

WEST RAINTON AND LEAMSIDE PARISH COUNCIL

Chairman's Annual Report for 2025/26

Introduction

It is a statutory requirement to hold an Annual Parish Meeting and it falls to the Chair of the Parish Council to prepare and present an Annual Report to that meeting. This report, covering the period 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026, summarises PC activities over the past year, its current financial status, budget forecast and likely future activities.

Your Parish Council

The PC is an independent statutory body, comprising local councillors elected by local residents. Councillors are volunteers and receive no payment for their services. Following the election in May 2025 the 6 residents who had completed nomination forms were duly elected. Since then, the PC has co-opted 2 more residents bringing us up to 8 councillors. Our PC can have a maximum of 9 councillors so we currently have 1 vacancy.

- Ian Diggory (Chair)
- Kevin Wood (Vice-chair)
- Avril Wallage
- Allan Langford
- Steve Corfield
- Malcolm Stabler
- Michael Potts
- Margaret Scott

The PC employs Mark Ramshaw as its Parish Clerk. Mark is a paid part-time employee whose role is to administer PC business and act as the responsible financial officer. The Clerk also advises Councillors on procedural matters and is the main point of contact for West Rainton and Leamside parish council: clerk@westraintonandleamsidepc.gov.uk

How do we see our role?

The PC is here to represent the interests and address the concerns of all residents in our parish. To that end we provide a forum for residents to raise issues that are important to them, either in writing to the Clerk or in person at a monthly PC meeting.

We undertake actions and promote activities that enhance existing community services. Activities. We also seek to identify and develop projects that improve local services, community activities and enhance our environment. Where appropriate we offer financial support in the form of grants to causes that in some way bring benefits to the community.

We must also keep abreast of legislative changes to ensure compliance with the statutory framework under which we are required to work. This includes financial

accounting, audit requirements and demonstrating transparency and accountability in our decision making process.

Ward Councillor Elections

In addition to elections for parish councillors in May 2025, there were elections for two ward councillors in the newly formed electoral division of Lumley and West Rainton. This division includes the parishes of West Rainton and Leamside, Great Lumley, Bournmoor and Woodstone Village. Alan Bell and Phil Heaviside were elected and represent our interests at county level. In the 12 months since Phil and Alan were re-elected they have offered a lot of support to our parish, not least by regularly attending community events and parish meetings.

Financial Status

How we are funded

We receive no direct funding from central government and even our local government contribution (LCTSS) has been cut. Our principal source of income is through the annual precept which is determined by the amount of money we estimate will be needed for the next financial year after consideration of a draft budget in January. The precept is collected by DCC as part of your Council Tax Bill. For specific projects we seek funding from various 'pots of money' available from a variety of agencies.

Financial position

A summary of income received and payments made in 2025/26 is shown in Appendix A of this document, together with an outline financial forecast for 2026/27 in Appendix B. In January 2026 the PC reviewed its financial position and agreed a draft budget for financial year 2026/27. Based on these estimates, increasing costs and the fact that we have not increased the precept for a couple of years:

PC decided on a 5% increase in precept for 2026/27.

The principal source of our income is the precept and because we live in a parish that has many properties that are in lower council tax bands our potential tax base is relatively low. It has increased slightly with the Allenson View development and will likely increase again as Cathedral Meadows properties are sold.

What does 5% precept increase mean for you

The precept and DCC council tax calculations are based on a Band D tax property. The current year precept for a Band D property is £54.39. This will increase by £2.72 to £57.11 from April 2026. Properties in Bands A, B and C will see a lower increase and those above Band D will see a higher increase.

Grant Awards

Following our annual application process, in January 2026 the PC approved the award of grants totalling around £5,500 which were paid in April 2026.

General Ongoing Activities

The PC has a number of regular activities or commitments that we try to maintain (not always successfully!):

- Managing and maintaining Parish Cemetery
 - Maintaining Heritage Garden
 - Maintaining War Memorial
 - Maintaining Village Planters and 3 village notice boards
 - Organising Village Christmas Tree and illuminations
 - Organising Xmas Carols event
 - Support for refurbishment and management of Jubilee Hall
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- Reviewing potential impact on the parish of any planning and licensing applications.
 - Using our media outlets to keep residents informed of activities in the parish.
 - Liaising with voluntary groups to ensure we work together effectively for the benefit of our community.
 - Providing financial support to voluntary organisations, charities and community groups that undertake activities or services for the benefit of residents.
 - Monitoring ground maintenance works undertaken by DCC around the parish to improve the appearance of our green spaces and avoid excessive use of herbicides.

