The Council of the Parish of Esh

Minutes of the Ordinary meeting of the council

Held on Wednesday 11th June 2025 at the Miners Institute, Langley Park

Meeting commenced at 6 p.m.

Item 1 Record of Attendance:

Cllr O. Moat (Vice Chair), Cllr, A. Wardman, Cllr P. Short, Cllr C. Bloomfield, Cllr J. Clark, Cllr A Walker, Cllr H. Fairey, K. Harbisher (clerk)

Cllr K. Thompson was late and arrived at 6.07pm

There was 1 member of the public present.

Item 2 Apologies for absence:

Cllr M. Quinn, County Councillor A. Neil

Item 3 Declarations of Interest:

Cllr K. Thompson item 10

Resolved: councillor items of interest noted

Item 4 Minutes of previous Annual Assembly/ AGM held on 14th May 2025:

The minutes from the Annual Assembly/ AGM held on 14th May 2025 had been circulated to councillors via email, prior to this meeting, there were also hard copies of the minutes to examine at the meeting. It was proposed by Cllr Wardman that it be noted that the minutes are a true and accurate representation, this was seconded by Cllr Moat.

Resolved: It be noted that the draft minutes are a true and accurate representation of the meeting on May 14th 2025.

Item 5 Opportunity for members of the public to raise matters of interest:

There was one member of the public present, they have previously attended council meeting and brought up an issue of a proposed change of re-routing a public right of way on private land. Esh

Parish Council had noted the concerns and had supported against the rerouting of the public right of way by writing a letter of objection to Durham County Councils' planning department. The member of the public had informed council that the landowner was now closing access routes to the public right of way. The issues had been reported to Durham County Council by the member of the public and he was updating council of issues.

Ongoing: Council to monitor situation.

Item 6 Clerks' report:

The accounts had been sent for internal audit with an independent accountant, the report from this was presented to council and also a summary of accounts for the year 24/25. The summary of the accounts included breakdowns of where money had been spent and sources of income for the financial year 2024/25. Councillors were informed that this information would be used to complete Annual Governance and Accountability Return which needed to be completed.

There were a number of other items to bring to council's attention, including an update on the refurbishment at The Bobby Robson Play Area. Over the time period of 2nd – 8th June, the contractors had faced issues with fly tipping in the skip that had been placed there for the spoil from the refurbishment. Due to this fly tipping the contractor didn't have enough room to place the spoil, therefore, he removed the items from the skip and placed them on the ground next to the skip. This had encouraged more fly tipping on the area. The incidents had been reported to both the neighbourhood warden and DCC ASB team. The neighbourhood warden visited the clerk to gain clarification, he stated that legislation deems the contractor responsible for the removal of the fly tipped material removed from the skip as he had removed it, if he had left it where it was then it would have been the fly tippers responsibility following an investigation to determine who they were. He had also visited the site and placed notification that the incidents of fly tipping were under investigation. On the 7th June the contractor had reported that there had been an incident of vandalism to the onsite toilet. Someone had broken into the site through a broken area of fence and had strewn around hand towels and toilet roll from the welfare facilities, this was reported to the police through 101 on the morning of the 7th June. On Monday 9th June, the incident had been picked up by the neighbourhood police team, who visited the clerk to gather more information. They said that the matter would be investigated but due to a lack of evidence to pinpoint the individuals the case would be closed.

With regards to the fly tipping, the contractor had given the clerk a figure that he had been quoted for removal of the rubbish from the site. He had asked if Esh Parish Council would be willing to foot half of the cost. This request was put to council, after a discussion Cllr Moat proposed that Esh Parish Council would not pay half of the removal costs as the contractor had been told that if a skip was sited then it would have to be removed the same day due to the possibility of people fly tipping into the skip, this was seconded by Cllr Clark. A vote was held which was returned as being unanimously in favour of Esh Parish Council not contributing towards the cost of the rubbish removal.

The clerk, Cllr Moat and Cllr Thompson met with a representative from The LITE Company who supply the Christmas lighting around the parish. Esh Parish Council are coming to the end of the contract with the company and this will be their last year of the current contract. Installation dates were discussed which are scheduled to take place during the last week of November, ready for switch on, for the first Friday in December.

