

Minutes of the Meeting of Hexhamshire Parish Council held on Thursday 11th December 2025 in the Malcolm Caisley Meeting Rooms, Whitley Chapel Parish Hall

1. Present – Marge Rastall (Chair of the Meeting), Nicola Matthews, John Austin, David Flatman Roger Rutherford, Edward Parker and Cllr Colin Horncastle
2. Apologies for Absence – Lauren Kristensen and Gill Whatmough
3. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Parish Council held on Thursday 13th November 2025 – Approved.
4. Declarations of Interest – None
5. Matters Arising –
 - 5.1 B4RN Public Meeting Thursday 5th Feb.
Hall is now booked. The meeting will explain the service and determine interest from residents. B4RN supply Allen Valleys at costs in the region of £33 a month.
All agreed the meeting needs to be promoted in the Hexham Courant Shire Notes, Facebook and with posters on noticeboards. B4RN will be asked to promote directly as well.
 - 5.2 Generator repair
Update pending and to be added to agenda for January meeting.
 - 5.3 Bench near Kingslaw
Replacement bench is ordered and delivery expected on Monday 15th December.
6. Public Participation - None.

7. Matters for discussion with the Unitary Councillor - Cllr Horncastle reported:

Savings of c.£28 million are needed in Northumberland County Council. In the following two years, a further £22 million of savings will be required. Voluntary redundancies have been sought and some capital projects may be scaled back. Anticipated cuts to services and further redundancies are expected by December 2026. Central Government money has been offered under the Recovery Fund but Northumberland does not qualify.

The Old Fire Station –The need for additional depot services for Hexham remains and if NCC don't use the old fire station there will be a split site at a capital cost of £2.1million and £250,000 revenue costs. Therefore, NCC is exploring whether other properties would be better suited for the purposes of the Gormley Foundation. Conversations between NCC and the Foundation are ongoing to find a suitable alternative.

8. Correspondence

8.1 Local Nature Recovery Strategy Questionnaire.

Agreed not to respond due to the length of the questionnaire and the limited relevance to our Parish.

8.2 Northumberland Design Code Survey

There was a discussion reflecting the personal nature of the questionnaire. All agreed to promote to residents for personal responses. To be promoted via Facebook as deadline is 9th January.

8.3 NALC Update

John Austin will attend the free Planning update run by NALC on 15th December with Rob Murfin.

Nicki Matthews to attend the workshops on Finance for Councillors. £35 to be paid by Hexhamshire Parish Council.

8.4 Change to gov.uk email addresses, website changes and IT Policy.

This is now an assurance standard on the AGAR form and is therefore a matter to be progressed now.

Privacy and IT policies can be downloaded from NALC (Kirsten J to progress).

Website accessibility:

John Austin to speak to NCC IT contact to determine what is required

Kirsten to research the change to gov.uk email addresses.

9. Finance

9.1 Lloyds complaint – progress

The financial ombudsman will not progress the complaint as it does not deal with complaints from public bodies. Gill Whatmough will forward the complaint to the Financial Conduct Authority to see if they will investigate. As the Council is liable for public money the bank should not allow unauthorised signatories to make any payments and it is vital that this lapse by the bank is not allowed to happen again.

9.2 Microsoft 365 invoice received for payment

Nicki M has paid this and all agreed to reimburse her at a cost of £138.84.

9.3 TDP invoice received for payment

Nicki M has paid this and agreed to reimburse. £441.80. This includes VAT which can be reclaimed.

There was a discussion about whether VAT could be recovered historically as no claim was made in the last year.

9.4 Mathew Hope invoice of £2,385 received for payment

There is currently insufficient money in the Sportsfield Account. After discussion, it was agreed that the Sportsfield Account should be merged into the General Account.

All agreed to pay Mathew Hope.

9.5 Insurance renewal figure received

The annual premium is £16 more than last year, at 856.72 increase in cost.

All agreed to pay.

9.6 Precept Letter received. Deadline 23.01.26

It was agreed Nicki Matthews will do a summary of this year's expenditure for 8th January 2026 meeting to enable a discussion about how much to request next year.

10. Planning Applications

10.1 25/04089 FUL Land West of Windy Hill – Erection of Agricultural Building

The previous planning application (retrospective) to build up land has not yet been granted. It was agreed to lodge an objection response on procedural grounds: that the Parish Council cannot respond to the current application before the first application is concluded.

11. Highways, footpaths and BOATS

Grit heaps have been replenished in some parts of the Parish but not all.

There are multiple tickets for footpaths on FixMyStreets which are unresolved. Kirsten J to follow up.

12. Reports

12.1 Wetlands – Willow cutting has taken place. The RPA payment of £514.70 has recently been received.

12.2 Hall – The Christmas Fair had been very successful with just under £1000 raised. The David Nixon panto will be held on 12th December.

12.3 School – Nativity Show is Tuesday 16th December.

12.4 Dukesfield Arches – The content of the Arches website will be transferred to the main Parish website this week.

12.5 Sportsfield & Play Area – It is expected the agreed repairs will begin in January.

14. Any Other Business

13.1 Parish Clerk vacancy – filled. Kirsten Johnson was appointed Clerk beginning 1st December 2025.

13.2 Updates to the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Bill is currently progressing to Royal Assent. There are a number of changes which increase protection for livestock and widen the definition of livestock. Regulations now include the need for owners to have dogs under control on roads.

13.3 Domain name annual charge - £11.99 + VAT is approved for payment.

Meeting closed at 8.29 pm

Next Meeting Thursday 8th January 2026