

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Committee held on Tuesday 8th October 2024 at 16:00pm via Zoom

Present: Councillors C Lattin (Chair), V Ashfield, L Brown, D Freeman and S Walker.

Also present: Parish Clerk A Shanley, Prof. Steve Lindsay and Mr Matthew Phillips.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Meeting called to order by Chair Carole Lattin. Apologies were received from Councillor Nicola Brown and Councillor Rupert Friederichsen and the Chair **accepted** that Councillor Susan Walker was attending as a substitute for Councillor N Brown.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

No declarations of interest were received from Members.

3. TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19th SEPTEMBER

The minutes from the previous meeting on 19th September 2024 were received and **approved** without any issues raised.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Professor Steven Lindsay and Mr Matthew Philips from the Elvet Clean Air group advised that they were attending to participate in the discussion under item 5 on the Agenda.

5. REPORT BY PROF. STEVE LINDSAY ON A PROPOSAL FOR A DURHAM CLEAN AIR ZONE

The Chair welcomed Professor Steve Lindsay and Mr Matthew Phillips to the meeting.

In the presentation and subsequent discussion on the proposed Durham City Clean Air Zone, Steve, representing the Elvet Clean Air working group, highlighted the severe impact of air pollution in Durham, particularly in areas like Church Street where vulnerable populations, such as children and elderly residents, are disproportionately affected. The focus was on reducing vehicle emissions, especially from diesel buses and through-traffic, which contribute significantly to the city's pollution levels. Steve shared data visualizations demonstrating how air quality has fluctuated over time and noted a natural experiment during lockdown when air pollution levels dropped due to decreased traffic.

Steve proposed creating a Clean Air Zone by diverting high-pollution vehicles away from the city centre onto the existing ring road, with a congestion charge imposed on vehicles entering the zone. The goal is to shift traffic patterns and reduce pollution while still allowing essential vehicle access. He cited successful examples

from London and Newcastle, where similar schemes have led to substantial reductions in air pollution.

In response, Matthew Phillips pointed out that schemes like low-traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) often lead to behavioural shifts rather than increased congestion on boundary roads, as more people opt for alternatives like walking or cycling. He added that such schemes could also generate revenue that might fund public transport projects, including park-and-ride facilities, further encouraging people to leave their cars outside the city.

Overall, the discussion suggested that while the proposed Clean Air Zone may face political and logistical challenges, it could yield health benefits for Durham residents and set a precedent for other cities seeking to improve urban air quality.

Members raised several key concerns during the discussion, highlighting both support and scepticism about the current proposal.

Liz Brown emphasized the need for improved public transport, noting that some residents, including herself, rely on accessible public transport due to mobility limitations. Matthew Phillips agreed, pointing out that reducing city-centre traffic would make public transport more efficient by reducing delays caused by traffic jams, which also increase operational costs for bus services. He suggested exploring options like bus gates on certain roads to prioritize public transport and limit through traffic.

Carole Lattin expressed frustration over past challenges in regulating large delivery trucks on Sandland Road, which add to congestion and pollution. This resonated with the group's concerns about heavy vehicle traffic and the need for more restrictive measures.

The Clerk expressed appreciation for the work done by the Elvet Clean Air group and supported the push for electric buses. However, he raised concerns about the proposed clean air zone's potential to overload certain roads, especially the A167 and Neville's Cross traffic lights, with additional vehicles. Adam noted that diverting traffic might create gridlock and exacerbate air pollution in other areas of the parish. He also expressed hesitation to support the current plan without viable alternative routes to manage diverted traffic effectively.

In summary, while there was clear support for measures to reduce air pollution, including electric buses and enhanced public transport, concerns remained regarding the feasibility of the proposed clean air zone. The impact on traffic congestion and the potential displacement of pollution to surrounding areas were major points for reconsideration before advancing the proposal.

Members **agreed** to write directly to the North East Mayor Kim McGuinness to lobby for more zero emission bus services to the Church Street area of the parish where it was highlighted that emissions from buses alone represented nearly 60% of total emissions.

