

## 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 17<sup>th</sup> February 2026.

PRESENT Chairman: Councillor Craig Martin.

Councillors: Suzanne Brown, Margaret Caygill, Jackie Gregory, Maureen May, Patrick Driscoll, Dennis Hall, Darren Hawkes.

County Councillor: Craig Martin.

Clerk: David Murrell.

The Chairman commenced the meeting by welcoming everyone.

### **Item 1. 26/12 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Chris Veitch and Graham Watson.

### **Item 2. 26/13 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Craig Martin declared interests as a County Councillor and as a Trustee of Park View Academy. Councillors Jackie Gregory and Darren Hawkes declared interests as members of the North Lodge Remembrance Group.

### **Item 3. 26/14 Report of the County Councillor**

The County Councillor's report included the matters contained in his written report below -

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#### **Openreach Fibre Broadband - Picktree Lodge**

Openreach will be providing fibre broadband to Picktree Lodge through a new process known as micro-trenching. Openreach do not have a timescale for when this work will be completed, but I understand work has already begun. However, they have confirmed that it is certain fibre broadband will be delivered to every household on Picktree Lodge.

There will, of course, be some disruption when the work takes place, including the digging up of sections of the footpaths. They have also confirmed that, as the term micro-trenching suggests, there will be significantly less excavation of the footpaths compared to previous methods.

A number of residents are deeply disappointed – and understandably frustrated – that Virgin broadband was not provided to the entire estate.

Since this issue arose, I have been lobbying and applying pressure through multiple channels to secure fibre broadband for every single household on Picktree Lodge. I am hopeful that this matter will be resolved in the near future.

I have also explained the history and current situation regarding broadband provision on Picktree Lodge directly to an Openreach representative, encouraging them to prioritise the street and ensure that no household is left out this time.

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Councillors thanked the County Councillor for his report.

**Item 4. 26/15 Adoption of Minutes of Council Meeting**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2026, 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. 26/16 Chairman's Report**

The Chairman advised that all matters to be reported would be raised elsewhere in the meeting. Councillors thanked the Chairman.

Regarding outstanding matters -

- a) Re Minute 26/03 section c). Cllr Gregory reported that the new electric buses were now in use on the service 21 but there were initial problems with the charging-up regime.
- b) Re Minute 26/05 section d). Cllr Gregory advised that the replacement barriers had now been installed at Northlands roundabout.
- c) Re Minute 26/06 section j). Re pavement parking, Cllr Hall was interested to know what resources would be made available should Durham County Council decide to introduce proposed regulations. The County Cllr will enquire with the County Council.
- d) Re Minute 26/08 section c). The Clerk provided an update on discussions with the School re a table for the conference room. A suitable table was not available at present but continued to be sought.

**Item 6. 26/17 Portfolio Holders' Reports**

**a) Communications and Media Development**

In his absence from the meeting, Cllr Veitch had provided the written report below -

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Very little social media activity over the last month, only 1 post and it was with regards to the speed camera activity on Blind Lane. As always if any Councillor has anything they would like placed on our social media please email me with details.  
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The Chairman thanked Cllr Veitch for his report.

**b) Crime and Community Safety**

Cllr Gregory's report included the matters contained in her written report below -

**Crime**

Please refer to Police.uk for any recorded crimes in the North Lodge parish.

Lyndhurst Avenue:

Recently, a male was seen interfering with a car door handle. The male made off when realizing he was being observed. Police attended the location, no arrest was made and the video evidence was given to the police.

**Community Safety.**

The mobile speed monitoring vehicle continues to visit Blind Lane.

Annual Speed Monitoring Data for Blind Lane, 2025.

The mobile speed camera has been deployed on 92 occasions to the A693 Blind Lane throughout 2025, with 1838 drivers triggering the speed camera.

