chair noted that, following approval of the updated documents in May, the next review would be scheduled for April 2027 with adoption in May.

Members unanimously **agreed** to the formation of this time-limited Governance Review Working Group and also **agreed** the Councillors S Walker, V Ashfield, E Hopgood and R Cornwell should form the membership of this Working Group, dividing the work appropriately and presenting any amendments to the May annual meeting of the Council for adoption.

9. REPORT ON THE LATEST UPDATES IN RELATION TO THE OVE ARUP MOBILE POLICE MAST

Councillor R. Handy presented a report regarding the latest position relating to the Grade II listed Ove Arup police telecommunications mast at Aykley Heads. Members heard that the mast had originally formed part of the approved redevelopment proposals for the former Durham Constabulary headquarters site, with planning permission requiring the dismantling, relocation and re-erection of the structure alongside the new police headquarters.

The Council was advised that, although the mast had been dismantled in 2017, it had never been re-erected and had instead remained in storage on site, where concerns had been raised regarding deterioration and damage to the structure. Councillor R. Handy further reported that subsequent applications seeking permission to demolish the mast entirely had been refused and that no appeal against that refusal had been submitted. Members therefore noted that the original planning requirement to re-erect the mast remained in force.

Members discussed the wider planning and heritage concerns associated with the prolonged failure to restore the structure, including objections raised by heritage organisations and concerns regarding compliance with the original planning obligations connected to the redevelopment of the site. Following discussion, Members unanimously **agreed** that the Parish Council should write to the key stakeholders involved in the matter and seek a meeting to discuss possible options to address the proposed demolition and future restoration of the mast.

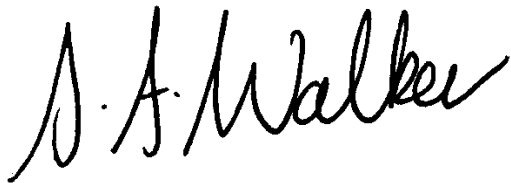
Due to the confidential nature of the following items, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and the public were excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined 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.

10. PARTNER OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINATIONS

Members **agreed** that the Partner of the Year Award should be limited to one organisation only. Following careful consideration of nominations, Member **agreed** to award The Durham City Riverscape Community Group this year's Partner of the Year Award.

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

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. A. Walker'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'A.' and last name 'Walker' clearly distinguishable.

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council
(27th May 2026)**