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## Conserving our Past: Building Our Future

### Chair Cllr. Harvey Neve

Minutes of the Annual Parish Council Meeting held

Wednesday 14 October 2026 at 6.30pm

Location: Bishop Middleham Village Hall

**Present:** Cllr MacCallam (Chair), Cllr Brownlee, Cllr Cooke, Cllr Jacobs, Cllr Sparks

**Parish Clerk:** Mrs A Hall

**County Councillor:** Cllr Chris Lines

**PCSO:** PCSO J Walbey

**Members of the Public:** 2 members of the public in attendance

### 1. Notice of Meeting

The Chair welcomed those present and opened the meeting. Public notice of the meeting had been given. Members and visitors were asked to ensure that they had signed the attendance sheet.

### 2. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Harvey Neve and the reason for absence was noted. Cllr MacCallam chaired the meeting in his absence.

### 3. Declarations of Interest

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items on the agenda. No declarations of interest were recorded.

### 4. Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 9 September 2026

The minutes were considered and progress on matters arising was reviewed. The Clerk confirmed that the Glee Club trophies had been paid for, the audit completion documentation had been published and the Clerk's pay award had been implemented. Lighting column stress testing had been completed and the Mainsforth noticeboard was in place. Other outstanding matters were covered under the relevant agenda items.

No update was available on the Chair's discussions with the quarry operator concerning blasting and related matters. Information expected following the previous County Councillor report remained outstanding. A meeting with representatives of Fishburn and Sedgely was being arranged to discuss the emerging County Durham Plan. No application for the councillor vacancy had yet been received.

**Resolved:** The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2026 were approved as a true and accurate record and signed.

**Action:** Clerk to follow up the outstanding quarry update with Cllr Neve and the information awaited following the previous County Councillor report.

### 5. Public Participation

A resident drew attention to land north of the village being advertised for sale. It was agreed that this would be discussed under Planning. No further matters were raised at this stage. Residents also contributed to subsequent discussions on planning, policing and local maintenance matters.

## 6. County Councillor Report

### County Council update and funding

Cllr Chris Lines advised that a written report had been provided to the Clerk. He outlined changes within the County Council administration and concerns about the effect of continuing uncertainty on staffing, recruitment and the Council's work.

He had written to the North East Mayor regarding proposed additional planning powers and local concerns about overdevelopment. An acknowledgement had been received and a substantive response was awaited.

Local Networks, which had replaced the Area Action Partnerships, were now operating. Funding applications were due to be considered by the elected member board. Demand exceeded the available funding and Cllr Lines would monitor the distribution of awards across the network area.

### Footpath towards Knotty Hill Golf Club

Members discussed the poor surface of the footpath between the Skerne and Knotty Hill Golf Club and the repeated removal of the gate intended to restrict off-road motorcycle access. Cllr Lines had spoken with the Golf Club, which was supportive in principle of improvements, provided that a suitable means of managing access could be agreed.

Options discussed included large boulders or a stile. Any proposal would require agreement with the landowner and permission from Durham County Council because the route was a public right of way. Cllr Lines had spoken with the new Rights of Way Officer and would pass her contact details to the Clerk.

Earlier proposals, including contractor prices, an offer of stone from the quarry and access from the Bishop Middleham side, were recalled. The bridge had since received a new deck, which might improve access for machinery. A defined and costed project would be needed before funding could be sought, including possible County Councillor funding.

**Action: Cllr Lines to provide the Rights of Way Officer's details. Clerk to obtain updated costs and continue discussions with the Golf Club and Rights of Way Officer on surfacing, access arrangements and permissions, so that funding options can be explored.**

### County Council budget consultation

Cllr Lines encouraged participation in the consultation on the County Council's budget and Medium Term Financial Plan. He explained that the scale of the projected funding gap depended on assumptions about future council tax increases and outlined possible reductions affecting a range of services.

Particular concern was expressed about the proposed reduction in the library budget and the potential effect on services used by parish residents, including Sedgefield Library. Highways, waste services, grounds maintenance and grass cutting were also mentioned. Residents could respond online or obtain printed copies from the library.