During this time:

23 drivers fell within the Process Level (Court action)

147 drivers fell within the Conditional offer level (fine and points)

1668 drivers fell within the Speed Awareness Course level

This worked out at about 20 triggers per visit with each visit lasting approx. 1 hour 29 mins. (so around 1 trigger every 4-5 minutes)

## Police

### Firearms

Bruni top-venting blank-firing imitation firearms are now illegal to own.

A national firearms amnesty runs until **27th February**, allowing for these specific models to be handed in anonymously and without prosecution.

Co Durham police stations available to accept these firearms: Durham City, Darlington, Peterlee and Bishop Auckland.

After 27th February, possession of these models may result in prosecution and a potential sentence of up to 10 years' imprisonment.

If you think you may have one of these items, hand them in now.

### Operation Sunrise

Officers from across the county came together to take part in Operation Sunrise.

This operation was targeting the most wanted criminals across County Durham and Darlington.

A total of eight people were arrested during the operation for a number of serious offences, including causing grievous bodily harm, firearms offences, domestic violence, and exploitation.

Police will continue to pursue dangerous criminals.

To report something that's not quite right in your area. Contact police on 101 or online at

[www.durham.police.uk](http://www.durham.police.uk)

Alternatively, information can be passed on anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111, or

online at [www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org)

### Children using the internet.

The internet gives access to a wide range of content and information, some of which can be harmful or inappropriate for children.

What is or isn't appropriate is up to individual parents and carers to decide, but it's always good to:

1) Have an open conversation with your child about online and phone safety.

2) Check privacy settings and parental controls on their devices and apps.

3) Remember: most games and social media platforms have multiple communication features including text and voice chats, private messages, image sharing, video calls and live streaming.

While some platforms have moderators to remove harmful content, not all do.

With technology now easily accessible, help keep your children safe online.

### Electric Bikes

A reminder to riders of the safety and legal requirements involved with their use.

In particular the likes of Surron electric bikes. These models have been involved in two serious collisions over the last fortnight, both of which have left the riders with significant injuries.

Most Surron bikes are NOT road legal and are only permitted to be ridden on private land with permission.

They are not permitted to be used on public roads, cycle paths or footpaths.

### Other electric bike models

If you have one of the few road legal models, you must have:

1) Insurance (Third Party at a minimum)

2) A valid registration and number plate

3) When riding, wear a motorcycle helmet that meets UK safety standards

Without these, your bike is likely to be seized by police.

For more information visit: <https://surronelectricbikes.co.uk/.../are-surron-bikes.../>

### Domestic abuse

Clare's Law :Anyone can make an application for information if they are worried their current or ex-partner may have a history of abuse and are a risk to them.

Applications can be made online here <http://www.durham.police.uk/.../request-information.../>

If you or someone you know is experiencing physical or sexual violence, tell us.

Call 101 or 999 if you or someone you know is in immediate danger.

If you don't want to speak to the police, there are other people/organisations who can help:  
Call The Meadows Sexual Assault Referral Centre on 0330 223 0099 or visit [www.sarcdurham.co.uk](http://www.sarcdurham.co.uk)

The Rape and Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre (RSACC) offers free, specialist support to anyone who has experienced any form of sexual violence at any time in their lives. Call 01325 354119, email [info@rsacc-thecentre.org.uk](mailto:info@rsacc-thecentre.org.uk) or visit [www.rsacc-thecentre.org.uk](http://www.rsacc-thecentre.org.uk)

The National Domestic Abuse Helpline is available 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247.  
Local service, Harbour, is also available 24 hours a day on 03000 20 25 25, or visit [www.myharbour.org.uk](http://www.myharbour.org.uk)

#### Unroadworthy Vehicles

Recently, the Forensic Collision Investigation Unit and Roads Policing Unit teamed up with counterparts at Durham Constabulary and the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA). They spent a full day on the A1M, northbound at the Washington Services, carrying out random checks in a bid to identify unroadworthy vehicles.

The results of the joint operation are as follows:

Prohibition notices were issued by the DVSA for tyres below the legal tread depth, tinted windows and defective suspension systems.

Other drivers were given advice around smaller issues with their vehicles that could soon develop into serious faults.

