

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Committee held on Tuesday 12th November at 13:00pm via Zoom

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

Also present: Parish Clerk A Shanley, Councillor J Ashby, Claire Dodds (Wear Rivers Trust) and Mr Martin Hiles (member of the public).

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed all participants and there were no apologies.

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 8th OCTOBER 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th October 2024 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

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

Mr Martin Hiles advised that he was attending the meeting to discuss item 7a. I) with the Committee.

Councillor J Ashby thanked the Committee for allowing him to come and speak on a project in his ward of the Parish Council. Councillor J Ashby presented a proposal to reinstall a historic boundary stone that was recently discovered in a local resident's garden. The stone was originally located on the border between the City of Durham and Shincliffe parishes. The Committee agreed to further investigate the project and coordinate with Councillor J Ashby on this project. The Clerk advised that he would like to have a site visit with Members if this could be possible and Councillor J Ashby and the Chair agreed that this would be a good first step in the project.

5. TO CONSIDER THE LATEST NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN REPORT

The Committee warmly welcomed the hugely positive report from the Neighbourhood Wardens Kirk Thiis and Antony Waterson and agreed to thank them both for their tireless work throughout the year. The Clerk confirmed that both Wardens would be receiving awards at the upcoming Christmas Civic event in December.

6. TO REVIEW THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE'S STRATEGIC AIMS FOR 2025/26

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council has agreed to formulate its strategy for 2025/26 ahead of the budget setting process in January 2025. As part of this, all Parish Council Committees are being asked to agree their priorities for the forthcoming financial year so that this can feed into the Parish Council's budget agreement.

For this current year, the Clerk highlighted that Members had agreed that the five overarching priorities for the Parish Council are as follows:

1. Being an ambitious voice for the city
2. Enhancing the physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish
3. Upholding the Neighbourhood Plan and representing the parish on planning matters
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.

The Committee considered its own priorities for 2025/26 and **agreed** these priorities as follows:

Council priorities 2025/26	Environment priorities 2025/26	Looking Forwards initiative(s)
1. Being an ambitious voice for the city	Engaging with and responding to residents of all ages and backgrounds in environment-related work Mobilise Volunteer groups Work with young people and respond to their concerns	Theme 6: A City with an enriched community life.
2. Enhancing physical and mental wellbeing of our residents and addressing inequalities in our parish	Promote cleaner air, a cleaner river, green spaces, and streets for living across the city. Reduction in light pollution. Reduction in night time noise. Sustainable travel Supporting the creation of a Community Emergency Plan	Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future Theme 5: A City With A Modern And Sustainable Transport Infrastructure
3. Upholding the neighbourhood plan and representing the parish on planning matters.	Work with all relevant committees to ensure the climate and ecological emergencies are considered in all planning	Theme 4: A City with attractive and affordable places to live

	matters. Sustainable housing	
4. Creating a positive environment for businesses and encouraging tourism to improve prosperity of parish	Improve and protect the appearance of the city and its heritage.	Theme 2: A Beautiful and Historic City Theme 3: A City with a diverse and resilient economy
5. Taking action to combat the climate and ecological emergencies.	Be proactive and collaborate with all partners (including Parish Council committees, Durham County Council, residents, developers, landlords, and other businesses) to coordinate our impact on the climate and ecological emergencies and increase community resilience. Encourage sustainable Travel Increased awareness and action on climate change. Tackle the ecological emergency	Theme 1: A City with A Sustainable Future Theme 5: A City With A Modern And Sustainable Transport Infrastructure

7. TO CONSIDER THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE'S BUDGET FOR 2025/26

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council is required to agree its budget and precept request for the forthcoming financial year in January 2025.

In order to assist the Council in agreeing both the budget and precept for 2025/26, the Clerk highlighted that each Committee of the Council is being asked to propose a budget against their individual identified priorities for next year.

As such, Members unanimously **agreed** the following draft budget for 2025/26:

Environment Committee

Item of expenditure	Cost (£)
PRIORITY 1: Additional policing and safety for the parish area	
Enhanced SLA with Durham Police for late night policing	£30,000.00

Safety of Women at Night Hub	£10,000.00
PRIORITY 2: Noise abatement	
Building on the <i>Shhh...11pm to 7am</i> campaign	£2,000.00
PRIORITY 3: Clean Air, Clean and Green City	
Planting budget	£15,000.00
Supporting local climate groups	£2,000.00
PRIORITY 4: Engaging the youth in the work of the Parish Council	
Project working with young people (clean air and climate change)	£2,500.00
PRIORITY 5: Improving the appearance of our City	
Neighbourhood Warden SLA	£10,000.00
PRIORITY 6: Promoting the heritage of our parish area	
Introduction of new blue plaques	£5,000.00
PRIORITY 7: Enhancing the River Wear	
Supporting the work of the Wear Rivers Trust (Education and INNs)	£5,000.00
PRIORITY 8: Emergency planning	
Supporting our community in preparing for emergency events	£2,000.00
TOTAL PROVISION IN 2025-26 AGAINST PRIORITIES	£83,500.00

8. DISCUSSION OF ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PRIORITIES:

7a. To decide:

I) Report by the Durham City Riverscape Community Group on safe entry to the river

Martin Hiles from the Durham City Riverscapes Community Group provided an update on their work clearing litter and invasive species from the River Wear. He raised concerns about the difficulty of accessing and rescuing people from the river in the area between Prebends Weir and the power generating turbine, and requested support from the Committee to address this safety issue, including potentially getting help from the Cathedral authorities who own part of the affected area. The Committee **agreed** to support the Riverscape Community Group in any way it could on this and this included making a contribution towards its public liability insurance payment.