**Action: Clerk to circulate the budget consultation link to members and publicise it to residents. Members were encouraged to respond and consider the implications for the parish.**

## 7. PCSO Report

### Rural crime and suspicious activity

The PCSO reported on incidents since the previous meeting, including suspected poaching at Castle Lake, suspicious vehicle activity near a local farm, suspicious persons near quad bikes at Highland Farm and entry to buildings at Island Farm, where wiring had reportedly been stripped. An off-road motorcycle and a bag of items had been seized for investigation.

Residents were encouraged to report suspicious activity and provide vehicle registration details where available. The PCSO explained the value of local intelligence in identifying travelling offenders and tackling rural crime. Rural crime warning signs were being offered to farmers. Police drone capability, including night flying, was also being developed to assist rural policing and provide a visible deterrent.

### Anti-social behaviour and school engagement

The PCSO referred to reports involving young people with a crossbow and earlier concerns about catapults and damage to fences. A school assembly was planned for 13 November, including education about catapults, damage to property and the consequences of anti-social behaviour.

## Parking, speeding and e-scooters

Parking advice letters had been delivered following complaints about vehicles obstructing visibility at junctions. The initial approach was education, with enforcement to follow if necessary. Members reported that some problem parking had resumed. Parking near the Recreation Ground and football activity was also raised.

Further Speedwatch activity was planned on the main road within the following weeks. Other locations had been considered but were less suitable for the checks. A vehicle registration connected with speeding concerns in Mainsforth was passed to the PCSO.

An e-scooter awareness campaign was being prepared, with leaflets aimed at helping adults understand permitted use and the relevant restrictions. The local police team would agree its approach before distributing the material.

**Action: PCSO to arrange further Speedwatch activity and follow up parking concerns, including liaison with parking enforcement and consideration of parking around the Recreation Ground.**

## Tethered horse and PACT meeting

A resident reported a horse becoming loose after being startled by a motorcycle near the quarry road. The risks of tethering horses beside roads and the difficulty of identifying ownership were discussed. The PCSO would continue to monitor the matter.

The next PACT meeting was to be held on Thursday 15 October from 6.30pm to 7.30pm. The previous daytime meeting had attracted approximately five or six residents and the PCSO was considering arrangements for more regular engagement.

## 10. Planning

With the agreement of the meeting, Planning was brought forward and taken immediately after the PCSO Report to allow residents interested in the matter to participate before the remaining business.

### Land north of High Road

Members and residents discussed the marketing of approximately 19 acres of land north of High Road, between the village and the quarry/woodland area. The sales particulars identified Durham Cathedral as the freehold owner and Savills as the agent. The land was being marketed by sealed tender and had been put forward through the call for sites process.

Concern was expressed about the potential for housing or other development, the effect on nearby residents, the adequacy of local infrastructure and services, transport links, and the relationship with the quarry. Previous development proposals on adjoining land and the sustainability arguments raised at that time were recalled.

Members distinguished the marketing statements made in the sales particulars from any planning decision. The sale and inclusion in a call for sites did not establish that planning permission had been granted. The Council had only recently become aware of the sale and had no confirmed information about a current planning application.

It was acknowledged that the Council could not prevent a private land sale. It could seek information, monitor the emerging local plan and any application, and ensure that residents' concerns were represented. Any future proposal would need to be considered on its merits, taking account of the views of local people.

**Action: Clerk to contact Durham County Council Planning to establish whether any application or other planning approach had been received concerning the site and obtain clarification of its current position.**

**Action: Cllr MacCallam to locate the earlier sustainable settlements/development policy document and establish whether it remains current. Council to continue monitoring the emerging County Durham Plan with neighbouring councils.**

## 8. Finance

### a) Payments from July 2026

Members reviewed the payments information covering the period from July, which had not been available in full at the previous meeting, together with income and the budget position. Several grounds maintenance payments appeared together because the accounts had been brought up to date; these were regular payments rather than additional monthly charges.

The Clerk explained the checks against the agreed budget. Expenditure was generally within budget, with pavilion electricity identified as a concern. The electricity allocation was at or beyond its budget and bills were being

estimated because the newly fitted smart meter was not working correctly. A visit was arranged for Monday 19 October. Correct readings might result in an adjustment, but this was not yet confirmed.