This is hugely important, and no doubt that the targeted approach will go a long way to prevent future collisions and serious harm.

#### Recruitment

Thinking about a career in policing? PC recruitment is opening soon.

Join the virtual police officer discovery event on **Tuesday, 17 February at 6pm.**

This is your chance to:

Learn what it really means to be a police officer

Understand the application process, what to expect and how to apply

Explore our open entry routes.

You'll hear first-hand from our police officers, HR, learning and development and well-being teams.

Sign-up today <https://www.durham.police.uk/.../jobs/po-discovery-event2/>

Our current policing recruitment routes are:

Police Constable Entry Programme (PCEP)

Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship (PCDA)

Degree Holder Entry Programme (DHEP)

<https://www.durham.police.uk/.../careers/join-us/vacancies/>

Vacancies for Police Community Support Officers.

<https://www.durham.police.uk/.../vacancies/jobs/-PCSO-/>

Other Vacancies:

Operational Police Lawyer

Driver/Maintenance Officer

Digital Forensic Technician

Vetting Researcher

Case Manager

Firearms Licensing Clerical Officer

Firearms Enquiry Officer

Business administration apprenticeship

Level 3 ICT administration apprenticeship

These positions receive a lot of interest, so be sure to submit your application asap.

<https://www.durham.police.uk/.../careers/join-us/vacancies/>

For non- emergency telephone calls to police, use telephone number 101

For all emergency telephone calls to police, use telephone number 999  
Please refer to Durham Constabulary's social media accounts for more information about issues relating to police matters.

### **Co Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS)**

#### **Accidental house fires.**

CDDFRS data shows that from January to December 2025, crews attended 202 accidental house fires, 125 of which started in the kitchen (61%).

Remember, if you do have a fire in the kitchen, don't take any risks - get everyone out of your home and call 999.

To test a domestic fire alarm, press and hold the test button until you hear it sound.

If the alarm doesn't go off, you may need to replace the battery or the alarm itself.

You can check how safe your home is and find out if you are eligible for a free Home Fire Safety Visit (HFSV) and smoke alarms at: <https://orlo.uk/iCqNY>

Further Information is on the CDDFRS Facebook account giving information on how to protect yourself and loved ones.

A number of apprentice firefighters have completed their initial training just before Christmas 2025. They are now working at fire stations across County Durham and Darlington helping to save lives and protect their communities.

[#NationalApprenticeshipWeek](#) [#NAW2026](#) [#firefighter](#)[#fireservice](#)

#### **Recruitment**

Deputy Chief Fire Officer

For more information visit: <https://orlo.uk/sJ68b>

Vehicle and Equipment Technician to join a busy workshop team.

Visit North East Jobs to apply.

[#fireservice](#) [#mechanic](#) [#durham](#) [#DurhamJobs](#)

For all emergency telephone calls to the Fire Service, use telephone number 999

Please refer to CDDRS social media accounts for further information.

### **Durham County Council**

#### **Avian Influenza**

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs has advised that an avian influenza prevention zone has been put in place across the county.

More information can be found at:

[www.durham.gov.uk/article/27589/Avian-influenza-bird-flu](http://www.durham.gov.uk/article/27589/Avian-influenza-bird-flu)

#### **Scams**

Scammers have been targeting residents across County Durham in recent months including:

1) QR code to pay for parking - QR codes have been left in council car parks or parking places as an option to pay for parking. DCC car parks do not have any on or off street parking place that is payable by QR code.

2) Battery operated card reader on parking machines - Small battery operated card readers are being attached to car park machines and tariff boards to encourage people to pay using this method. These are scam devices. Please do not pay using this option.

3) Winter fuel payments - Residents are still receiving text messages from telephone numbers beginning with +485, with a fake link to a Government website

4) Electoral register -DCC has been made aware that electors are falsely being asked for additional documents to process their electoral role application. The phishing emails are being sent from electoral@register-to-vote.electoral.agency or similar email addresses.