The Chair thanked Steve and Matthew. At this point, both Steve and Matthew left the meeting.

6. TO CONSIDER THE LATEST NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN REPORT

The Clerk advised that he had not yet received a report from the Wardens owing to Kirk Thiis being off on sick at present. The Committee thanked the Clerk for this update and wished good health and a speedy recovery to Kirk.

7. DISCUSSION OF ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PRIORITIES:

7a. To decide:

I) To agree a scheme of planting across the parish for next Spring/Summer season

The Chair highlighted that no fewer than 70,000 bulbs were being distributed to community groups and volunteers for planting around the parish area and thanked all those involved in this work.

The Committee also **agreed** to order addition three-tier planters in locations such as Silver Street, Back Silver Street and Milburngate coach drop-off.

The Chair reported that DCC is looking to cut back on its planting commitments and were considering sustainable planting for the Leazes Bowl area instead of the usual carpet bedding.

II) To decide on the purchase of new trees for the parish area

It was **agreed** that Councillor S Walker and the Clerk should arrange for the purchase of more fruit trees for the parish area up to a budget of £1,500. Councillor L Brown asked that some of these trees be installed at Peskies Park.

III) Preparing to decide the Environment Committee priorities and strategy for 2025/26

The Committee **agreed** to review the current Strategy and Budget at its next meeting in November and Members were encouraged to consider their priorities for the forthcoming meeting as well as the Councillors' Away Day.

7b. To complete:

I) Update on Durham Tidy Gardens/ Recycling leaflet as part of the landlord funding

Councillor Victoria Ashfield presented a revised draft letter focusing on student residents. This letter aims to encourage tidy gardens and proper recycling practices and the Committee unanimously **approved** the letter with minor adjustments. Free bulbs are to be offered at the Palatine Centre as part of the initiative.

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

Bulbs have been distributed to various resident groups and volunteers. Additional locations for bulb planting being considered, including Mill Hill Lane

III) Update on proposal to request that BT audits its clear glassed telephone boxes.

The Clerk confirmed that a formal letter has been sent to BT regarding the phone box locations and the need for their ongoing maintenance. The Clerk advised that he was awaiting a response from BT.

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

The Clerk advised that the Parish Council had received one expression of interest from the advert towards a contract fundraiser.

The Clerk advised that he was awaiting further details from the applicant in relation to a proposed day rate prior to putting this to Full Council. The Clerk advised that he and Councillor C Lattin and V Ashfield had met with Claire and expressed how impressed they all were with her experience.

The Committee **agreed** that, in light of forthcoming S106 funds becoming available across the parish area, the Committee should prioritise green roof bus shelters and topiary statues as part of this project.

V) Update on the production of a Community Emergency Plan

The Chair reported good progress was being made on developing the plan document and that she was aiming to have a draft of the Emergency Plan ready for January's Full Council meeting for approval.

The Chair reported positive engagement from resident groups in developing local area plans and advised that, once in place, the plan will require testing and approval from the Civil Contingencies Unit. Councillor V Ashfield took the opportunity to thank Councillor C Lattin for all her continued work on this Plan.

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

The Committee **noted** that a formal report from OASES on the impact of the Breath Clean Air project was due to be received imminently.

7c. To note:

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

The Committee expressed frustration with the lack of progress on planned improvements to the Market Place and highlighted that there ongoing issues with proposed frontage designs for Stack building. Parish Council pushing for action on planters and other enhancements Concerns about continued parking problems damaging paving

II) Update on the City Safety and Wellbeing card

Members warmly welcomed the updated City Safety and Wellbeing card, as presented by the Parish Clerk and thanked the Clerk for his work

The Committee particularly welcomed that the card includes a QR code for donations to Durham City Street Friends and will be delivered alongside other parish communications.

8. AOB

None received.

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Tuesday 12th November 2024 at 1pm

Tuesday 14th January 2024 at 1pm

Tuesday 11th February 2024 at 1pm

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

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cathy Lath', is written below the 'Signed,' text.

**Chair of the Parish Council Environment Committee
(12th November 2024)**