

NORTH LODGE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of North Lodge Parish Council held at Park View School, Lombard Drive, Chester-le-Street on Tuesday 15th April 2025.

PRESENT: Chairman: Councillor Patrick Driscoll.
Councillors: Suzanne Brown, Margaret Caygill, Jackie Gregory, Maureen May, Dennis Hall, Craig Martin, Chris Veitch.
County Councillor: Craig Martin.
Clerk: David Murrell.

The Chairman commenced the meeting at 6.30pm by welcoming everyone, especially one member of the public in attendance.

Item 1. 25/40 Apologies for Absence

There were no Apologies for Absence.

Item 2. 25/41 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Craig Martin declared interests as a County Councillor and as a Trustee of Park View Academy. Councillor Jackie Gregory declared an interest as a member of the North Lodge Remembrance Group. Councillor Chris Veitch declared an interest as a member of the North Lodge Remembrance Group.

Item 3. 25/42 Report of the County Councillor

The Chairman invited the County Councillor to give his report which included the matters contained in his written report below -

Political Balance of Scrutiny Leadership

Durham County Council now has it written into the constitution that chairs and vice chairs of the various scrutiny committees have to be politically balanced. Meaning that control of the agenda and what is discussed is no longer held in absolute control of the governing political group.

This is something I've campaigned for a very long time and welcome this change. It has always been completely undemocratic for the governing group to hold control of scrutiny, the function holds the council to account for their decision making.

Durham Women FC to Move to Riverside Complex

Durham County Council have announced plans to work with Durham Women FC and the women's county cricket team to create a new purpose built facility at the Riverside. The proposal is only at the initial stages, but this will be the first purpose built women's sporting facility in the country.

I have questioned and received reassurances from the Council about continued community use of the facilities. That whatever agreement is made, the community will be able to utilise these public facilities.

Fully support this proposal as it will help to regenerate and revitalise the dilapidated facilities at the Riverside complex. A few years ago political in-fighting prevented refurbishment of the sporting offer, hoping this does not happen again. It is expected that most the money for this will come from grant funding.

Star Pelaw Refurbishment

Recently invited to a Drum Business Group meeting at Star Pelaw. They were showing some of the refurbishment that had taken place, with investment in all their TVs to view the races.

They are making a push for the facilities to be more than just a dog track, stating they pushing and promoting the venue to be for events of all kind.

Proud that our community continues to have two fantastic pubs, Wheatsheaf and Lambton Worm, along with a regenerated dog track in Star Pelaw.

In addition, a) A meeting with the Clean and Green Team would have to wait until after the forthcoming elections. Councillors hoped to discuss at that meeting the planting at Northlands roundabout and the siting and provision of litter bins. In the meantime, the County Cllr and Cllr Gregory would make enquiries to see if it was correct that the position of a dedicated officer, with responsibility for tackling litter in the town, had been removed, b) Cllr May asked if there was to be a formal handover for the responsibility of the shrub beds at the entrance to Picktree Lodge. The County Cllr advised that there was not. He had funded the work for the first year and it was generally accepted that the Parish Council would now take over, c) The County Cllr thanked the Parish Council for the scrutiny of his work during the last four years and felt that his achievements had been helped by the Parish Council. Councillors thanked the County Councillor for the considerable amount of help and support he had provided.

The Chairman thanked the County Councillor for his report.

Item 4. 25/43 Adoption of Minutes of Council Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on Tuesday 18th March 2025, draft copies of which had been previously circulated, were adopted as a true and accurate record of the Meeting and were duly signed by the Chairman.

Item 5. 25/44 Chairman's Report

The Chairman's report contained the subject in his written report below -

Leading on from last month's report on vandalism in the parish, the level of graffiti activity has snowballed, with police informed, and looking at linkage to other incidents. It isn't just a parish problem though, since this is continuing into Rickleton at one end of the parish, and Chester-le-street itself, at the other.

The cost implications of already re - painting the two southbound North Road shelters near Lombard Drive, and opposite the " Lambton Worm" public house will need to be assessed at the Parish Council meeting on the 15th of April. Between them, these shelter rear walls have been re-painted three times overall, and the Lombard Drive shelter is now looking at it's 3rd re- paint alone. The sad fact is that the perpetrators are taking each fresh painting as a "game" or "challenge", and re-spraying as a consequence. The cost/benefit of continuing this cycle will therefore be addressed.

