

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF CRASTER PARISH COUNCIL**  
**Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2026 – 6:30pm in the Hall**

**Councillors present:**

**Chair:** Martin Smith

**Parish Council members:** Michael Robson, Marjory Taylor, Robert Cornall, Iain Brown, Sophie Heslop, Ann Fettis, Allan Gregory and Derek Moss

**Also present:** Adam Shanley (Parish Clerk) and 6 members of the public.

**1. Welcome and apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from County Councillor Wendy Pattison.

**2. Declarations of interest**

Councillor I Brown declared an interest in application 24/04252/FUL and left the room as and when this application was being discussed.

**3. Co-option of a Parish Councillor on to Craster Parish Council – application from Mr John Young**

The Chair introduced the co-option item, explaining that following the recent vacancy on the Council, the Parish Council had followed the required process and had reached the stage where co-option could take place.

The Clerk confirmed that Mr John Young's application had been circulated to members in advance. The Chair offered Mr Young the opportunity to address the meeting; Mr Young thanked the Council for the invitation and indicated he was content to proceed. Members then completed a formal vote. The Clerk clarified the voting requirement, stating that an outright majority was necessary for co-option, and confirmed that the required threshold was met.

The Chair announced that Mr Young was duly co-opted and welcomed him as a full Member of Craster Parish Council. Councillor Young signed the declaration of acceptance of office.

**4. Confirmation of the minutes for the annual meeting held on Thursday 20th November 2025**

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 20th November 2025 were unanimously agreed as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

**5. Matters arising**

The Chair raised one principal matter arising relating to correspondence received over the holiday period from the National Landscapes team regarding coastal path improvements. Members were advised that the broader coastal path ambitions remained a longer-term project due to land ownership constraints; however, National Landscapes had identified potential funding for a more immediate improvement to the footpath adjacent to the play park, which the Parish Council owns. The Chair sought members' views and recorded overall support for progressing this opportunity, with a specific caveat that the scope should not inadvertently create or exacerbate complications connected to land ownership near Heugh Road.

A detailed discussion followed about the most appropriate configuration of improvements, including whether the proposal related solely to additional drop kerbs or to a more substantial new footpath surface and links between access points. It was noted that the existing entrances near the play park/picnic area already provide access, and one member queried the value of

investing in additional access points where onward routes are limited; it was suggested that priority should be given to addressing standing water and improving the usability/safety of the current muddy/wet section.

The Chair confirmed an intention to seek further feedback once the relevant contact returned (after 21 January) and noted the funding timetable requirement to spend monies by the end of March.

## **6. Public participation**

The Chair reminded attendees of the public participation protocol and invited residents to raise matters either at this point or, if more appropriate, to flag items to be brought into later agenda discussion. Two principal public points were raised.

First, residents highlighted concerns about grit bins not being properly identified within the County Council's reporting system, which creates difficulty when attempting to report empty bins or issues through the standard online process; examples were cited of bins in Dunstan and at Smithy Bank not appearing on the database. The Chair acknowledged the concern and indicated this would be addressed under the later Chair's report on highways discussions and grit bins.

Second, a resident raised an issue regarding lighting timers and the timing of the Christmas/tree lighting display, indicating the lights did not activate as expected and appeared to come on only later in the day than intended. It was noted that the tree had already been removed, and the Chair thanked the residents who had acted promptly. The Chair also formally recorded thanks to Linda and David for donating the Christmas tree, noting that the donation had been very well received and had enhanced the village display.

## **7. Correspondence received to the Parish Council**

The Clerk advised that he had received significant correspondence concerning dangerous icy conditions at Tower Bank and the long-standing challenges in securing consistent gritting. The Chair described repeated follow-up with the relevant highways contact and explained that the issue reached a critical point following a report of a vehicle accident, after which Northumberland County Council implemented a practical mitigation using a 4x4 vehicle and manual dispersal of grit by an operative. The Chair stated that, while not ideal, this approach may be necessary in future given the continuing constraints cited by the Highways Authority. A discussion followed on additional risk mitigation, including the potential placement of a temporary warning sign (e.g., "Bank too dangerous"), with residents offering support to place signage if the Council could source an appropriate sign or re-purpose an existing frame.

The Chair also noted that "new road layout" signs had remained in place longer than intended and were impeding pedestrian movement; steps were discussed to remove them while retaining one frame if useful for an interim hazard sign during forecast icy conditions.

Members debated the merits of temporary versus permanent signage, noting local sensitivities about signage proliferation, and agreed the matter required proportionate action given the seasonal nature of the hazard. The Chair recorded thanks to residents who had assisted directly with gritting in the interim, recognising the expectation that residents should not have to undertake such tasks themselves.

The Chair then addressed a reported broken light outside the Church, noting this had now been fixed. Finally, the Chair reported an issue relating to an ongoing development at Whin Hill where builders had not adhered to planning conditions, specifically obstructing a public

right of way adjacent to the site. The Chair confirmed contact had been made with enforcement and the planning agent, and commended the property owner for responding promptly, apologising and ensuring the obstruction was removed.

