

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Committee held on Thursday 19th September 2024 at 16:00pm via Zoom

Present: Councillors C Lattin (Chair), V Ashfield and L Brown.

Also present: Parish Clerk A Shanley

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors N Brown, D Freeman and R Friederichsen.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

None received.

3. TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9th JULY 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th July 2024 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

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

None received.

5. TO CONSIDER THE LATEST NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN REPORT

Members warmly welcomed the hugely positive report from the Neighbourhood Wardens and in particular thanked them for their ongoing work in addressing low-level anti-social behaviour in the City. The Clerk agreed to write directly to Kirk Thiis and Antony Waterson and thank them formally for their excellent work over the Summer.

6. DISCUSSION OF ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PRIORITIES:

6a. To decide:

I) Proposal to launch a Durham Tidy Gardens initiative as part of the landlord funding

The Clerk reminded Members that the City of Durham Parish Council has launched an appeal to local landlords for a contribution to the parish precept for the last two years.

Last year, part of the funding acquired from this appeal was directed towards additional waste collections at £1,500 and there remains approximately £8,000 in its account from both appeals.

An additional aspect of the funding from this appeal was proposed to be directed towards supporting residents maintaining their front gardens (where applicable) and, as an added aspect of the proposal, to help educate residents on how to recycle. This will be done through a leaflet which was included with the Agenda.

In establishing a number of reputable gardeners, the Parish Council has reached out to DCC and has been provided with 2 private companies who are able to cut grass and carry out general gardening maintenance. As such, there is no requirement on the Parish Council to provide gardening equipment or a service directly, this leaflet will simply pinpoint residents to an appropriate gardening service which will be chargeable for the resident.

In the case of student properties, the Clerk reported that the Parish Council has received complaints from local residents about the condition of some student properties throughout the year. In a number of cases, landlord tenancy agreements stipulate that it is the tenants' responsibility to maintain the gardens and the Parish Council is also aware of anecdotal evidence that students are not having their deposits returned to them in full by some landlords because the garden areas are not maintained. The Clerk advised that this initiative by the Parish Council is entirely geared towards supporting residents in a) maintaining their gardens and b) in the case of student properties, to make it easier for students to comply with their tenancy agreements and receive their deposit back in full.

Councillor V Ashfield advised that she felt that the Parish Council should look to expand the list of reputable local gardeners by doing a call-out for anyone interested so that they can be checked and vetted and added to the list. This was agreed by the Committee as was the draft proposed content of the letter to each household.

The Committee also agreed that DSU be approached to carry out some research on how widespread the issue of non-repayment of deposits is in Durham. The Clerk reported that DSU does not support the scheme as proposed as a payable service.

II) Purchase of bulbs as part of the Parish Council's work to green the parish area.

Committee Members agreed to spend circa. £3,000 on bulbs for the autumn this year and agreed a variety of pollinator friendly species as part of this order. Members expressed the hope that community groups could get involved in planting these bulbs. The Clerk advised that he had ordered the bulbs for delivery to Merryoaks Community Hall in the coming weeks.

III) Proposal to request that BT remove its clear glassed telephone boxes

The Clerk highlighted that there are several BT telephone boxes located around the parish area. Most of these boxes are relatively modern, glazed structures which are inappropriately designed for a Conservation Area. Similarly, the traditional red phone boxes, such as telephone box at Lower Claypath and at Palace Green, make a positive contribution to the Conservation and, in fact, are considered Non-designated Heritage Assets (NDHAs).

The Clerk advised that a number of these boxes are subject to vandalism, anti-social behaviour or are simply no longer functioning.

The Clerk highlighted that, in June 2022, Ofcom updated its rules on public call boxes. BT now cannot remove a box if it meets one or more of these criteria:

- it is in a place without coverage from all four mobile network providers;
- it is located in an area with a high frequency of accidents or suicides;
- it has made 52 or more calls over the past 12 months; or
- there is other evidence that the box is reasonably needed at the site – for example if it is likely to be relied upon in the event of a local emergency, such as flooding, or if it is used to call helplines.

If a public call box that is the last at a site does not meet any of these four criteria, BT or KCOM can consult with the relevant local authority on removing it. BT and KCOM must take account of any views and evidence received from this consultation before deciding whether to remove the box.

Public call boxes that are not the last at a site can be removed by BT and KCOM without consultation.

BT maintains strict confidentiality regarding call volumes and will not share them with the Parish Council or any other agency. The only exception to this policy occurs when law enforcement agencies request access to these records for investigative reasons.