In addition, Councillors agreed with the Chairman's proposal that any further re-painting of the graffiti should be deferred for a time until the situation appears to have changed. Cllr Veitch will post messages on social media to advise the public. After the forthcoming elections, Cllr Gregory will seek to establish a meeting with all relevant authorities to discuss ways of addressing the problem.

Councillors thanked the Chairman for his report.

Regarding outstanding matters -

a) Re Minute 25/33 section a). Re the Low Flatts stables, the County Cllr advised that it would likely be a long process involving the Enforcement Team. Cllr Gregory advised that the Police might be able to use drones in matters such as this.

- b) Re Minute 25/33 section d). Cllr Caygill had now met with the project organiser at the art society and advised on progress with new artwork for the display cabinets. Councillors agreed to consider the possibility of making a donation to the society at some future time should it be appropriate.
- c) Re Minute 25/36). No reply had been received from the County Council re a replacement seat for the Barley Mow bus stop. The Clerk will chase this up.
- d) Re Minute 25/39). No reply had been received from the County Council re the sign affixed to the "Prince Bishops" sign at Barley Mow. The Clerk will chase this up.

Item 6. 25/45 Portfolio Holders' Reports

a) Communications and Media Development

The Chairman invited Cllr Veitch to give his report which included the matters contained in his written report below -

Social Media

Social media activity over the last month has consisted of: Notice of the upcoming elections, our latest litter pick, activities in the area during spring and summer holidays.

As always if any Councillor has anything they would like placed on our social media please email me with details.

Litter Pick

The litter pick was held April 15th to coincide with the Big Spring Clean Initiative currently being ran by DCC. There was 9 volunteers and 13 bags collected.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Veitch for his report and invited Cllr Gregory to give her report which included the matters contained in her written report below -

b) Crime and Community Safety

Crime

For reported crimes in North Lodge, please refer to Police.uk

Police

Anti Social Behaviour

Incidents continue to escalate around the North Lodge parish.

a) Bus Shelters continue to being targeted with graffiti

b) At the woods adjacent to the A693, there is evidence of fires,'dens' and damage to trees.

Residents should not approach individuals if they see anything suspicious in this area and should immediately telephone the police using telephone number 999.

The Parish Council will be discussing this issue at the next meeting with a view to involving our community partners in stopping this behaviour.

Community Safety

Speed monitoring

The speed monitoring vehicle has visited Blind Lane on numerous occasions. Data obtained to be circulated once received.

The Royal Visit to Durham Cathedral, Maundy Service.

On Thursday, 17th April, there will be restrictions in place on the roads leading to and surrounding Durham Cathedral for the visit of King Charles and Queen Camilla.

Please be aware that a temporary restriction on drone flights will be in place over Durham City from 7am on 16th April to 7pm on 17th April 2025.

More information is available on the social media accounts of Durham Constabulary and Durham County Council.

Operation Spotlight

The national campaign for April, targets those who use the roads for criminality, high harm offenders, speeding, driving under the influence, those not wearing seat belts and those using a

mobile phone

See someone breaking the law on our roads? Report it by calling 101 or online at:

<https://www.durham.police.uk/.../af/how-to-report-a-crime/>

You can also use the force's dedicated Op Snap reporting channel at:

<https://secureform.nextbase.co.uk/>

Routine Drugs drug tests.

Suspected burglars, shoplifters and drug dealers are to be routinely drug tested when they are arrested in County Durham and Darlington.

Positive results will result in further action by police.

Domestic Violence (Operation Nightingale)

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue has highlighted Durham Constabulary's Operation Nightingale as a good example in which there has been a reduction in delays in obtaining crucial medical evidence.

Sexual and Physical abuse

The National Crime Agency reports that in 2024 there was a rise in harmful online networks consisting of predominantly teenage boys, with millions of messages now being sent online relating to sexual and physical abuse.

The digital world is evolving faster than most adults can keep up with, so don't be in the dark when protecting your children.

Have you recently watched Netflix's #Adolescence?

For advice on how to support young people as parents, guardians or teachers, visit:

www.ceopeducation.co.uk

Stalking

If you're experiencing stalking, call police on 101, or dial 999 in an emergency.

Reports can also be made online at www.durham.police.uk

More advice and support:

National Stalking Helpline 0808 802 0300

Suzy Lamplugh Trust www.suzylamplugh.org

The Chairman thanked Cllr Gregory for her report and invited Cllr Veitch to give his Finance report which included the matters contained in his written report below -

c) Finance

I have inspected the financial information supplied to me by the clerk and can confirm that everything appears correct.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Veitch for his report. Cllr Driscoll then gave his report which included the matters contained in his written report below -

d) Highways and Community Assets

The monthly bus shelters inspection was completed on Monday the 7th of April, with "sports tags" requiring cleaning at the glass shelter in Picktree Village, three sprayed tags in total. One at the side glass panel, one in the rear, and one on the rear plastic support. The seat at the "Lambton Worm" shelter needed a complete clean.