A refund from Npower relating to overpayment for Christmas lighting electricity was noted. Members raised no further queries on the payments information.

**Action: Clerk to arrange access for the electricity meter appointment, check subsequent readings and bills, and monitor the pavilion electricity budget and any credit due.**

#### **b) Risk Register Review Section 2**

Members considered Section 2 of the Risk Register. The Clerk explained that sections were being reviewed at successive monthly meetings, after which the full register would be reviewed quarterly for changes. No amendment to this section was identified during the discussion.

An incident at the Michaelmas Fair involving a child becoming stuck in mud in the Wildlife Garden was raised. The Clerk had only been informed that evening and had requested an incident report. Members discussed the deceptive appearance of the exposed mud and the need for warning signs. Further details are recorded under Wildlife Garden.

#### **c) Community Grant Horticultural and Craft Show**

Members considered a retrospective grant request for £497 towards show-day hall hire, leaflet printing, prize cards and consumables, and general meeting costs. The Clerk had advised the organisers that future applications must be submitted before the event and that Council support should be acknowledged in publicity.

Members recognised the value of the show and the small number of volunteers involved. They discussed the organisers' fundraising, the need for a sustainable approach and whether routine meeting costs should be supported. A proposal to fund all costs was discussed, but the decision reached was to meet the show-day hall hire only.

**Resolved: To award a grant towards the show-day hall hire only. The other elements of the £497 request were not approved.**

**Action: Clerk to confirm the hall hire amount from the application, notify the organisers of the award and explain that future applications should be made in advance and supported by information on fundraising and sustainability.**

#### **d) Funding applications update**

The Clerk updated members on discussions with Ashcourt regarding financial support for community events. Funding remained outstanding, and clarification was being sought on the application process and whether it could support the current year's events.

Members noted the importance of external funding to the events programme and agreed that continued use of reserves would not be sustainable.

**Action: The Clerk to continue discussions, pursue the outstanding funding and report back to Council.**

**Action: Clerk to clarify GrantScape eligibility and timescales.**

#### **e) Payroll Services**

The Clerk reported that Durham County Council would cease providing payroll services from April 2027. Alternative providers had been considered from a list supplied through CDALC. A quotation of £180 per year had been obtained from an accountancy provider whose principal was also a parish clerk and already provided payroll services to other councils.

The proposed service used Sage, offered access to payroll information and was reported to have appropriate data protection arrangements and references. The cost was comparable to the existing service.

**Resolved: To approve the proposed replacement payroll service at £180 per year.**

**Action: Clerk to arrange the transfer of payroll provision in time for the withdrawal of Durham County Council's service in April 2027.**

#### **f) Church Commissioners Village Green Land**

Members considered the latest draft licence for small pockets of Church Commissioners land maintained by the Council. The Clerk explained that the previous lease had expired and that she had been seeking an arrangement reflecting the Council's maintenance role rather than taking on wider responsibility for the land. The new proposal included an annual charge of £100.

The Council maintained grass, flower beds and its own assets on these publicly accessible areas. The Clerk questioned paying a fee while also meeting the maintenance costs. Savills had accepted responsibility for trees and this was reflected in the latest draft.

Members discussed the difference between permission to maintain land or place assets on it and the wider responsibilities that might follow from a licence. It was recognised that the legal effect could not be settled from the discussion alone. Legal advice to be sought. No agreement to enter into the licence was made.

**Resolved:** To seek further advice before deciding whether to accept the proposed licence.

**Action:** Clerk to provide the previous lease, latest draft licence and associated plans to Cllr Members to see legal advice and advise Savills that the Council is obtaining further advice.

### **9. Events and Outdoor Activities**

#### **a) Michaelmas Fair**

The detailed review and recommendations for the 2027 event were deferred. The Clerk reported takings of £695 from the event. Future arrangements would also depend on clarification of event funding.