The report also considered permissions sought from local residents to use the field adjacent to the park at Esh Village, one being from a local school seeking permission for their sports day and another from a resident requesting use for a birthday party. In terms of the school using the field it was decided to grant permission as they had used the field in the past. The clerk is to inform the school of councils' decision. For the birthday party, it was decided that the clerk contact the resident and request that a risk assessment be given and a letter stating that all liability lies with the residents and not with Esh Parish Council.

Account s/ Annual Governance and Accountability Returns

The accounts had been sent for internal audit with an independent accountant, the report from this was presented to council and also a summary of accounts for the year 24/25. The summary of the accounts included breakdowns of where money had been spent and sources of income for the financial year 2024/25. Councillors were informed that this information would be used to complete Annual Governance and Accountability Return which needed to be completed.

The report also included details of the use of the hall at The Miner's Institute over the coming month.

Resolved: To accept clerks report

Item 7 PCSO Report:

PCSO hart was invited to the meeting but had sent apologies and a report to be read in her absence. The report included local incidents of anti-social behaviour, 26 in total, of which almost half, 12, were involving reports of off road or e bikes being used in the Langley Park and Quebec areas. An operation is being planned to target off road bikes in the near future. There was also a report of an incident where a Traffic 183 warning had been issues to a youth in Quebec for riding a quad bike in an anti-social manner. The report also mentioned that the police are looking to set up cuppa with a copper, which will be informal drop ins where any concerns can be reported to the officers present.

Cllr Clark gave a update on the CCTV cameras positioned around Langley Park, this had been instigated from the vandalism that had occurred at The Bobby Robson play area. The neighbourhood police team had visited the clerk at the Miners' Institute about the incident. They had mentioned that they didn't think that the CCTV camera at Bobby Robson was working. Cllr Cark had made enquiries with Durham County Council regarding the CCTV around Langley Park and was informed that all of the cameras were working and that any footage was kept for a period of 28 days before being deleted. Therefore, there would be footage of the perpetrators of the vandalism and fly tipping at the park. The tree would need to be cut back and the top section of the tree removed to enable the best viewing capacity of the camera. The clerk is to seek quotes for pollarding the tree, there are no nesting birds present therefore as a matter of safety the tree can be cut back before the period to allow for nesting birds ends.

Resolved: To accept the report from PCSO Hart and for the clerk to contact tree surgeon for quotes.

Item 8 Policies for adoption.

There were a number of policies that had been brought to council to review. They included Financial Regulations, Standing Orders, Risk Management and Internal Control. The policies were examined and it was thought that there were still a few things to amend in the Financial Regulations and Standing Orders and bring back to the next council meeting. It was agreed that the clerks discretionary payment be increased from £300 to £500 bringing it in line with NALC recommendations.

Cllr Moat proposed that the Risk Assessment of r25/6 be adopted, this was seconded by Cllr Wardman to which a vote was taken, which was returned as unanimous for Esh Parish Council to adopt. Cllr Moat also proposed that The System of Internal Control for 25/6 be adopted this was seconded by Cllr Clark, again this returned a unanimous vote.

Ongoing; Risk Assessment and System of Internal Control to be adopted for 2025/6 and to be reviewed in May next year. Amendments made to Financial Regulations and Standing Orders to be brough before council at the next meeting.

Item 9 Funding Possibilities from County Cllr Neil

Due to County Cllr Neil sending apologies, this item was deferred until next month.

Item 10 Bobby Robson Update:

As well as the earlier update regarding anti-social behaviour and vandalism that had occurred there were updates focussing on the progress made by the contractors. At this Point Cllr Thompson had left the room as quotes were going to be discussed and she had declared a pecuniary interest.

Cllrs Moat, Thompson, Wardman and Clark as well as the clerk met with the project manager where a few issues were highlighted, these were brought up for discussion with council. First of all, there was an issue with the height of the benches that were installed, they were installed prior to the mulch being laid which means should the benches need to be replaced at some point would this affect the guarantee of the mulch, Cllr Moat had asked for the company to provide evidence in writing saying that the guarantee of the mulch would not be affected. The second issue that was brought to the attention of council was that there had been damage caused by the contractors' digger to the small fence surrounding the toddler area of the play park, this again had been highlighted with the project manager. On the adventure trail, there are undulations in the ground which some councillors thought should have been filled which would eliminate gaps within the lay of the land. Cllr Moat expressed concerns over the end of the adventure trail being too close to the hill, but was willing to see if it was highlighted in the ROSPA inspection due shortly.