Overnight between 20th/21 st of March, "sports" related tagging occurred to the shelter near the Lombard Dive entrance, and across the road from the "Lambton Worm" public house, plus a further tag on the Picktree Village stone shelter.

To complete this sorry tale, overnight between 07/08 of April, the largest tag yet - 3' - 4' high appeared in the shelter near Lombard Drive, and the Northlands shelter glass cabinet was ripped

open and art poster removed. The lock is still useable, but stiff. This is an unprecedented sequence of events, the implications of which are highlighted in the Chairman's Report.

Councillors thanked Cllr Driscoll for his report.

The Chairman invited Cllr May to give her report which included the matters contained in her written report below -

e) Horticulture

SUMMARY

1 Due to recent good weather and sunshine, the Parish is looking very colourful.

2. Millennium Bed.

The refurbishment of this bed is now complete

The Chairman thanked Cllr May for her Horticulture report and invited her to give a Partnership Organisations report which included the following matter -

f) Meetings of Partnership Organisations

Cllr May advised that there had not been any recent meetings of CDALC or the new Local Network.

The Chairman thanked Cllr May for her report and invited Cllr Caygill to give her report which included the matters contained in her written report below -

g) Play Areas

MERLIN DRIVE

All equipment appears to be in good order.

LOW FLATTS

All equipment appears to be in good order.

The debris from the hedge cutting remains scattered around.

The grass appears to have been cut in both areas and the Mole hills flattened.

In addition, the debris from hedge cutting had still not been cleared away. The Clerk will again chase this up.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Caygill for her report and invited Cllr Hall to give his report which included the matters contained in his written report below -

h) Policy and Governance

Extracts from Recent NALC Bulletin

Breaking the mould of parish and town councils

Our latest event explored [how parish and town councils can attract a more diverse range of councillor candidates](#). The panel featured Shuwanna Aaron of Queens Park Community Council, Simon Kaye of Reform Think Tank, and Tamsin Hewitt of the Local Government Association (LGA). Shuwanna shared how her council engaged key community stakeholders and hosted informal meetings to increase awareness and encourage election participation. Simon highlighted the need for more resources to strengthen councils and counter the perception that they lack influence. He also advocated for better collaboration among smaller councils and simplified processes for creating new councils in urban areas. Tamsin presented the LGA's Be A Councillor

campaign, which promotes public awareness, local events, and partnerships with civic organisations. She also outlined key resources, including an employer-employee guide and a toolkit for breaking down barriers for disabled councillors. The discussion underscored the importance of engagement, resourcing, and strategic promotion in making parish and town councils more inclusive and representative of their communities. Our website also has a [dedicated area about becoming a councillor](#) with further information and resources.

Model Standing Orders

We have updated [Model Standing Order \(England\) 18](#) to comply with new procurement legislation and ensure consistency with our [Model Financial Regulations](#). The changes are to 18.a.v, 18.c, 18.d, and 18.f. We've also updated [Model Standing Order \(England \) 14](#) to better reflect Code of Conduct requirements. 14.a, 14.b, and 14.c have been removed. We have also changed the language in the document to gender-neutral terms to align with our policy and the [Civility and Respect Project](#).

In addition, a) Cllr Hall expanded on what the Council might do to encourage community engagement, b) the Clerk will examine the revisions to the Model Standing Orders to ascertain if any amendments are needed to the Council's documents.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Hall for his report and invited Cllr Martin to give his report which included the following matters -

i) Project Development, Business and External Relations

Cllr Martin gave an update on progress with the Remembrance Artwork. Cllr Veitch advised that he was working on a new item for the forthcoming VE Day celebrations.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Martin for his report and invited Cllr Brown to give her report which included the matters contained in her written report below -

j) Picktree Village

Picktree Village spring flower beds are looking colourful and thriving. Our regular scourge of litter and speeding motorists continues and we now are experiencing the third anti social behaviour trait. Graffiti has appeared on 2 bus shelters and on part of Lambton wall. Residents have reported this to DCC clean and green but no sign yet of removal.

A resident in Lintfort also has observed illegal entry to Picktree farmhouse on a number of occasions and have reported this to the Estate manager. Subsequently the house is now completely boarded up.