Members **agreed** to ask BT to carry out an audit of its telephone boxes in the City of Durham Parish area. Where it is the case that the box does not meet any of the criteria above and is either broken or vandalised, this should be removed. Councillor C Lattin also proposed that the Environment Committee should install a tree in place of any box which is removed.

Where a phone box does meet the criteria above but the box is damaged, Members agreed that the Parish Council should ask BT to carry out some remedial works to the box itself.

IV) Production of a recycling leaflet for new and returning students in the city

Members **agreed** the content of the recycling leaflet and this was agreed to go on to the reverse side of the leaflet for the Tidy Gardens initiative.

V) Review of the 3-tier planter provision across the parish area

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council currently funds 6 x 3-tier planters in the City of Durham Parish area and these include: 2 at North Road, 1

near the bench opposite St. John's Church, 2 at Freeman's Quay (near the passport office and sixth form centre) and 1 at Clayport library.

Members expressed disappointment at the display of flowers in the 3-tier planters paid for by the Parish Council this Summer and agreed that a meeting should take place as soon as possible with Clean and Green Officers to discuss this.

VI) Report on a proposed City Fair (similar to village fete) event.

Councillor V Ashfield reported that she had recently been contacted by a local resident and friend of hers in relation to a proposal to host a City Fete in the summer. Councillor V Ashfield advised that, whilst she was awaiting further information about this, she felt that this ought to be something the Parish Council should be supporting.

It was **agreed** that Councillor V Ashfield should receive more information about this proposed event and propose this to the Parish Council's Business Committee as an initiative to take forward as part of their work program.

6b. To complete:

I) Update on the recruitment of a grant bid writer for the green roofed bus shelters project

The Clerk reported that there has been one expression of interest in this contract from an experienced Funding Manager in the parish area. The Clerk advised that he had also reached out to Craig Morgan at the AAP to request support from the AAP team on this initiative also.

The Committee **agreed** that the applicant should be contacted and asked to submit a formal proposal for consideration and welcomed the news that there may be funding available through some local funding streams. The Clerk advised that he would keep both the Environment Committee and Personnel Committee updated on this project.

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

The Clerk advised that the blue plaque for Prof. Dame Rosemary Cramp would be installed w/c 30th September and that the event was now fully planned for Friday 4th October alongside the Vice-Chancellor's office and University colleagues.

The Clerk also reported that he had met with the Principal of St. Mary's and had agreed that the unveiling event should take place at 33 Claypath on 22nd November 2024 as part of celebrations to mark the 125th anniversary of the college.

The Committee thanked the Clerk for his exceptional work on these initiatives.

III) Request to apply wood preservative to the Viaduct planters

Members **agreed** with a request from a member of the public to apply wood preservative to the planters in the Viaduct Area, in particular at Allergate.

IV) Update on the production of a Community Emergency Plan

The Chair reported on the most recent and positive meeting of the Working Group creating the Community Emergency Plan for the City and took the opportunity to thank all of the volunteers working so hard on this excellent initiative. The Chair advised that she hoped to have a working draft of the plan later this year and advised that she would be keeping the Parish Council updated on how this progresses.

The Chair also reported that the Environment Agency and the Clerk have circulated details of how to get involved as a volunteer Flood Warden in the community too and thanked the team for this.

The Committee thanked the Chair for her hard work on this initiative.

6c. To note:

I) Follow up with local schools on the OASES Breath Clean Air project

The Clerk advised that he would be reaching out to OASES seeking an update on how their Breath Clean Air project is progressing, however he was aware that Councillor R Friederichsen had circulated a very positive report on this project to Members already and confirmed that he would be following up on this.

II) Update on the installation of a noticeboard at Peskies Park

The Clerk advised that he had submitted the planning application for the new noticeboard at Peskies Park and this was awaiting a decision. The Clerk advised that he was grateful to both the CCP and the City of Durham Trust for their kind letters of support for this application.

III) Progressing the plans for the new layout of Durham Market Place

The Clerk advised that he was still awaiting an update on this project and would be meeting colleagues on 2nd October to discuss this with them in more detail.

IV) Update on the City Safety and Wellbeing card

The Clerk advised that the City Safety and Wellbeing cards would be arriving on 3rd October 2024 for distribution to students and residents.

7. AOB

None received.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Tuesday 8th October 2024 at 1pm
Tuesday 12th November 2024 at 1pm
Tuesday 14th January 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. J. Lath'.

**Chair of the Parish Council's Environment Committee
(8th October 2024)**