**Action:** Clerk to bring the Michaelmas Fair review and recommendations back to a future meeting.

#### **b) Seating at Bus Stop**

A resident had requested somewhere to sit at the bus stop outside the Village Hall. The Council had a bench in storage which could potentially be used. Members discussed whether seating should be inside the shelter or alongside it and whether the stored bench would leave sufficient standing space.

**Action:** Clerk to contact contractor to find out if the seat could be installed inside the bus shelter.

#### **c) Incident Response Plan**

Consideration of the Incident Response Plan was deferred to the next meeting.

**Action:** Clerk to include the Incident Response Plan on the next agenda.

#### **d) Park Signage**

Members considered the proofs and quotation for two signs, covering the play area and the main Recreation Ground. The supplier would refine the artwork. The supply cost discussed and agreed was £670 for both signs; installation was separate.

Existing boards and posts might be reused. The Clerk would ask the grounds maintenance contractor about installation and had an alternative installer available if required.

**Resolved:** To approve the supply of the two signs at £670.

**Action:** Clerk to finalise the artwork, order the signs and arrange installation, checking whether existing supports can be used.

#### **e) Coronation Garden**

The main garden work was reported complete. During the earlier review of matters arising, flagstones to provide access to the throne were mentioned, together with painting the fence and possible treatment of the throne. An official opening was discussed but no date was arranged.

Members suggested solar lighting, including possible lights in the tree. No specific product or expenditure was approved.

**Action:** Clerk to follow up the remaining finishing works with the contractor. Possible lighting and an official opening to be considered further.

### **Additional discussion Mainsforth Christmas Tree Lights**

Members revisited the cost of providing a mains electricity supply for the Mainsforth Christmas tree. The Clerk explained that the wider quotation also included a tree and first-year lights and would involve continuing arrangements with Durham County Council. Members questioned the value of the substantial installation cost for a display used for only a few weeks each year.

The Clerk had identified more robust battery-operated festoon lights, with larger bulbs, substantial cabling, timers and separately replaceable battery packs. The estimated cost to cover a 14-foot tree was approximately £500. Members supported this option in place of progressing the mains connection proposal. Existing lighting column wraps in Mainsforth were a separate arrangement.

**Resolved: To proceed with the battery-operated lighting option for the Mainsforth Christmas tree at an estimated cost of £500.**

**Action: Clerk to progress the suitable battery-operated lights and confirm the quantities and battery packs required.**

### **f) Village Survey**

Consideration of the circulated draft survey was deferred to allow Cllr Neve to contribute. Members emphasised that each question should have a clear purpose and lead to information the Council could use in setting priorities and planning projects.

Previous surveys from 2012 and 2015 were discussed. Members wanted the updated survey to inform both local priorities and the Council's response to the emerging County Durham Plan, including environmental and development issues.

**Action: Members to review the circulated questions and provide comments. Clerk to circulate the earlier survey results and bring a revised draft to the November meeting for approval, with a view to issuing it promptly thereafter.**

### **g) Tree Survey Priority B Works**

Members considered the recommended Priority B works to four trees, quoted at £700 and identified for completion within three months. The work included removal of the tree identified as 182, reduction of two trees and deadwood/ivy work to tree 137, as set out in the schedule presented.

The Priority A work related to a tree in school grounds and was not identified as the Parish Council's responsibility. Priority C works, estimated at £3,000 and recommended within 12 months, would need to be considered through the budget process.

**Resolved: To approve the Priority B tree works at £700.**

**Action: Clerk to arrange the approved Priority B works and consider provision for the Priority C works when preparing the budget.**

### **h) Recycling Bin**

The Clerk proposed deferring purchase of a recycling bin until the next financial year so that provision could be made in the budget. Durham County Council had indicated that the Council could source an appropriate bin, with emptying arrangements to be agreed separately.

The damaged dog waste bin near the changing rooms was discussed. The emptying team had advised that it was little used and questioned whether a separate dog bin was necessary because bagged dog waste could be placed in ordinary waste bins. Members supported informing users of this alternative.

The Clerk had reported the overflowing bin outside the Post Office to Durham County Council, which had agreed to monitor the location. Residents and members were encouraged to report further instances through the County Council's online system.