Communicating with Residents

We recognize the importance of communicating with residents and take steps to facilitate these communications. We hold a monthly meeting to which the public are invited, with meeting notices and agendas posted on the three notice boards in the village. There is always an agenda item for public participation. For residents who cannot attend in person our website provides a facility to email the Clerk. We maintain a comprehensive and transparent website that contains information on all our activities, including financial information, policy documents and minutes. For social media fans we maintain a Facebook page. We continue to report 'News from the Parish Council' in each edition of the Village News and maintain an awareness of the activities of various community groups through attendance at Village Partnership meetings.

However, effective communication is a dialogue and not a monologue, so if you have concerns or issues you wish to raise, we encourage you to attend one of our monthly meetings, email the Clerk or contact us via our website: <https://westraintonandleamsidepc.gov.uk>

Planning Applications

The PC receives regular lists of all planning applications covering our parish. Most of these do not require a response from the PC. However, if the PC decides a response is necessary a written notice is sent to DCC planning authority and in the case of more contentious applications the PC will present its case before a planning committee meeting. In the past year the issue about a retail outlet on the Community Hub land has rumbled on and the only other significant application the PC has dealt with was for an alcohol license at a proposed retail outlet in Chapel View.

Community Hub Development

An area of land adjacent to the Cathedral Meadows development was designated a Community Hub in the original planning application for the whole site in 2015. The developer had approval to develop commercial premises on the land. In 2024, failure to secure any interest from the commercial sector led the developer to seek planning consent for the construction of 20 affordable homes on the site with no retail unit.

October 2024: PC submitted a letter stating it had no objection to the proposed affordable homes development.

March 2025: Group of residents submitted a petition to the planning officer objecting to this housing development and calling for it to be replaced with a retail outlet - as originally planned.

April 2025: Planning committee voted to reject the housing application, despite a positive recommendation from the planners. **Developer planned to appeal the decision.**

May 2025: Parish Council independently contacted a number of retailers to gauge interest in establishing an outlet on the Community Hub site. There was an initial positive response from the Coop, but it came to nothing.

July 2025: Developer submits a planning application which includes a mixture of affordable homes and a retail outlet – but with no tenant identified. **This application was approved.**

Today: Developer is still awaiting result of his planning appeal. No retailer has come forward to take up retail space. If the developer wins his appeal, he will in theory have two options: (1) developing the site with affordable homes only or (2) developing the site with fewer homes but including a retail unit.

Proposed retail outlet in Chapel View

In late 2025 a company that had only been set up in July 2025 submitted an application for a “Premises License” to sell alcohol from a proposed Londis store to be sited in the old Methodist Chapel in Chapel View. A Licensing Committee hearing was held in December 2025 at which the applicant was granted a premises license. The Chair of the

PC requested a limit on the proposed times for sale of alcohol to be included as a condition of the license. The applicants and their barrister accepted the condition.

Today: Nearly 6 months later there is no sign of a Londis store being opened and the Methodist Chapel is back on the market.

Cathedral Meadows Development

September 2025: Following a village rumour that the Cathedral Meadows development may have stalled or been delayed due to the significant number of ongoing housing developments in the area, the Chair of the PC contacted the MD of Banks Group.

His response was that Banks had 98 homes under construction or built and were targeting full site completion in 2027. Banks' MD stated there are no commercial or technical reasons preventing their progression. Banks were happy with sales to date; having sold 38 homes already with a further 11 homes reserved/exchanged.

Unregistered Footpath

Getting the path linking the Dene to Red Track designated a public right of way has been a long-running issue. At a hearing in December 2025 DCC approved registration of this path as a Public Right of Way on its Definitive Map. However, the landowner said she was going to appeal the decision. At this time (May 2026) there has been no further word of an appeal.

School Avenue Park Project

This project that has now been completed – after a considerable time. Unfortunately, the PC has little or no control over projects carried out by a third-party. The final part of the project was erection of a metal fence around the site that provides a safe environment for park users, particularly younger children.

