

North Lodge Parish Council

Annual Report 2025-2026

This report covers the year from the Council meeting in May 2025 to the meeting in April 2026.

In July, we learned the sad news of the death of former Councillor Carole Walton. Carole, who had been a Councillor from 1983 until 2017, had served several terms as Chairman and as Horticulture Portfolio Holder. We expressed the condolences of the Council to Carole's son David.

In June, we welcomed Darren Hawkes as a co-opted Councillor and he later became our Planning Portfolio Holder.

In July, we welcomed Graham Watson as a co-opted Councillor. However, in March he resigned due to time pressures from other commitments.

Also due to time pressures, Councillor Glenn Batey, who had joined the Council following the May local elections, resigned in September.

At our AGM in May 2025, Councillor Craig Martin was elected Chairman and Councillor Suzanne Brown was elected Vice-Chairman. The outgoing Chairman, Councillor Patrick Driscoll, was thanked for all his work over the previous two years. Councillor Martin had also been re-elected in the County elections as our County Councillor.

The work of the Parish Council is divided into various Portfolios and a summary of each one follows.

Communications and Media Development

The Council's X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook pages continue to receive many visits, with some posts exceeding 1000 views. There have been numerous posts on a wide variety of local, regional and national topics, from sources such as Durham County Council (DCC), the Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service, the Police and of course the Parish Council and many more, all of which we hope to be informative and interesting for our residents. Website hosting is with Madhouse Media Ltd who have an office in the town centre. Our website continues to be up-dated at regular intervals by the Clerk. Council Minutes, Agendas, dates of meetings, financial information and items of interest and information are contained on the site. A new group photo of Councillors and the Clerk was taken and published on our social media. The Council's annual Newsletter contained a nostalgic look back at the Parish 40 years ago. There were many positive responses from residents. The Newsletter, collated by Councillor Maureen May with our grateful thanks,

is delivered by Councillors to each household in the Parish. The Council thanks all who contribute to its production and distribution. The Newsletter can also be accessed via the Council's website.

Social media is an important part of the Council's approach to enhancing contact with the North Lodge community and we thank Portfolio Holder Councillor Chris Veitch for his work in ensuring our posts are interesting and relevant.

Crime and Community Safety

We continue to experience very low crime levels in our Parish. There have been a small number of instances of anti-social behaviour such as graffiti, damage to display cabinets and illegal motorcycle activity. There was also an incident of a burned out car. We continue to liaise with the Police and DCC, as appropriate, on all incidents including anti-social behaviour but we urge residents to report immediately, without endangering themselves, direct to the Police should they witness any crime being committed. The police speed camera is regularly in Blind Lane and this we consider to be necessary and important. Over the year of 2025, 92 visits were made by the camera van producing 1838 speeding "triggers" at an average of one "trigger" every 4 to 5 minutes. A traffic incident at Northlands roundabout resulted in one person being taken to hospital and two people being arrested on suspicion of theft from a shop. In February, replacement barriers were installed by DCC at Northlands roundabout after many months of temporary ones being in place after traffic incidents. However, DCC refused our request to consider changes to traffic flow around the roundabout. We supported the County Councillor's petition to DCC to have the speed limit in Vigo Lane reduced from 40mph to 30mph but this was also refused by DCC. We also supported DCC's consultation on parking and waiting restrictions in the Parish and this resulted in new yellow lines on North Road at the junctions with Longdean Park and Low Flatts Road.

Councillor Gregory's reports to Council meetings always contain much useful and helpful information from the Police, Fire Service, DCC and other organisations on national, regional and local levels.

Portfolio Holder Councillor Jackie Gregory maintains a close link between the Council, the Police and other agencies which greatly contributes to the low levels of crime in the Parish. We thank Councillor Gregory for all her work on this busy Portfolio.

Finance

Financial matters continue to be carefully planned, budgeted for and controlled by the Council and we again received a "clean" report from our auditors. We set a the Precept for 2026/2027 at £36.78 per Band D equivalent property, an increase of £5.28p per annum and the first increase since 2018/2019. It is an essential part of our duties that we provide best value for

our residents and we believe that we are achieving this. The Precept enables the Council to provide enhanced services, such as play facilities, flower beds and bus shelters, to those provided by DCC and also allows us to engage with organisations such as DCC on matters of importance to individual residents. Organisations receiving a donation from the Council included the Poppy Appeal, Wag and Company, St Cuthbert's Hospice, Daft As A Brush Cancer Patient Care, the North Lodge Remembrance Group, Friends of the North East War Memorials Project and the Police's Activity Week. The tariff for the power for the North Road tree lights was changed to one much more advantageous to the Council.

Councillor Chris Veitch, as our Finance Portfolio Holder, takes an active role in this central aspect of the Council's activities. The Parish Council always welcomes suggestions from Councillors and residents for project ideas which might provide lasting benefit to the Parish. Our newly established Community Improvement Fund is designed with this aim in mind.

