

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE WHEATLEY HILL PARISH COUNCIL
HELD ON 12 JANUARY 2026**

**Present: Councillor J Miller (Chair)
Councillors N Craggs, J Huntington,
B Miller, L Stewart, C Stogdale**

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Carr, L Johnson and L White.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 The Minutes of the last meeting held on 8 December 2025, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were approved and signed by the Chair.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There was no public present at the meeting.

5 POLICE MATTERS

The Police reported shoplifting at the CO-OP food store. A suspect had been arrested and investigations were ongoing.

Members were advised that the Police were actively using “Keep in the Know” which could be accessed via a website. The Police were using it to post updates in relation to the area and positive news.

Members reported that there had been numerous break-ins in the village and questioned why they were not included in the Police report. In addition, it was pointed out that the Police had not attended a Cuppa with a Copper held on 8 January 2026.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted and the Clerk contact the Police in relation to the queries raised.

6 COUNTY COUNCILLORS REPORT

County Councillor Craggs provided a report on the following issues.

- Complaints had been received related to vehicles parked at the rear of Granville Terrace which were causing access problems for the County Councils bin motor. The County Councils Highways section had been asked to investigate
- Rubbish had been dumped at a property at Granville Terrace. The landlord had been contacted and advised of the problem.

7 CORRESPONDENCE

(1) Royal Garden Party 2026

The Clerk reported the receipt of correspondence from the County Durham Association of Local

Councils advising of the Royal Garden Party to be held in 2026.

RESOLVED that Councillor Stogdale be nominated to attend the Royal Garden Party on behalf of Wheatley Hill Parish Council.

(2) Member Code of Conduct

The Clerk reported the receipt of correspondence from the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) advising that Durham County Council had amended its Member Code of Conduct.

The Clerk advised that in the past CDALC had recommended that parish and town councils adopt Durham County Councils Member Code of Conduct. Wheatley Hill Parish Council had taken this advice and adopted the County Councils Code of Conduct.

Members were advised that the County Council had amended its Code of Conduct and added an additional paragraph 6 which read as follows:

“The right to freedom of expression under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights is the basis of democracy and will be upheld at all times. Members have a democratic duty to represent their constituents and engage in robust political debate. Therefore, in a political context, a degree of immoderate, offensive, shocking or provocative expression, is acceptable.”

This addition paragraph was discussed at forum meetings and by CDALCs Executive Committee, with little or no appetite to embrace it. The Executive Committee agreed that the addition of this paragraph was inappropriate and unnecessary and CDALC recommended that the original Code of Conduct be used by parish and town councils.

RESOLVED that the original Code of Conduct be adopted by Wheatley Hill Parish Council.

8 PLANNING

There were no planning matters.

9 CLERKS REPORT

(1) Allotments

(i) Plot 6

The Clerk provided an update on plot 6.

Members were advised that the annual rent for plot 6 had not been paid. Despite numerous attempts to contact the tenant to discuss the tenancy and the state of the plot there had been no response. The tenant had been advised, in writing, that the tenancy had been terminated and the plot would be re-allocated from the waiting list.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted and plot 6 be re-allocated from the waiting list.

(ii) Plot 18

The Clerk reported that plot 18 had been allocated from the waiting list to applicant 2/2025.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(2) Precept and Budget Setting 2026/2027

The Clerk reported the receipt of correspondence from Durham County Council advising of changes

to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) grant and tax base for the forthcoming 2026/27 financial year.

Members were advised that in 2024/25 Durham County Council implemented a three-year phased reduction of 50% of the LCTRS grant paid to local councils. The staged cuts, running from 2024/25 to 2026/27, were intended to gradually reduce the support originally provided by the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, introduced in 2013 to reduced local tax bases.

The County Council had now changed its position and stopped all LCTRS grant payments entirely from 2026/27. This proposal was part of the County Council's response to its wider financial pressures.

Members were advised that the LCTRS grant received in 2025/26 was £5,969 and the tax base was 787.00. The Parish Council would receive no grant in 2026/27, and the tax base had been reduced to 784.00.

The Clerk advised that due to the loss of the LCTRS grant and the reduced tax base the Parish Council must consider how to balance its budget for 2026/27.

The Clerk provided Members with options and a range of figures for consideration. It was suggested that a budget be set based on an 8% increase to the precept. The increase was necessary to make up for the loss of the LCTRS grant.

The Clerk took Members through the detailed budget based on this and advised that the Parish Council required a budget of £147,313 for the 2026/27 financial year. It was suggested that the Parish Council request a precept of £147,313.

As part of the budget process Members considered the Cemetery fees and allotment and stable block rents. It was suggested that all fees be retained at their current levels.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) Wheatley Hill Parish Council set a budget of £147,313 for the 2026/27 financial year.
 - (ii) Durham County Council be advised that the Parish Councils precept request for 2026/27 was £147,313.
 - (iii) Cemetery fees and allotment and stable block rents be retained at their current levels.
- (3) Website Hosting

The Clerk sought approval for Madhouse Media to continue hosting the Parish Council website for a further 12 months on the bronze package at a cost of £480 plus VAT, the same price as last year.

RESOLVED that approval be granted for Madhouse Media to host the Parish Council website for a further 12 months on the bronze package at a cost of £480 plus VAT.

- (4) Website - Domain Renewal

The Clerk reported that the Parish Council had renewed its .gov.uk domain at a cost of £90 incl. of VAT.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

- (5) Parish Council Meeting Venue

The Clerk reported that meetings of the Parish Council would continue to be held in Wheatley House during 2026.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(6) Street Sign - Update

The Clerk reported that the “Private Road” sign to the rear of First Street was reported to Durham County Council with a request that it be removed as the road was adopted.

Durham County Council had advised that this would be added to their worklist and inspected as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

10 MEMBER ISSUES

Parking – Front Street

Members reported problems related to vehicles parked on both sides of the road all along the Front Street.

The Clerk reported that this had previously been reported to the Police and Durham County Council.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

11 PAYMENTS

The following schedule of payments was circulated together with figures for all income and expenditure at 31 December 2025.

PAYMENT	TO	DETAIL	COST	VAT	TOTAL
Direct Debit	E-on Next	Gas - Heritage Centre	116.43	5.82	122.25
Direct Debit	E-on Next	Electric - Heritage Centre	57.54	2.88	60.42
Internet Banking	MKM	Cemetery Supplies	9.25	1.85	11.10
Internet Banking	Madhouse Media	Domain Renewal .gov.uk	75.00	15.00	90.00
Internet Banking	Horns Garden Centre	Christmas Trees	270.83	54.17	325.00
Internet Banking	MKM	Cemetery Supplies	18.78	3.76	22.54
Debit Card	Maxwells	Cemetery Supplies	25.41	5.08	30.49
Debit Card	Asda	Machine Fuel	25.00	5.00	30.00
Internet Banking	Anglian Water Business	Water - Allotments	327.19		327.19
Internet Banking	J Thompson	Telephone Allowance	25.00		25.00
Internet Banking	Payroll	Wages - January 2026	5,782.14		5,782.14
Internet Banking	HMRC/DCC	PAYE/Pension - January 2026	4,106.53		4,106.53
Internet Banking	JAC's Accountancy Limited	Payroll Services - January 2026	37.50	7.50	45.00
Direct Debit	British Telecom	Telephone/Internet	37.02	7.40	44.42

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Invoice 104	Co-Op Bank		Charges					14.95		14.95
								TOTAL	10,928.57	108.46 11,037.03

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted and the payments be approved.

12 RISK MANAGEMENT

The Clerk advised that there was nothing to report.

..... Signed

.....Dated