There has been a request from some users for additional play elements, such as a climbing frame. When contacted, DCC says the village has its quota of outdoor facilities. The land belongs to DCC who may be prepared to lease an area for more play elements but PC would be responsible for gaining planning consent, funding installation and take responsibility for maintenance and insurance. The PC will continue to keep this on its Action Plan.

Jubilee Hall

The threat of imminent closure of this key community asset has been averted. The PC set up a working group with a remit to establish a management team to ensure the long-term future of Jubilee Hall. Their work is now complete. A new board of trustees has been appointed and a new management team is in place, which has made significant progress in drawing up plans to refurbish Jubilee Hall. These plans have been approved and fund

raising has begun in earnest. A new café/ meeting room area has been set up and a volunteer team has come together to manage the café.

The PC continues to work closely with the Community Association in its efforts to refurbish Jubilee Hall. At our April 2026 meeting we resolved to establish a fund from the Village Reserve to support projects in Jubilee Hall and from June onwards the monthly parish council meeting will be held in the newly opened café area in Jubilee Hall.

Parish Environment

Tree Planting

Some time ago the PC invited the Green Group to submit a long-term planting strategy for types and locations of trees in the parish. In a separate project, Green Group advised there was a potential for additional trees on Believe Housing land in the village. The action on the PC was to consider the cost, supply and maintenance of any trees to be planted and develop a plan to progress this project, bearing in mind that DCC would need to be consulted if any planting on their land was proposed.

To date, the PC has failed to progress this issue. It remains on our Action Plan.

Heritage Garden

The Heritage Garden has been somewhat neglected but as a result of an initiative by Cllr Wallage the garden has been refurbished and two new benches installed.

Parish Cemetery

Cemetery maintenance costs are significantly greater than the income generated from burials, but this will always be the case. The Cemetery is a valued community asset and the PC continues to invest in maintaining its appearance and safety for the benefit of all.

Following representations from residents, new cemetery rules and regulations were drawn up and came into force on 1st April 2025. People with an interest in the graves in the new burial area were contacted to offer them the options available under the new policy.

A specialist tree company has been consulted about the condition of cemetery trees and as a result remedial work was carried out on the central avenue of lime trees. Responding to concerns of a resident, overhanging tree branches were cut back from a property adjacent to the cemetery.

Following concerns from residents about access to the new burial area up a steep embankment, the PC installed steps and a handrail. Other cemetery related actions include a replacement noticeboard on the cemetery wall and imminent stress testing of headstones.

Annual Plan

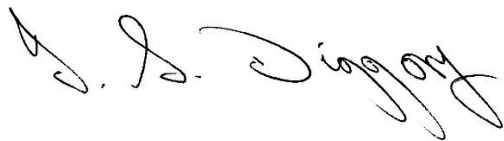
An Annual Plan is maintained, reviewed and updated by PC. It is used to define some PC objectives and provide a guide to future activities. The Annual Plan, indicating status of agreed actions, is published on our website. The actions are categorized under 6 themes:

WEST RAINTON & LEAMSIDE PARISH COUNCIL – ANNUAL PLAN		
Theme 1	Communication and Engagement with Residents	How well do we communicate with residents and community groups? What measures are we taking to ensure good communication and what measures might we take to improve those communications?
Theme 2	Addressing Road Safety Concerns	Speeding and illegal parking are two issues that residents regularly raise. What actions can we take to address these and other road safety issues?
Theme 3	Protecting and Improving our Environment	We monitor our built environment by vetting all planning applications. Is there anything else we should do? Our extensive green environment covers village trees, planters, woodland, streams, footpaths, grass verges, play parks, etc. Problems include litter and fly tipping. Are there actions we can undertake, probably in collaboration with Green Group, to maintain and improve our green environment?
Theme 4	Community Well-being	Are there any initiatives we can take to improve or extend support for activities or groups who bring benefit of our community? These can include any kind of recreational facilities that promote improved physical and mental well-being.
Theme 5	Maintaining Good governance in Parish Council Operations	Openness, Transparency and Accountability are three watchwords of good governance. What do we do to demonstrate the parish council is compliant, efficient and well managed? Is there room for improvement and if so, what actions should we undertake to achieve such improvements?
Theme 6	Cemetery Management	The parish council is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the parish cemetery. It does this through a range of policies that are reviewed on a regular basis. This theme is intended to document the activities that we as a PC undertake in relation to the operation of the cemetery and its grounds as well as responding to cemetery-related concerns raised by residents.