More information about current scams can be found:

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/currentscams>

## Recruitment

Customer Services Assistants

Surveyor

Human Resources Assistant

Teaching Assistant

School Crossing Patrol

You can find details of all DCC current vacancies and how to apply on the website:

<https://ow.ly/IHk450W0VP9>

Durham County Council Jobs and Careers

To contact Durham County Council by telephone, use the number is 03000 26 0000

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In addition, Councillors had observed an apparent increase in the presence of police officers patrolling the town centre.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Gregory for her report.

### **c) Finance**

In his absence from the meeting, Cllr Veitch had provided the written report below -

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I have inspected the financial information supplied to me by the clerk and can confirm that everything appears correct with payments matching bank statements.

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The Chairman thanked Cllr Veitch for his report.

### **d) Highways and Community Assets**

Cllr Driscoll's report included the matters contained in his written report below -

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The monthly bus shelters inspection was undertaken on Saturday the 7th of February 2026. All shelters appeared to be in good condition, and the stone shelter in Picktree Village has now been cleaned of graffiti, with only a slight trace of a red cross on the bus timetable, which does not prevent the information being legible.

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The Chairman thanked Cllr Driscoll for his report.

### **e) Horticulture**

Cllr May's report included the following matters -

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- 1) The horticulture contractor had provided a quote for the regular horticulture work for the financial year 2026/27. Councillors were happy to agree to the quote.
  - 2) The three Queen's Canopy trees had now been planted.
  - 3) Proposals for two projects would be presented later in the meeting.
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The Chairman thanked Cllr May for her report.

### **f) Meetings of Partnership Organisations**

As there was not at present a Portfolio Holder, no report was made.

### **g) Picktree Village**

Cllr Brown's written report included the following matters below -

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February has been a fairly quiet month with only the usual culprits of speeding vehicles and litter and graffiti at the filthy Lintfort bus shelter. Lambton Estates has not as yet repaired the damaged wall after the New Year's Eve incident.

A bungalow that has been left empty for over 10 years has now been completely demolished and the site cleared of rubble.

Thank you again to residents who are clearing rubbish from the lane.

### Celebration trees

I am delighted to report that the 3 trees have been planted with netting to deter rabbits. Our gardener reported positive comments from people passing as they were working. Plaques need to commemorate each tree remembrance. I understand our Clerk can advise on this.

### Coronation bench

I have looked at several design for treated wood to black composite. Prices range from £300 to £700 Thank you Chris for your research on designs. Some have ground anchors and have the dedication engraved. I am concerned about submitting an application to the Community fund when a site has yet to be agreed. I suggest beside the Police houses on North Road. Please can we discuss this and agree a site. That would speed up the process considerably. I am happy to provide photos of a selection for Council approval and choice so that we can proceed.

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In addition, 1) Cllr Brown advised that the damaged wall had now been repaired, 2) Re the demolished bungalow, the Clerk will contact the Planning Department to ask if all planning requirements have been met. The County Cllr advised that any proposed future development of the site would become apparent whenever a planning application was submitted, 3) Re a site for a Coronation bench, this had already been agreed to be the site suggested by Cllr Brown. The County Cllr confirmed that he would continue to pursue the request for a site meeting with the County Council to consider the future of the apple tree there.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Brown for her report.

### **h) Planning**

Cllr Hawkes advised of an application by Lambton Rowing Club for S106 money to restore a property on Lambton Estate, in Bournmoor Parish but using all the S106 funds currently available, including to this Parish Council. The County Cllr had twice previously met the Club and discussed the application with them. Councillors discussed the application and raised concerns which are to be forwarded to the Planning Department.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Hawkes for his report.

### **i) Play Areas**

Cllr Caygill's report included the matters contained in her written report below -

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The equipment at both Merlin Drive and Low Flatts appears to be in good working order.

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In addition, 1) Cllr Caygill advised that new signage was still awaited. The County Cllr advised that the County Council was still unable to provide a timescale for the availability of the signage, 2) Re maps showing the play area sites, the Clerk advised that Cllr Veitch had produced a map which needed some business names removed and Cllr Veitch was working on this.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Caygill for her report.