There were several contracts to be awarded to complete the refurbishment of the Bobby Robson Play Area. Quotes had been sought for maintenance work to the skate park and shelter, art work of the skate park and for removal of the fence and hedge at the park.

All of the quotes from contractors were presented to council and were discussed:

Skatepark maintenance – quotes from two contractors were presented, although four contractors were approached, only two supplied quotes. Contractor identification was known only by the clerk. Cllr Walker proposed that council go for the cheapest quote which was substantially cheaper than the other and was offering a similar specification on the work that needed to be done. Cllr Moat seconded this, a vote was held, which returned as unanimous in favour of awarding the work of skate park maintenance to that contractor.

Art work to the skate park, again three contractors were approached, two had made site visits and supplied quotes, these were given to council for approval. One of the quotes had given a rate that covered the whole of the mural painting and the second had given a day rate + costs of materials and had mentioned a youth consultation/ workshop to involve the children who will use the skate park, this would mean that because of their involvement with the project then the youths are less likely to damage or graffiti the skate park. Council liked the idea of the second quote involving kids and were willing to go with this one depending on the timescale, this was proposed by Cllr Moat, seconded by Cllr Clark and returned a unanimous vote, except for Cllr Thompson who had remained out of the room while this agenda item was discussed.

The date for the removal of the fence was to be deferred until after the nesting period had lapsed then the fence and hedge could be removed together.

Resolved: The clerk to contact the successful contractors to inform them of councils' decision.

Cllr Thompson returned to the meeting at this point in the proceedings.

Item 11 Garden at the Tute:

The garden to the rear of the Miner's Institute has presented issues as there isn't a clear plan for it's maintenance. It has been mentioned in the past and various councillors from time to time have cleared weeds, pruned plants. It however needs to have a structured plan of maintenance. It was mentioned that the planted area in the garden be cleared and replaced with seating, tables and a storage shed and that the roof on the trellis area, which blew off in a storm be replaced. Cllr Clark proposed that the triangular planted area be cleared, this was seconded by Cllr Moat and the clerk is to obtain quotes to have the garden cleared. The whole area needs to be weeded and the flagstones power washed. With this done the area could be used as an extension of the hall when the weather is nice.

Ongoing: Clerk to contact contractors to obtain quotes for the removal of the planted triangle area.

Item 12Miners' Memorial Statue update:

Durham County legal department had been contacted by the clerk with regards to Esh Parish Council's position on the Miner's statue. Over the past months, Esh Parish Council has been approached by some members of the group that campaigned and raised money for the Miner's statute in Langley Park. The members of the group were under the impression that the statue was the responsibility of Esh Parish Council, searches of documents and records show that no agreement was set up passing responsibility to Esh Parish Council.

An email from DCC legal department was circulated to councillors which confirmed that unless laid out in the lease agreement, then Esh Parish Council bore no responsibility for the repair and upkeep of the statue. Also, as there was nothing recorded in the minutes from meetings at the time to substantiate the claims from members of the statue group, Esh Parish Council feel that they cannot assume responsibility for the maintenance of the statue and this must be done by the members of the original group.

Resolved: Clerk to contact group members to convey the situation.

Item 13: Tute booking form:

An updated booking pro-forma for rooms at The Miner's Institute was presented to council. Updates to the form included the additions of optional setting up of the hall at £5 per booking and statements conveying the fact that all rubbish generated must be placed in the correct bins outside and that there is ample parking over the road from the tute, therefore parking outside should be for unloading and loading purposes only. Apart from minor grammatical errors and the addition of am emergency mobile number, it was thought that the form should be accepted. This was proposed by Cllr Wardman and seconded by Cllr Moat. A vote was held which as returned as unanimous to accept the new booking pro forma.

Item 14: Payments to be made and bank reconciliation

The clerk distributed information on payments made, petty cash income / balance and bank balances for councillors to take note.

Resolved: Accounts are correct and that payments are authorised by the Council.

Item 15: Date of next ordinary meeting:

The date of the next ordinary meeting for Esh Parish Council is Wednesday 9th July 2025.