A further concern was raised regarding the condition of the verge/grass area disturbed during the works; the Chair confirmed an intention to contact the developer regarding reinstatement and to keep the matter under review. Residents were again reminded that the FixMyStreet platform remains the quickest channel for reporting issues such as lighting faults.

## **8. Consultation on proposed overnight stay levy for the North East of England**

The Chair introduced the live regional consultation on a proposed "overnight stay levy" (referred to in media coverage as a tourism tax) and explained that the local press had requested comment from the parish.

The Chair outlined the consultation's core proposal: accommodation providers (including holiday lets) would be responsible for collecting the levy from visitors and remitting it to the relevant authority, with proceeds intended to support economic growth and the visitor economy, including potential infrastructure investment.

Members discussed that the consultation does not prescribe a single collection mechanism and is seeking views on whether the levy should be charged per person per night, as a flat fee per stay, or as a percentage of accommodation cost. The Chair referenced the headline proposal being advanced publicly of a £2 per night flat charge and the indicative estimate that it could raise approximately £20 million per annum across the wider LA7 area, while noting uncertainty about how funds would be allocated between local authorities and whether proceeds would be meaningfully targeted to the communities experiencing the greatest tourism pressures.

Members expressed broad support in principle for a levy that could help address local infrastructure impacts, but raised strong concerns that money may not be retained locally and could be directed elsewhere. The discussion highlighted the parish's high proportion of holiday lets (a figure of 58% of homes was cited), the risk that the parish would bear costs without receiving reinvestment, and the importance of ring-fencing or ensuring access to funding through bids for local projects.

It was also noted that a levy could interact with (and potentially reduce) voluntary contributions historically sought from holiday let owners for specific projects (examples cited included funding for a defibrillator and contributions towards solar panels and a battery), and members discussed the challenge of sustaining local fundraising if visitors are already paying a compulsory charge.

Practical implementation challenges were explored, including the absence (at present) of a national holiday let register and the difficulty of identifying all relevant properties, and members debated whether residents of the region should pay the levy when staying within their own county.

The Clerk also provided an update that government was understood to be considering a new use class (referred to as "C5") in relation to holiday lets, which members viewed as potentially positive in the broader context of managing holiday-let impacts.

The Council's emerging position was that, given the levy was likely to proceed in some form, it was important to influence the detail early by advocating for local reinvestment and/or local access to funds, particularly for infrastructure priorities.

#### **9. Report from the Chair following site meeting with NCC Cabinet Member re: signage coming into Craster village and Craster public toilets**

The Chair provided a detailed report following a site meeting with Northumberland County Council representatives, including the Cabinet Member with responsibility for relevant highways and community infrastructure. In relation to the public toilets, the Chair reported that NCC's position remained that the facilities do not require full replacement but instead periodic repair; however, it was acknowledged that despite scheduled repairs, failures can recur quickly.

The Chair stated that the Cabinet Member would revisit the issue and consider whether Craster could be moved forward in the programme for refurbishment, while also making clear that NCC's ability to undertake refurbishment is constrained by a lack of available funding at present. The Council discussed the ongoing operational and reputational impact of the toilets being in poor condition, particularly for disabled users, and members explored whether the parish could take any practical steps; the conversation recognised the significant liability and governance implications if the parish were to assume responsibility directly and acknowledged the constraints of operating on county-owned land.

On access and safety improvements, the Chair discussed the issue of drop kerbs, including concerns about the configuration near the phone box and the risk posed to wheelchair users and others with mobility difficulties; the Chair undertook to raise with NCC the need for completion/rectification in this location. The Chair also reported that NCC is conducting a review of grit bins and has acknowledged that current records are incomplete; residents were encouraged to report missing, damaged or empty bins with clear location data (including What3Words), and it was noted that NCC should still respond even where bins are not yet correctly mapped. This directly addressed earlier public concerns about the reporting system's limitations and the inability to report assets not recorded on adopted highways or properly plotted.

In relation to signage and traffic management, the Chair reported continued concerns about pedestrian safety on the narrow footway at the village entrance and the request to remove a fence to increase usable space; NCC's current response remained that removal would not be permitted. The Chair noted, however, that NCC agreed to install/position a camera to gather evidence on pedestrian behaviour and movement patterns, as the site meeting itself had demonstrated people walking on the carriageway, verge and footway in response to the constrained space. It was agreed that monitoring should be undertaken over at least a two-week period, with a suggested window around Easter.

The Chair also reported that NCC would consider additional signage such as "No public parking ahead," while acknowledging the legal reality that, on the public highway, parking rights apply equally to residents and non-residents. The Chair further noted specific issues around people entering the village, turning, and exiting again—behaviour relevant to the monitoring exercise. Overall, the Chair concluded that, while NCC engagement was constructive, lack of funding remained a recurrent constraint, and the Council would need to continue pressing for evidence-led improvements and practical mitigations.

#### **10. Report by County Councillor Wendy Pattison**

The Chair referred attendees of the meeting to Councillor Pattison's report in her absence.