Highways and Community Assets

Councillor Patrick Driscoll is our Portfolio Holder and he makes regular informal inspections of the bus shelters and public seating. Regrettably, a bus shelter display cabinet was broken into and a poster stolen from it. A panel was smashed and therefore replaced at our bus shelter on the west side of Picktree Village. A few instances of graffiti have been an annoyance. A new composite seat at the Barley Mow bus shelter was installed to replace the life expired metal seat there and a further three metal seats alongside bus shelters at Northlands, the Lambton Worm and Kingsmere will also be replaced with composites. We supported DCC's consultation on parking and waiting restrictions in the Parish and this resulted in new yellow lines on North Road at the junctions with Longdean Park and Low Flatts Road. Councillor Chris Veitch has organised several community litter picks around the Parish, with some residents and Parish Councillors joining in. The Council thanks all those who have taken part as this helps greatly to maintain the Parish to a high standard. Following liaison by Councillor Caygill, the Chester-le-Street Art Society produced new artwork for display in the bus shelter display cabinets and in the noticeboards. The Christmas Tree lights were again lit on North Road.

Our thanks go to Councillor Driscoll as Portfolio Holder but also as a resident who voluntarily carries out general cleaning and tidying of the bus shelters and seating which helps greatly in presenting the Parish in its best light.

Horticulture

It is vital that we do everything we can to keep North Lodge an attractive place to live and work so Horticulture is an extremely important function of the Council. There are over 20 flower and shrub beds planted up around the Parish and these are given regular care and attention by the Council garden

contractor, Makepeace Landscapes, who have received some good comments from the public. Both summer and winter bedding plants are provided to give an attractive appearance throughout the year. In Vigo Lane, three trees were planted to recognise the Queen's Green Canopy, the coronation of King Charles III and the 80th anniversary of VE Day, this project being financed by a Neighbourhood Budget grant from County Councillor Craig Martin for which we record our thanks. Finance is also now in place for the refurbishment of the bed at the entrance to Picktree Lodge (Parish Council funds) and the bed in Longdean Park (again, from a Neighbourhood Budget grant with thanks to the County Councillor). Councillors Caygill, Gregory and May had a meeting with the DCC Clean and Green Team regarding several matters including the future of an apple tree alongside North Road which we felt was dangerous due to the fallen apples causing potential problems for pedestrians and attracting vermin. After much correspondence including a formal complaint by the County Councillor to DCC, the tree was cut down. We hope to be able to use the space thus created to install a commemoration bench for the coronation of King Charles III.

The work of the Horticulture sub-group (currently consisting of Councillors Maureen May, Margaret Caygill and Suzanne Brown), both in making recommendations to the full Council and carrying out various individual tasks, has been of enormous benefit to the Council and our thanks go to the sub-group members for all their valuable work.

Thanks also go in particular to Councillor Maureen May as Portfolio Holder for this busy section of our work.

Meetings of Partnership Organisations

Councillor Maureen May, as our Portfolio Holder, is our representative to the DCC Local Network and to the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) where she has voting rights. Councillor May attends many meetings on behalf of the Council and her feedback ensures that all Councillors are kept up-to-date on matters affecting local government and people in Chester-le-Street and the County.

We thank Councillor May for keeping us up-to-date on many local and County-wide matters.

Picktree Village

Councillor Suzanne Brown, a resident of the Village, is the Portfolio Holder. Councillor Brown has reported on many issues including the speed of traffic, the amount of litter and the establishment of good communications with Lambton Estate. Several discussions have been held with DCC and the Police regarding possible traffic-calming measures but to date nothing yet has come of these. In January, a vehicle crashed into the Lambton Estate wall. The driver was believed to be involved in a race around the area. Following

the demolishing of a bungalow, concerns were expressed to the DCC Planning Department regarding the unsightly appearance of the residual plot of land. We were asked to consider cleaning the extremely dirty DCC bus shelter in the village after DCC had declined to do so. However, we were unable to take this on, not having the necessary equipment and staffing for the work. The provision of a Christmas Tree was again welcomed. We thank Councillor Brown for representing the interests of residents in this significant Portfolio.

Planning

In September, Councillor Darren Hawkes kindly agreed to be the Planning Portfolio Holder and has, since then, advised Councillors of all new planning applications in the Parish as well as some of interest from elsewhere. Submissions were made to the DCC Planning Department on concerns regarding additional traffic volumes from an application to build 800 new houses at Lambton Estate and on concerns regarding an application by Lambton Rowing Club to refurbish a building on the Lambton Estate using Section 106 funds (Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990). Other matters discussed included the future of the Milburngate development in Durham City, the transfer by DCC of £640,000 of funds earmarked for the improvement of facilities at Chester-le-Street's Riverside to a new build leisure centre at Bishop Auckland and unwelcome advertising signage at Barley Mow and Northlands. Some Councillors took part in a consultation exercise for a proposed new Lidl store in the town. Consulting on planning matters is an important function in setting standards for the Parish and we thank Councillor Hawkes for his active involvement in this.