### **j) Policy and Governance**

Cllr Hall's report included the matters contained in his written report below -

### **Government Policy**

**Government Policy paper Policy statement: a roadmap for Section 106 delivery in England (28 January)**

The government has a clear manifesto commitment to deliver the biggest increase in **social and affordable housebuilding** in a generation.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/policy-statement-a-roadmap-for-section-106-delivery-in-england>

In recent years, the negotiation of S106 agreements has become synonymous with inefficiency and delay. To ensure **the developer contributions system** secures the supply and affordability outcomes we seek in the years ahead, **we need to reduce its complexity and minimise negotiation friction**. To that end, the government intends to reset the market to provide for a **simple, more**

**transparent and more resilient S106 system.** We are clear that this reset must involve improved transparency and consistency of pricing; greater clarity as to the standards that S106 units must meet so that they are constructed to a specification that works for Registered Providers; and better and earlier engagement and collaboration between Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), Registered Providers (RPs) and developers.

**Government Press release Pride in Place: 40 neighbourhoods join transformational programme (4 February)**

Thousands more people handed the power to decide how millions are spent in their area as Pride in Place expands.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pride-in-place-40-neighbourhoods-join-transformational-programme>

**Press Release: Durham County Council**

Residents invited to get involved with Pride in Place funding

Published January 29, 2026 3.12pm

Residents across three neighbourhoods are being invited to have a direct say on how significant Government investment will be spent in their area.

The £5 billion Pride in Place programme will see up to £20 million invested into each of **East Peterlee, South Stanley, and Crook North/Tow Law** over the next ten years as part of phase two of the programme. The funding will be paid to us as the Accountable Body after submission of a 10-year vision and Pride in Place Plan.

We will oversee up to £60 million of additional funding to be invested across these three areas.

That means, over the next nine months, the council will work alongside local MPs and residents to establish Neighbourhood Boards.

As a result, we are encouraging residents, workers and people with strong ties in the three areas to get involved as each Neighbourhood Board will be seeking an independent chair.

**Other Matters: Case Report: Discrimination**

LGL: Town council ordered to pay compensation over indirect age discrimination in search for new clerk/CEO (22 January)

<https://www.localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/employment/395-employment-news/99520-town-council-ordered-to-pay-compensation-over-indirect-age-discrimination-in-search-for-new-clerk-ceo>

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In addition, re Pride in Place, as Chester-le-Street was not included Councillors asked the County Cllr what was the vision for the town. The County Cllr advised that there were many consultations and reviews being carried out across the County.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Hall for his report.

**k) Project Development, Business and External Relations**

Cllr Martin gave an update on the progress of the Remembrance Artwork. The lease for the land was presently being drawn up by the County Council. Under Standing Order 23(j), Councillors were in agreement that the Clerk and Cllr Veitch were to be the signatories to the lease on behalf of the Parish Council.

Councillors thanked Cllr Martin for his report.

**Item 7. 26/18 Correspondence**

1) From Durham Constabulary

email re mobile speed cameras in Blind Lane.

2) From County Durham Association of Local Councils

Notice of a Special General Meeting to be held on Saturday 7th March 2026.

- 3) Various planning applications, approvals and refusals from Durham County Council, of which the following application was within North Lodge Parish:-  
Application for tree works, at 2 North Lodge.

**Item 8. 26/19 Proposals, Reports and Requests for Consideration**

**a) Organising a Formal Community Remembrance Event**

The Chairman proposed the holding of events at the new Remembrance Artwork site after its installation. There would be cost and insurance implications. Councillors discussed this and agreed in principle to the proposal. The Clerk is to make enquiries towards obtaining the relevant permissions.