It is quite unpleasant to regularly observe the selfish and disgusting behaviour of people coming through our village.

I notice several mentions on Facebook of criminal and unacceptable behaviour in the Chester le street area. I see our Police commissioner has anti social behaviour as her top priority. Perhaps our Police chiefs should look at the very successful measures taken by Cleveland force recently. This sort of loutish disregard for acceptable behaviour is a blight on our communities.

In addition, a) Councillors had observed that road reinstatement work was now underway on Vigo Lane, b) Cllr Veitch agreed to add Picktree Village to the rota for litter-picking, c) Re speed of traffic, the Clerk will ask the Traffic Management Officer for the Police about the possibility for the installation of automatic traffic counters in the Village.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Brown for her report.

Item 7. 25/46 Correspondence

1) From Durham County Council
Notice of Uncontested Election.

2) Various planning applications, approvals and refusals from Durham County Council, of which the following application was within North Lodge Parish:-
Various tree works, at land to the north east of 17-19 Blind Lane.

Item 8. 25/47 Proposals, Reports and Requests for Consideration

The Annual Newsletter

Councillors discussed ideas for the Newsletter. Cllr May asked that items for inclusion should be sent to her by mid June.

Before the next item, the following resolution was passed -

That in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the public and press be temporarily excluded and they are instructed to withdraw.

The Clerk also left the room for the duration of this item.

CONFIDENTIAL ITEM

Item 9. 25/48 The Clerk's Annual Appraisal

The Chairman and the Clerk had carried out the Annual Appraisal and the Chairman had produced a Report which was advised to Councillors who agreed to the Chairman's recommendation to note the Report.

Item 10. 25/49 Payment of Accounts

TO	AMOUNT	REASON	VAT
Salaries	£ 644.48	Salaries April 2025	
Expenses	£ 110.00	Expenses April 2025	
Makepeace Landscapes	£ 1882.39	Horticulture April 2025	£313.73
DSJ Property Services	£ 190.00	Removal of Graffiti	
CDALC	£ 551.76	Annual Subscription	
Total of Above Payments	£ 3378.63		

Payments Made by Debit Card and Direct Debit

TO	AMOUNT	REASON	VAT
ANS Group Ltd	£ 46.25	Monthly Subscription - April 2025	£ 7.71
Total Card and D/D Payments	£ 46.25		

(Resolved - the payments be approved as submitted).

Item 11. 25/50 Other Matters for Information

a) Cllr Gregory suggested a need to introduce more community projects over the next four years. Cllr Martin considered that Councillors would need to lead on their projects.

b) The Clerk is to circulate a list of positions to be filled at the forthcoming Annual Meeting of the Council.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.40pm.

North Lodge Parish Council

Accounts for the month as submitted to the Meeting of North Lodge Parish Council held on Tuesday 20th May 2025.

TO	AMOUNT	REASON	VAT
Salaries	£	Salaries May 2025	
Expenses	£ 110.00	Expenses May 2025	
Makepeace Landscapes	£	Horticulture May 2025	£
Zurich Municipal	£ 753.84	Annual Insurance Premium	
CDALC	£ 40.00	Good Councillor Guides	
Npower Commercial Gas Ltd	£ 790.31	Power for North Road Tree Lights	£ 37.63
Total of Above Payments	£		

Payments Made by Debit Card and Direct Debit

TO	AMOUNT	REASON	VAT
ANS Group Ltd	£ 46.25	Monthly Subscription - May 2025	£ 7.71
Total Card and D/D Payments	£		

Balance to 30th April 2025

Balance b/f	£33444.37	Balances at Bank:-	
Deduct Payments - April 2025	<u>£ 3378.63</u>	Community Account	£ 7238.75
	£30065.74	Commercial Instant Access	<u>£67400.68</u>
Deduct Card and D/D Payments	<u>£ 46.25</u>	Total	<u>£74639.43</u>
	£30019.49		
Add Bank Interest Received	<u>£ 35.27</u>	Deduct cheques not yet presented	<u>£ 551.76</u>
	£30054.76		
Deduct Bank Charges	<u>£ 6.75</u>		
	£30048.01		
Add Precept Received	<u>£37762.28</u>		
	£67810.29		
Add VAT Refund Received	<u>£ 6277.38</u>		
	£74087.67		
Balance c/f	£74087.67		£74087.67

One cheque not yet presented -
£551.76 cheque number 1660 dated 15/04/25 payable to CDALC for annual subscription.