II) Proposal to carry out litter picking in the Fowler's Yard part of the parish area

The Chair raised the concern that Fowler's Yard continues to be a terrible mess in the City. The Chair advised that she had recently visited the area and was shocked to see waste on-street and the impact this is having in attracting vermin. The Chair suggested that she discuss this further with the Durham City Riverscape Community Group to see whether this could be included in the programme of riverbank litter picking. The Committee unanimously **agreed** this and offered to fund any materials needed for this.

The Clerk reported that the County Council regularly carries out litter picking in this area in spite of this being privately owned. Councillor D Freeman also advised that he was aware that the owner of the site was looking to develop this for further student accommodation.

III) Proposal to support the introduction of No Mow May signs in Durham for Spring 2025

The Committee discussed the pros and cons of the "No Mow May" initiative, ultimately deciding against promoting it directly. Instead, they agreed to develop an informational leaflet providing residents with guidance on supporting biodiversity in their own gardens and yards, in coordination with the county council's "Clean and Green" team.

IV) Proposal to support the use of Council-run car parks in the City for EV-charging for residents

The committee considered a request from a resident to allow electric vehicle owners with parking permits to charge their cars for free in city-owned car parks. While sympathetic to the issue, the Committee expressed concerns about the broader infrastructure challenges and logistics for County Council partners to deliver this largescale but **agreed** to provide a supportive letter to the County Council on the matter, on behalf of the resident.

V) Proposal to support the work of the Wear Rivers Trust with the Invasive Non-Native Species project

Claire Dodds from the Wear Rivers Trust discussed their work mapping and removing invasive species like Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed from the river banks. She shared photos of sea trout spotted in Ouseburn Beck, indicating their efforts are having a positive impact. The Committee expressed gratitude for the Trust's work and agreed to continue with its financial support for the Trust's work.

7b. To complete:

I) Update on the work of the BID writer/ fundraising efforts to fund new green roof bus shelters/ topiary statues

The Clerk provided an update on the work of the bid writer who has been engaged to help secure funding for this project. The Clerk advised that the fundraiser has now scoped out the entire project and provided a briefing note outlining the roadmap ahead.

The Clerk advised that the briefing note covers things like identifying suitable locations for the new bus shelters, securing the necessary funding, and project managing the installation.

There are still some unknowns, such as the exact locations for the bus shelters and the availability of funding from sources like Section 106 monies.

The Committee agreed that having the fundraiser act as a project manager, not just a bid writer, is a positive step as it will continue to take work off the council's shoulders.

Overall, the Committee was supportive of the fundraising efforts and the progress being made, while acknowledging there are still some details to be worked out. The Committee **agreed** with the approach of the fundraiser taking on more of a project management role, not just bid writing. The Committee also **agreed** that the contract with the fundraiser should clearly spell out expectations around project management and the final stages of the project.

II) To consider the report by OASES on the Breath Clean Air project in local schools

Councillor R Friederichsen thanked OASES for the high-quality report they produced, which involved surveying children and parents at local schools. The report provided a good overview of potential actions and their cost, difficulty, and impact.

Councillor R Friederichsen advised that he found the open-ended responses from the different schools particularly insightful. Councillor R Friederichsen proposed that the Committee go through the list of recommended interventions from the report and indicate which ones they would like OASES to develop further into a new project proposal for the next financial year.

The Chair advised that many of the suggested interventions were dependent on the county council and required significant funding, so the Parish Council may be limited in what it can directly deliver.

The Committee **agreed** that the OASES report was extremely useful and agreed to consider the list of initiatives at the January meeting of the Environment Committee. The Committee particularly expressed the desire that any new OASES project proposals focused on actions the Parish Council could realistically support and deliver. It was **agreed** to have a more in-depth discussion on this at the January Environment Committee meeting.

III) Update on the production of a Community Emergency Plan

The Chair provided a brief update on the Community Emergency Plan, indicating they were making good progress on it. The Chair noted that the plan was expected to eventually come before the full Parish Council in January. The Committee **agreed** to have a more detailed discussion about the plan at a future Environment Committee meeting.

7c. To note:

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

The Committee welcomed that the Tidy Gardens/ Recycling leaflet had now been distributed alongside other important leaflets across the parish area and thanked the Parish Clerk for his extensive work on this.

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

The Committee **noted** the work that had been done on bulb planting and the purchase of new trees as part of the parish council's efforts to green the parish area.

III) Update on the scheme of planting across the parish for next Spring/Summer season.

The Committee **noted** that it was still awaiting confirmation of costs for both Spring and Summer planting next year with the new floral towers ordered.

9. AOB

The Committee **noted** its support for a report on a proposal for a blue plaque commemorating former Crossgate Councillor Sam Greene to go forward to the next Full Council meeting.

10. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Tuesday 14th January 2025 at 1pm
Tuesday 11th February 2025 at 1pm
Tuesday 11th March 2025 at 1pm

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

Signed,



**Chair of the Parish Council's Environment Committee
(14th January 2025)**