**b) Proposals for the Use of the Community Improvement Fund and the Neighbourhood Budget**

Cllr May presented detailed proposals for the refurbishment of the Picktree Lodge and Longdean Park beds. Councillors discussed these and agreed to fund the Picktree Lodge project by way of £1140 from the Community Improvement Fund and an increase of £1680 in the Horticulture budget for 2026/27. This will leave £3360 in the Community Fund for future proposals. Re the Longdean Park bed, the County Cllr will discuss with the Horticulture group the possibility of funding from his Neighbourhood Budget.

**(Resolved on a unanimous show of hands - to provide funds of one thousand, one hundred and forty pounds from the Community Improvement Fund and one thousand, six hundred and eighty pounds by way of an increase in the Horticulture budget 2026/27 for the refurbishment of the Picktree Lodge flower beds).**

**Item 9. 26/20 Payment of Accounts**

| TO                             | AMOUNT           | REASON                     | VAT      |
|--------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|----------|
| Salaries                       | £ 664.56         | Salaries February 2026     |          |
| Expenses                       | £ 115.00         | Expenses February 2026     |          |
| Makepeace Landscapes           | £ 1976.51        | Horticulture February 2026 | £ 329.42 |
| Makepeace Landscapes           | £ 1710.00        | Planting Celebration Trees | £ 285.00 |
| Forvis Mazars LLP              | £ 378.00         | Audit Fee                  | £ 63.00  |
| DSJ Property Services          | £ 50.00          | Graffiti Cleaning          |          |
| Wag & Company                  | £ 150.00         | Donation                   |          |
| St. Cuthbert's Hospice         | £ 150.00         | Donation                   |          |
| Daft As A Brush                | £ 150.00         | Donation                   |          |
| <b>Total of Above Payments</b> | <b>£ 5344.07</b> |                            |          |

**Payments Made by Debit Card and Direct Debit**

| TO                                 | AMOUNT         | REASON                          | VAT    |
|------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|--------|
| ANS Group Ltd                      | £ 46.25        | Monthly Subscription - Feb 2026 | £ 7.71 |
| Cartridge Save Ltd                 | £ 29.05        | Printer Ink                     | £ 4.84 |
| <b>Total Card and D/D Payments</b> | <b>£ 75.30</b> |                                 |        |

**(Resolved - the payments be approved as submitted).**

**Item 10. 26/21 Other Matters for Information**

Cllr May asked for the Newsletter to be an Agenda item for the March meeting of the Council. The Clerk is to arrange this.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.12pm.

**North Lodge Parish Council**

**Accounts for the month as submitted to the Meeting of North Lodge Parish Council held on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2026.**

| TO                             | AMOUNT           | REASON                     | VAT      |
|--------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|----------|
| Salaries                       | £ 664.56         | Salaries February 2026     |          |
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| <b>Total of Above Payments</b> | <b>£ 5344.07</b> |                            |          |

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| <b>Total Card and D/D Payments</b> | <b>£ 75.30</b> |                                 |        |

**Balance to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2026**

|                                 |                  |                                  |                  |
|---------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|
| Balance b/f                     | £48184.91        | Balances at Bank:-               |                  |
| Deduct Payments - Dec 25/Jan 26 | <u>£ 6779.34</u> | Community Account                | £ 1451.11        |
|                                 | £41405.57        | Commercial Instant Access        | <u>£39699.07</u> |
| Deduct Card and D/D Payments    | <u>£ 969.49</u>  | Total                            | £41150.18        |
|                                 | £40436.08        |                                  |                  |
| Add Bank Interest Received      | <u>£ 45.60</u>   | Deduct cheques not yet presented | <u>£ 680.00</u>  |
|                                 | £40481.68        |                                  |                  |
| Deduct Bank Charges             | <u>£ 11.50</u>   |                                  |                  |
|                                 | £40470.18        |                                  |                  |
| Balance c/f                     | £40470.18        |                                  | £40470.18        |

Two cheques not yet presented -

£200.00 cheque number 1695 dated 20/01/26 payable to Society of Local Council Clerks for annual subscription.

£480.00 cheque number 1696 dated 20/01/26 payable to Madhouse Media Ltd for website hosting fee.