Play Areas

The two play areas in the Parish are extremely important for the welfare of residents. The Merlin Drive play area is owned by DCC whilst the Low Flatts play area is Parish Council owned. Portfolio Holder Councillor Margaret Caygill monitors both, and liaises with DCC on any issues that arise. At Low Flatts, there were a few instances of anti-social behaviour including the field being churned up, presumably by a motorcycle. Mole hills are a concern but these are considered to be natural so have to be left untouched. Councillor Veitch kindly produced a map showing both play areas and copies were placed in all our noticeboards and on social media. However, DCC have still not provided replacement signage for the play areas despite this being awaited for many months. Overall, both play areas are well used and appreciated by residents.

Our thanks go to Councillor Caygill for overseeing these highly regarded facilities.

Policy and Governance

Councillor Dennis Hall, as Portfolio Holder, has kept the Council informed on many matters affecting our sector of Local Government including information from central Government, the Local Government Association and the National Association of Local Councils. Topics included a wide range such as the Government's Pride in Place Strategy, proposal for a whole system reform of the Member standards and conduct framework, local planning powers to keep pavements clear, the Planning and Infrastructure Act, the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Act and new fly-tipping and vehicle seizure guidance. We adopted Homeworking and IT policies and we reviewed and approved our Annual Risk Assessment.

We thank Councillor Hall for keeping us informed on so many wider issues affecting Parish Councils.

Project Development, Business and External Relations

The Portfolio Holder is Councillor Craig Martin who, as our County Councillor, is in an ideal position to guide the Council on these matters. The major and substantial project of installation of a Remembrance artwork at the entrance to Lombard Drive to become a focal point for the community, previously being developed by the North Lodge Remembrance Group led by Councillor Chris Veitch with the help of Councillor Martin, is proceeding well. A community feedback exercise produced an outcome of 100% in favour. Planning permission has been granted by DCC, the artwork itself has been completed by the artist Graeme Hopper and installation awaits the signing by DCC of the Lease for the land. Full funding for the project has been finalised with the great majority of it coming from a DCC S106 agreement (Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990). It is recognised that Councillors Martin and Veitch have already given much time to the progress of this project, continue to do so and we thank them for all their efforts.

Meetings and Events Attended

During the year, Councillors have represented the Council at many external meetings, workshops and events. These include meetings of the CDALC Smaller Councils Forum, meetings with representatives of Park View School, meetings with representatives of Chester-le-Street Art Society, meetings with officers of DCC and meetings with officers of the Police. Councillor Brown visited the Lambton Estate to discuss with the Estate Manager various local matters. On 8th May, Councillors and the Clerk attended a poignant VE Day 80th Anniversary commemoration organised by Councillor Veitch and the North Lodge Remembrance Group. At the greatly appreciated North Lodge Remembrance Group event on 11th November at North Road, arranged by Group member Chris Veitch, several Councillors including the Vice-Chairman, who laid a wreath, were in attendance together with many residents, the Clerk and representatives of local businesses. At the Remembrance Sunday

Service, the Chairman laid a wreath on behalf of the Council. In December, the Chairman accepted an invitation to switch on the Christmas lights at Barley Mow Village Hall. Several Councillors attended the Police and Communities Together (PACT) meetings held in the Parish. The Parish Council thanks all those Councillors who have represented the Council in these many and various matters. This is a function that is of great importance in establishing and presenting the views of our residents.

Other Community Matters

We have been contacted by residents on many varied matters and have responded in, we hope, a manner that encourages such contact. We expect to deal with all contacts in the speediest and most effective way possible. Residents can contact the Council by using the contact link on the website <https://www.northlodgeparishcouncil.gov.uk/> or by telephoning 0191 3892516 or in writing to 21 Lyndhurst Avenue Chester-le-Street DH3 4AR or by contacting any Councillor directly. Our noticeboards are situated at North Road (near the Lambton Worm pub), at the entrance to Lombard Drive from North Road, at Merlin Drive play area, at Picktree Village alongside the stone-built bus shelter, at Picktree Lodge estate (between numbers 28 and 30) and on Vigo Lane at the west entrance to Wanstead Crescent.

Working with the County Councillor

The Parish Council considers it extremely important and beneficial to have a good working relationship with the County Councillor and such a relationship has been well established with County Councillor Craig Martin who shows a close involvement and interest in the Parish.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the Chairman (Councillor Craig Martin), Vice-Chairman (Councillor Suzanne Brown) and all Councillors who have contributed so much time and effort to the achievements of the Council. The Parish Council values its relationships with the County Council, the Police and Park View School, all of whom show that they share our aim of improving North Lodge for the benefit of our residents and for the benefit of those who work here. Finally, there are two seats available on the Parish Council for any residents interested in serving their community. Please contact the Clerk or any Councillor if you would like more information. We always welcome the involvement of residents and local businesses in Parish matters and we will continue to strive for the improvement of North Lodge Parish.

David Murrell
Clerk, North Lodge Parish Council

5th May 2026