**Action: Clerk to include recycling bin provision in the next budget, follow up arrangements for the damaged dog bin and provide a notice explaining that bagged dog waste can be placed in the general waste bins. Members to report further overflowing bins to Durham County Council.**

### i) Changing Rooms Renovation

The planned renovation was on hold because the contractor had suffered an accident. The Council remained on his work list and the work would be taken forward when he was able to resume. No revised start date was available.

**Action: Clerk to maintain contact with the contractor and obtain a revised programme when available.**

### j) Wildlife Garden

Members discussed the incident at the Michaelmas Fair in which a child had become stuck in exposed mud. The Clerk had requested an incident report from the person who dealt with it, PCSO Walbey. No subsequent concern from the parents had been reported to the Clerk at the meeting.

Members noted that the exposed surface could appear safe to walk on and discussed prominent warnings to discourage entry onto the mud. The need to address the garden's condition was emphasised..

The potential funding opportunity of up to £75,000 could support a more substantial scheme, including boardwalk improvements, but consultation and an application would be required. No grant award or transfer of responsibility was confirmed.

**Action: Clerk to obtain and retain the incident report and arrange appropriate warning signage for the mud hazard. Clerk to continue investigating the Wildlife Garden funding opportunity and the consultation needed to support a project.**

### k) Playpark Fencing

A quotation of approximately £5,500 had been received for the supply of metal bow-top fencing and gates for the measured area. Installation was not included. Members discussed durability and comparative costs, but did not approve an order.

A potentially cheaper source of fencing had been mentioned by Cllr Lines. The Clerk had made enquiries but had not yet received a response.

**Action: Clerk to follow up the alternative fencing source through Cllr Lines and obtain sufficient information on supply and installation costs before returning the proposal to Council.**

## 11. Correspondence

The Clerk referred to correspondence concerning a lending library but was unable to retrieve the details during the recorded discussion. No substantive consideration or decision was recorded.

**Action: Clerk to retrieve the lending library correspondence and circulate it or bring it back for consideration.**

## 12. Member Sharing

### Speeding

Continuing concerns about vehicles travelling at speed on High Road were raised. Members were encouraged to use the PCSO's contact details to report specific issues and support the planned Speedwatch activity.

### Recreation Ground manholes and flooding

Concern was raised about a hole around a manhole in the Recreation Ground, with reports that children had fallen into it and that the surrounding ground was being disturbed. Members discussed previous sewer surcharging, the build-up of silt and debris and earlier cleansing work by Northumbrian Water.

A resident also reported flooding and deterioration of the road near their property at The Park. Members discussed the capacity of the combined drainage system during heavy rain. The grounds maintenance contractor had offered to remove deposited material, regrade and reseed affected areas, but no instruction or expenditure was approved at the meeting.

**Action: Clerk to contact Northumbrian Water about the Recreation Ground manhole hazard and surcharging, explain the reported risk to children and seek investigation and remedial action.**

### Fireworks tickets and Remembrance display

Members received an update on firework ticket sales. An initial allocation of 250 tickets had sold and a further allocation had been supplied. Tickets scattered accidentally during handling had been recovered, although one might remain unaccounted for.

### Overhanging vegetation and watering

Members discussed an overhanging bush obstructing a short path near the substation. The exact land ownership was unclear and the Clerk would investigate. Asking the grounds maintenance contractor to cut it back was also suggested.

A query was raised about watering the flower beds. The Clerk explained that additional watering during the summer heatwave had been approved at an extra cost of approximately £500. The extent of watering carried out would be checked.

**Action: Clerk to investigate the overhanging vegetation and arrange an appropriate response, and check the flower bed watering arrangements with the grounds maintenance contractor.**

### Quarry update and councillor vacancy

Members again asked about feedback on concerns over quarry blasting. The Clerk had no update from Cllr Neve at that stage and would follow up.

A resident expressed an interest in the councillor vacancy and reviewing Council policies and procedures. The Clerk advised that these were available on the website. Members welcomed the interest and encouraged an application. No co-option decision was made.

### 13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 11 November 2026 at 6.30pm at Bishop Middleham Village Hall.

Meeting closed at 8.45pm