

MINUTES OF THE HEXHAMSHIRE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD THURSDAY 12<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2026 AT 7.30 PM IN THE MALCOLM CAISLEY MEETING ROOM, WHITLEY CHAPEL PARISH HALL

1. Councillors present: Marge Rastall (Chair), Nicki Matthews, Roger Rutherford, John Austin, Edward Parker, Gill Whatmough, Lauren Kristensen, County Cllr Colin Horncastle, Kirsten Johnson (Clerk)
2. Apologies for absence: David Flatman
3. Declarations of Interest - KJ declared meeting Christopher Porter in a professional capacity, through her work for the Great Northumberland Forest.
4. Minutes of the Parish Council held on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2026. The minutes were approved.
5. Matters Arising
  - 5.1 **B4RN Public Meeting Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> Feb** There was good attendance at the meeting with 30 – 40 residents. There are 339 properties in the Parish and 138 need to express an interest to access the Government funding. Prior to the meeting, 64 properties had declared an interest and following the meeting, there are 80 properties. 58 properties are required to make the minimum numbers. The service would significantly increase the provision within the Parish. It is anticipated work could commence in November 2026 and be completed by November 2027. B4RN are keen for on-the-ground support to assist with the engagement of landowners whose land would be crossed. The cost is £60 per household as a one-off payment, applied uniformly across the whole of the Parish. Thereafter, the cost is £33 per month. Those in existing contracts can pay a £5 retainer fee each month for the remainder of their contract if they want to switch over. The minimum number of households would need to be established in the next few months to ensure work begins in November 2026. The Government funding is time limited so it is important to capitalise on the opportunity. For any landowners whose land is crossed by the 10mm, there are no wayleaves as B4RN maintain the infrastructure. There is an anticipated route for the cables but alternative routes are possible if individual

landowners do not wish for the network to cross their land. The form for expressions of interest has been sent to Geraldine to be included in the Parish Magazine. Nicki will print and put posters in Parish Noticeboard. The scheme has already been promoted on the Parish Facebook page. All agreed the Parish Council should support the initiative.

**5.2 Moving to a Gov.uk domain.** All agreed to move to the NCC offer and maintain the existing website. All agreed with website name [www.hexhamshireparishcouncil.gov.uk](http://www.hexhamshireparishcouncil.gov.uk) was the best of the permitted options.

**5.3 IT Policy and Privacy Policy.** All agreed to adopt the draft policy with the removal of sections highlighted in blue.

**5.4 Generator repair** - this is completed. The fault identified was from the original purchase so the manufacture has repaired it at their cost.

6 Public participation - none

7 Matters for Discussion with the Unitary Councillor – Central government has awarded £13million in additional funding over the next 3 years to Northumberland County Council. This is significantly short of the £22 million required for inflation, and there is a possibly an additional £2 million required to meet a possible food recycling costs. The savings needed have so far been met by voluntary redundancies. This means the Council Tax increase will be the maximum of 2.9% for 2026 – 2027. As the budget covers three years, there will be service reductions in 2027 – 2028. There are some pockets of increase such as budget for Special Education. Not all Local Authorities have experienced this level of reduction: in comparison, Durham County Council has received a 428% increase in their award from Central Government.

Highway update: the weather conditions have created very poor road conditions. The Highways team are responding as they can but the scale of the reports, together with ongoing poor weather, is creating delays in the filling of potholes.

Housing Inspection: a data inspection has taken place for the 8,000 social houses in Northumberland. Northumberland County Council failed the housing inspection (a C4 rating of a scale C1 – C4) as they were judged on final outcomes part-way through the delivery cycle. As a result, NCC has been required to complete actions that were identified as outstanding in a timescale which means the work cannot be completed in-house. The cost of the external contractors is £1.5 million. The next inspection will be in four years time unless NCC request early investigation of any issues identified as outstanding.

8 Correspondence –

**8.3 Northern Power Grid Resilience Grant Fund** – applications are invited for eligible projects. No need within the Parish identified and therefore it was agreed not to make an application.

**8.4 Community Governance Review, Stage 1 public consultation open 01.02.26 – 30.04.** Parish

Council has made submissions at the earlier stage and no action currently required.

**8.5 Environment and Climate Fund of Northumberland County Council open for applications – no projects in the Parish are needed and therefore no action required.**

**8.6 Christopher Porter email re Tyne River Trust access to Wetlands** all agreed permission should be granted. Kirsten to return the signed letter on behalf of the Parish Council.

9 Finance –

**9.3 Whitley Chapel Hall invoices for payment (two)** all agreed payment of the invoices of £22.50 and £67.50.

**9.4 Payroll reporting update** – We have received a summary response from HMRC with figures including tax and National Insurance. The Business Page has not yet been updated to reflect the new figures and we await a response from HMRC and are in receipt of a request for a 90 period before any renewed contact from us.

10 Planning Applications –

**10.3 25/02519/FUL S78 appeal for Dairy House Steel** All agreed no action is currently required.

**10.4 24/00728/BRCOND Lilswood Caravan Park** Alex Campbell will follow up with the owner in March to see whether the actions have been completed.

**10.5 25/01839/FUL (withdrawn)** Guards Lane No response yet received from Alex Campbell

11 Highways, Footpaths and BOATS The repair to the BOAT track through Slaley Woods (543/039) has taken place. Kirsten to contact Highways to clarify why it's been repaired rather than closed.

543/039

Gill reported the potholes on Leazes Lane have been patched after been reported on FixMyStreets.

12 Reports:

12.3 Wetlands – correspondence from Christopher Porter (see 8.6)

12.4 Hall – nothing to report

12.5 School – Mrs Robinson returns from maternity leave after half term. There is anticipated a low roll number in September with around 20 pupils in the 2026 – 2027 intake.

12.6 Dukesfield Arches – nothing to report.

12.7 Sportsfield/Play Area – repairs are delayed by the weather conditions.

13 A.O.B.

- 13.3 Windy Hill Planning [check number] appears there is a requirement for the developer to sort the road.
- 13.4 There has been a request for a marquee wedding on the 28<sup>th</sup> August 2027. All agreed to ask for the standard donation and request no parking on the field.
- 13.5 Wildfire preparedness. All agreed the Village Hall would be a refuge if called upon. Kirsten to contact the Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service to establish a communication link.
- 13.6 Gill reported she had been in contact with the family of Dr Wootten, to whom the bench at Kingslaw is dedicated.

Meeting closed 8:57pm.

Next meeting is Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March