Looking ahead to 2026/27

- Support the Community Association in developing the future of Jubilee Hall.
- Seek to fill any councillor vacancies to maximise community representation on the PC.
- Seek to improve how we engage and communicate with residents.
- Engage with new residents moving into the parish.
- Identify and develop projects and initiatives for the benefit of all residents.
- Identify and explore potential external funding opportunities.
- Review all new planning applications to assess their potential impact on our community.
- Monitor the implementation of any approved planning developments.
- Review and update our Annual Plan. (Possibly revisit our Parish Plan)

The next PC meeting is on 21st May when we hold our AGM and make various appointments, such as Chairman and vice-Chairman, and set out plans for the year. We would anticipate the PC will continue to work in partnership with community groups, DCC and other public bodies to maintain and/or improve existing activities, services and facilities for the benefit of all residents in the parish of West Rainton and Leamside.



Ian Diggory
Chair, West Rainton and Leamside Parish Council

Appendix A

2025/26 Financial Summary and 2026/27 Financial Forecast

Sources of Income	Income 2024/25	Income 2025/26
Precept	£39,618	£41,483
LCTSS Grant	£1,302	-
S106 Grant Award School Avenue Park Project	£3,772	£1,818
Bank Interest	£1,951	£2,023
Cemetery - Burial Income	£1,544	£3,929
Cemetery - Memorial Tree	-	£600
VAT included in memorial leaf income		£120
Recoverable VAT (From previous year)	£2,921	£3,001
Total Income	£51,108	£52,974

Expenditure Items	Expenditure 2024/25	Expenditure 2025/26
Staff Salaries	£7,467	£7,781
Learning & Development	£10	£152
General Administration/Office Expenses	£374	£885
Subscriptions	£596	£539
Room Hire	£190	£280
Insurance	£790	£807
Accountancy and Audit Fees	£835	£760
School Avenue Play Park Furniture (1)	£3,772	£2,200
Cemetery grounds maintenance (2)	£5,144	£12,940
Cemetery - Replacement Notice Board	£1,110	£0
Other grounds maintenance (3)	£4,605	£6,680
Memorial leaf & inscriptions	£0	£358
Village Clock Servicing/Repairs (4)	£185	£930
Community Grants	£1,470	£1,865
British Legion - Remembrance Day Memorials (5)	£20	£91

Supply Christmas Tree, Lighting & Xmas Concert	£3,244	£2,837
Youth Service	£3,000	£4,000
VAT Payable (6)	£3,001	£4,387
Bank charges	£145	£106
Total Expenditure	£35,958	£47,598
Surplus/Deficit to transfer to general reserve	£15,150	£5,376

Reserve Balances Carried forward	Income 2024/25	Income 2025/26
Village Improvement Plan	£20,000	£20,000
Election Reserve	£4,000	£4,000
General reserves at start of year	£42,795	£57,945
General Reserves at year end	£57,945	£63,321
Total Reserve balances carried forward	£81,945	£87,321
(1)	Completion of Project	
(2)	New Contractor following competitive tendering exercise & £5320 Ad hoc Tree Work	
(3)	Refurbishment of HG	
(4)	Ad hoc Church clock repair	
(5)	Lamp-post poppy purchase for Remembrance Day	
(6)	Increase spend	

NOTES	
2025/26 figures are unaudited	
Commitments carried over from 25/26:	
DCC invoices awaited for street furniture & bins installation cfwrđ from 2023/24	£5,570 (1)
Grants approved in January 26, paid April 26	£5,492
Cemetery Steps & Handrail	£3,334
	£14,396
Potential Funding Pressures 2026/27	
Potential Additional traffic calming measures	TBA
Cemetery Stress Testing	£1,000
Further support for JH - £10K Earmarked Reserve agreed at the April PC Meeting	£10,000
Installation of additional defibrillator	£1,000
Tree & Bulb Planting	£5,000
Purchase and installation of Blue Plaque	£650
Repairs to Cemetery Fence following Storm Dave	£3,000
	£20,650

Appendix B

Financial Forecast 2026/27

Draft Budget, May 2026	2026/27
Precept	£44,757
Other	£7,387
TOTAL Income	£52,144
TOTAL Spend	£51,638
Surplus for year	£506
Start of year	£63,321
End of year	£63,827
Earmarked reserve	£20,000
Election reserve	£4,000
Reserve Balance	£87,827