

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Committee held on Tuesday 11th June 2024 at 13:00pm via Zoom

Present: Councillors C Lattin (Chair), L Brown, N Brown, D Freeman and R Friederichsen.

Also present: Parish Clerk A Shanley and Councillor E Ashby

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE

Councillor C Lattin was elected as Chair of the Environment Committee. Proposed by Councillor D Freeman and seconded by Councillor R Friederichsen.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE

Councillor V Ashfield was elected as Vice-Chair of the Environment Committee. Proposed by Councillor C Lattin and seconded by Councillor D Freeman.

3. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies were received and accepted from Councillor V Ashfield.

4. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS.

None received.

5. TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14th MAY 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th May 2024 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

6. TO RECEIVE ANY PUBLIC PARTICIPATION COMMENTS ON THE FOLLOWING AGENDA ITEMS.

Councillor E Ashby advised that she was attending the meeting with a general interest in the Agenda. In particular, Councillor E Ashby asked for clarification on the proposal that no further blue plaques would be delivered by the Parish Council this year. Councillor E Ashby highlighted that she would like to propose a location in the Neville's Cross part of the parish and the Committee agreed to consider any future proposal for a new plaque.

7. TO CONSIDER THE LATEST NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN REPORT

Members warmly welcomed the latest Neighbourhood Warden report from Kirk Thiis and Antony Waterson. Members particularly noted the concerns relating to youth anti-social behaviour and thanked Kirk and Ant for all of their work on this issue.

Members also **agreed** to support the Wardens with funding any training required for removal of graffiti.

8. REPORT ON DCC'S AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Members considered the content of the Air Quality Management Plan consultation and agreed that whilst the ambitions of this Plan were most welcome, the Plan seriously lacked any measurable targets from which the success of any actions could be assessed.

The Chair thanked Councillors R Friederichsen and V Ashfield for their work in drafting a proposed response to this important consultation and Members unanimously **agreed** the following response to go forward for approval at Full Council:

1. Introduction

The County Council is required to produce a revised Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP) and is currently consulting on a draft.

Air pollution is associated with adverse health impacts and is specifically recognised as a contributing factor in the onset of heart disease and cancer. Additionally, air pollution particularly affects the most vulnerable in society: children, the elderly, and those with existing heart and lung conditions. Key measures to reduce air pollution have significant co-benefits for health (active travel) and climate (active travel and public transport).

Several areas of the city have long been identified as air pollution hot spots. The Parish Council and residents have previously urgently been exploring solutions to localised air pollution problems and supported the more decisive encouragement of active travel.

The Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to engage with DCC around the AQMP and all measures that will improve air quality in Durham city.

2. Analysis of the AQMP

There is a contradiction at the heart of the AQMP. It is that a) the root causes and the nature of the problem of air pollution are very well understood by all key actors, and b) the existing policy vision and policies are clear about the direction to take; however, c) the impact of the solutions is not sufficiently measured, the implementation of solutions is not resourced appropriately or implementation is insufficient for other reasons, which means the problem has persisted for over a decade and it will continue to persist. The evidence for this reading of the AQMP can be found in the AQMP itself as follows.

Causes and nature of the problem: The AQMP states that the main source of air pollution is road traffic (p. 12) and differentiates in detail which categories of vehicles cause which locations to be affected by air pollution.

Figure 1 (p.13) illustrates the extent of the AQMA right across the city from Stonebridge in Southwest to Sunderland Road in the Northeast; and from New

Elvet to Church Street. The worst affected locations, listed on p. 14, are located within the AQMA and NO₂ mean annual concentrations are **predicted** to be between 32 and 40 µg/m³. The national air quality objective for NO₂ is 40 µg/m³ which was due to be achieved by 31 December 2005 (and maintained thereafter) (see [DEFRA online](#)). The WHO guideline level for NO₂ is 10 µg/m³ (See [WHO Air Quality Guidelines](#)).

The AQMP fully acknowledges the complexities of air pollution. Its health impact which tends to affect deprived areas most, the connection to climate action, and numerous policies and plans that affect air quality (pp.17-20).

Overall, the Parish Council is satisfied that the AQMP presents the nature of the problem of air quality appropriately. However, the report fails to acknowledge the frustrating lack of progress on air quality. It is content, with qualifications, that "air quality is improving" (p. IV). There is no summary assessment of the impact on air quality made by the previous AQMP and the current plan does not convey a sense that DCC wants to learn from experience regarding which measures have worked and which haven't.

Stating plainly that, despite the AQMA being in place since 2011, significant numbers of Durham residents are and will continue being denied their legal right to clean air would signal a more appropriate level of urgency (see Figures A15 to A17 on pages 74-76 marking non-compliant properties. The residents of the properties marked with red dots are the worst hit and they will continue to suffer dangerous and illegal levels of air pollution, keeping in mind that the UK legal standard itself is four times the level internationally agreed as safe.