## 11. Report from Embleton Joint Burial Committee representative

The Council received a substantial report and discussion from Councillors A Fettis and D Moss who had recently attended the Embleton Joint Burial Committee, focusing in particular on the cemetery house. Councillors A Fettis and D Moss reported that numerous questions were asked to understand the current position on the property.

A number of significant issues were raised in terms of the management of the property as well as the financial implications for each of the 3 parish councils involved in the project.

Members noted that the Parish Council had been asked for a contribution of £1,200 towards the Committee's costs in relation to the property. Members expressed a desire to further analyse the benefits of maintaining one affordable-rent tenancy when compared with the risks and ongoing costs borne by 3 parish councils.

It was clarified that ownership/contribution shares were apportioned by population across the three parishes (with percentages for each parish cited in the meeting). The Council **agreed** that the issue required a structured follow-up and that it would be inappropriate to make significant financial commitments without a full, transparent picture. It was therefore agreed to convene a focused meeting involving relevant representatives, with a set of drafted questions circulated in advance to enable informed responses. =

## 12. Budget proposal for financial year 2026/27

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council is required to submit a precept request for the financial year 2026-27 to the County Council by the end of January 2026. In order to assist Members in deciding an appropriate precept level, it is also necessary for the Council to agree a budget for the forthcoming financial year.

The Clerk advised that it is expected that the Parish Council will finish the current financial year with approximately £5,500 remaining in the bank account and it was also recommended that £5,000 still be retained as a general reserve.

Members carefully considered the Parish Council's budget for 2026/27 and **agreed** the following expenditure for the forthcoming financial year:

<b>Item of expenditure</b>	<b>Expected expenditure</b>
Staffing costs (including on-costs following changes to employer NI contributions (previously exempt))	£9,600.00
Insurance	£250.00
Wifi and telephone to the Hall	£516.00
RBL Appeal	£25.00
Cutting of grass verges – incl. Tower Bank and Dunstan. Entrance to the village and 50% contribution to playpark	£1,800.00
NALC subscription	£120.00
Website and .gov.uk email account	£180.00
Hall hire	£288.00
Community events	£250.00
EJBC request for precept	£1,278.00
Greening/ planting budget	£500.00
Stationary	£100.00

<b>Total:</b>	<b>£14,407.00</b>
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### **13. Precept request for financial year 2026/27**

The Clerk advised that the 2026/27 Tax Base is 197.49. The 2025/26 Craster Parish Council Tax Base was calculated at 196.09. the Parish Council's Tax Base has therefore increased by 1.40. The Clerk reminded Members that the precept request must be submitted to Northumberland County Council by the end of January 2026.

The Parish Council's current precept charge for Band D currently sits at £76.50 and generated a total income of £15,000 for the Parish Council in 2025/26. The Band D charge in Craster parish area remains one of the lowest in Northumberland County.

Members **agreed** (by 6 votes in favour and 3 votes against) to raise the precept in line with inflation. As at November 2025, the UK's inflation rate was 3.2% and Members noted that this will equate to a Band D charge of £78.95 and generate a total income of £15,591.84

### **14. Report from Craster Community Trust representative**

A report was received from the Craster Community Trust (CCT) representative. Members were updated on matters relating to the Community Hall, including that proposed works (referenced as sound boards) were not currently feasible without significant ceiling replacement and that certain materials might present fire safety concerns; the CCT was therefore exploring alternative solutions.

The Council also received an update on fundraising activity, including a forthcoming bingo event intended to support the playground, and Jackie Reeves thanked those who had donated prizes. The Council also recorded thanks to Councillor Wendy Pattison for support to the Community Trust and its work, including assistance relating to the playground.

### **15. Planning matters:**

**Update on 25/03196/COU** | Change of use from former Tourist Information Office (Sui Generis) to a retail shop (Class E) selling food, gifts, alcohol etc during the day, and a bistro in the evening | Craster Quarry Car Park, Craster Tourist Information Centre West End Craster Northumberland NE66 3TW. Whilst noting the comments from the Highways team, Members **agreed** to maintain the Parish Council's support for this application.

**Update on 24/04252/FUL** | Change of use of existing agricultural building from grain store to livestock building. (additional information received 13.03.2025) | Land North West of Dunstan Steads Farm Embleton Northumberland. Members **agreed** to retain its current position on this application.

### **16. Items for next Agenda**

The Chair reminded Members to contact the Parish Clerk should they wish to have an item of business included on the next Agenda in February.

### **17. Date and time of next meeting**

Members noted the next scheduled ordinary meeting as Thursday 19 February 2026 at 6:30pm in Craster Memorial Hall. However, following the discussion around the burial house/property issues, the Council **agreed** to convene an additional, focused meeting earlier in February with the two other Parish Councils involved in the EJBC. Members **agreed** to hold an extraordinary/additional meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> February at 6:00pm in the Memorial Hall (subject to hall availability).

There being no further business, the Chair thanked Members for their attendance and closed the meeting.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Smith'.

**Chair of Craster Parish Council  
(19<sup>th</sup> February 2026)**