Vision and policy context:

The AQMP lists the visions of various policy documents, including

- the Northeast Transport Plan vision of "moving to a green, healthy, dynamic and thriving North East" (p. 18), and
- the Durham County Council Strategic Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan 2019-29 vision "to make cycling and walking part of Durham's culture and to make them safe, affordable, enjoyable, everyday modes of transport for everyone." (p. 19)

Moreover, the resulting imperative to **increase highway space for active travel**, to reach air quality as well as climate targets is mentioned (p. 19).

The Parish Council strongly supports the policy vision presented in the AQMP and to which it is designed to contribute. We also note that the connections between the AQMP and CERP are only mentioned most briefly (p.18); they fail to point out the very important alignment of climate and clean air policy goals that can be reached through transport policy. We are very concerned that the ambitious target mentioned in the Climate Emergency Response Plan 2 (p. 122 – to achieve "35,000 fewer petrol and diesel cars on our roads" across the County between 2019 and 2023) is not updated and broken down to a goal to reduce the number of cars on the roads of Durham City as part of the AQMP.

Implementation, impact and resourcing:

Table 11 on pages 40 to 47 detail the AQAP Measures. They are not ordered from top to lowest priority, but it is not explained how they are ordered.

The table's column "Reduction in Pollutant / Emission from Measure" is the closest the report gets to quantifying the impact of the proposed measures. The reductions in air pollution to be achieved by each measure are most welcome but the amount of data provided is very limited. As a consequence, the Parish Council feels that the AQMP fails to give it the required information to monitor and assess the impact of the AQMP as a whole. Therefore, the AQMP fails to give levers to residents and the Parish Council to hold the County Council accountable for the success of the AQMP.

The Parish Council wishes to comment on the AQMP actions by **key theme** and in descending order of priority as we perceive it (numbers of actions are as in the AQMP, pages IV and V).

- 1. Active travel:** Despite its focus on the health impact of air pollution, the AQMP does not mention that the health benefits of active travel constitute significant co-benefits, which may be part of the reason why the action "Implement the Strategic Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan 2019-2029" is item 20, i.e. the second lowest priority on the list of 21 actions (p. IV). This action should be given a much higher priority. The resourcing of this line at £10k-£50k and the comment "not progress to date" (p. 44) consolidate the impression that, in total contradiction to the vision for active travel, it's actual promotion is in fact being utterly deprioritised. This impression is further exacerbated by the recent changes made to the crossing outside White Church which did not make any provisions for cycling whilst focusing entirely on improving the flow (and increasing the number) of cars.

Public transport: We welcome the intention of action 8 to reduce the level of pollution caused by buses but note that it is resourced at only £10k-50k and are concerned that this is a minor action with potentially very minor impact. We urge DCC to add the stretch action to the final AQMP. We welcome actions 14, 15 and note that action 15 will have negligible impact on the city's air quality.

We feel that opportunities afforded by the new bus station have been missed: Only bus providers using electric, or retrofitted buses should be allowed to use the bus station. For years climate campaigners have been asking DCC to engage with bus operators to agree dates for the upgrading of buses. No agreements have been negotiated. We strongly suggest adding a timetable for the exclusive use of electric buses at the new Bus Station.

- 2. Park and ride:** We welcome actions 5, 7, 11 and the work that has already begun to expand park and ride sites. We would like DCC to consider means of incentivising more people using fewer cars to come to the Park and Ride, e.g. by applying charges per car instead of per bus passenger. More passengers riding in fewer cars would reduce the air pollution in the periphery of the city.
- 3. Planning:** We welcome actions 2 and 3. However, the development at Bent House Lane is very much in contradiction to the AQMP: This huge development has been allowed to commence without any requirements for

ceasing gas use in houses and improving bus routes so that they serve the whole of the development. We urge DCC to engage with the Parish Council and developers to avoid increasing further the flow of polluting traffic through Gilesgate.

- 4. Freight and delivery freight:** We welcome action 19 because it addresses the growing issue of home deliveries. We are concerned that “obtain a better understanding” and “potentially followed by a feasibility study” demonstrates a low level of ambition.
- 5. Parking:** We welcome action 6.
- 6. Electric vehicles:** We welcome actions 4, 12 and look forward to learning how much impact it will have had in due time.
- 7. Workplace travel plans:** We welcome action 9 and look forward to learning how much impact it will have had in due time.
- 8. Awareness raising:** We welcome actions 10, 13, and 117, and look forward to learning how much impact they will have had in due time. We note that given the start of AQMA in 2011, it feels very late indeed to “Define and Implement a Public Awareness Campaign focusing on air quality” in 2024.
- 9. Taxis:** We are disappointed by the lack of ambition of action 16. We urge DCC to go much further, starting with setting strategic goals for the reduction of emissions by the taxi fleet and the level of its electrification.
- 10. Green infrastructure:** We note action 18 is at a very early stage and look forward to learning more about the potential contribution of Green infrastructure to reducing air pollution (and contributing to the resilience and adaptation capacity of the city during the climate emergency).
- 11. Traffic flow:** We are pleased that the Urban Traffic Control (UTC) system is operational (action 21) and would welcome further improvements it might deliver for Claypath. We are disappointed to not see more ambition on reducing the amount of traffic through the city.
- 12. Cross-cutting measures:** We support an overall higher level of ambition (working with organisations such as Climate Action Durham, Space for Durham, cycle groups in Durham, etc).
- 13. Actions missing from the AQMP:** We urge DCC to work with
 - a. schools across the county to find ways to reduce car-based school journeys, implement “school streets”, and parking enforcement in the vicinity of schools, and
 - b. Durham University to support the introduction of restrictions on student cars.
- 14. Making progress on the AQMP transparent and enabling accountability:** We note the detail provided in table 11 but strongly suggest it is insufficient to enable residents to monitor progress satisfactorily. In particular, each action in the AQMP must have a) a target that specifies the measurable improvement in air quality each action is expected to deliver; b) clear timescales (start and completion dates); c) monitoring (who is responsible for checking that progress towards targets is on track at regular intervals).

3. Conclusion

The Parish Council concludes that the AQMP in its current form does not provide a credible path towards solving the problem of dangerous and in certain places illegal levels of air pollution in Durham City.

We appreciate the measures proposed in the AQMP and have detailed requests for additional and more ambitious measures to bring the AQMP in line with DCC's stated policy visions and national air quality standards.

Significant detail must be added to the plan to enable the measurement of progress towards specified targets. In the absence of mechanisms that allow residents to check and verify the level of progress made, the AQMP is not a credible tool to achieve safe and legal air quality for all Durham City residents which calls into question its very purpose.

End of response

9. DISCUSSION OF ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PRIORITIES:

9a. To decide:

I) Proposal to fund a noticeboard at Peskies Park in the Viaduct Area

The Clerk advised that he had received a request from Councillor S Walker for the Parish Council to support the introduction of a new noticeboard at Peskies Park in the Viaduct Area.

Members raised a number of queries relating to the planning application and funding and the Clerk agreed to discuss this further with Councillor S Walker. As such, the Committee **agreed** to defer this item until further information was received on the practicalities of this project.

II) Update on the landlord voluntary contribution scheme for 2024-25

The Clerk confirmed that the request for a voluntary contribution from all landlords and letting agents had now been distributed as agreed. The Clerk advised that the Parish Council has already received a number of small donations from some private landlords and that a verbal commitment of £2,500 had also been received from Durham University to this appeal.

The Chair thanked the Clerk for his work on this project and it was agreed to re-agenda this item for the next Environment Committee to assess the success of the appeal.

III) Update on Green Move Out for this academic year in the City

The Chair advised that she was aware that the Green Move Out operation this year is set to commence very shortly. The Clerk highlighted that approximately £4,500 is remaining from the appeal in 2023-24 and the Committee **agreed** to fund additional collections on Sundays as happened last year.

9b. To complete:

I) Funding for the planters in the Viaduct Area of the City

The Committee **agreed** to fund additional plants for the Autumn in time for the new students moving into the area. The Committee also **agreed** to commit £2,000 towards bulbs for this year.

II) To consider the latest updates on the blue plaques for Prof. Dame Rosemary Cramp and 33 Claypath.

The Clerk advised that the planning application had now been approved for 12 Church Street and thanked Elvet Residents Association for their work and support on this application. The Clerk advised that he would be liaising with colleagues to plan the unveiling event for this plaque in the Summer.

In addition, Councillor C Lattin highlighted that she had had a very positive meeting with St. Mary's College Principal and they had agreed to fund the reception associated with the plaque unveiling. The Committee felt that the third UK astronaut – an alumnus of St. Mary's College herself – may be an ideal person to ask to support the unveiling of the plaque.

III) Battle of Neville's Cross signage and walking leaflet

The Clerk advised that he was delighted that the new boards and leaflets for the Battle of Neville's Cross had now arrived. The Clerk advised that he would be contacting the Neville's Cross Parish Councillors to ask if they would like to get their photographs taken by the new boards for promotion purposes and then seek their support in distributing these excellent leaflets.

The Clerk also advised that he is liaising with David Butler on the organisation of a walk in the Summer for any interested residents to take part.

The Committee thanked the Clerk for all of his excellent work on this project.

IV) Progressing the plans for the new layout of Durham Market Place.

The Clerk advised that he was still awaiting confirmation of the next steps with this project from DCC and would report back ASAP.

10. AOB

None received.

11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Tuesday 9th July 2024 at 1pm

Tuesday 10th September 2024 at 1pm

Tuesday 8th October 2024 at 1pm

There being no further business, the Chair thanked all those present for attending and for their contributions and closed the meeting.

Signed,

Ca36 Lath

**Chair of the Parish Council's Environment Committee
(9th July 2024)**