

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Committee held on Tuesday 8th April 2025 at 13:00pm via Zoom

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

Also present: Parish Clerk A Shanley, Councillor E Ashby and Ms Hannah Shepherd (Durham University).

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors V Ashfield, L Brown and N Brown.

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 11th MARCH 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th March 2025 were unanimously agreed as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

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

Councillor E Ashby advised that she was attending the meeting with a general interest in all Agenda items. Councillor E Ashby also expressed her hope that the Parish Council might do something to further a planting scheme at the planting bed at Gilesgate roundabout.

5. TO CONSIDER THE LATEST NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN REPORT

The Committee warmly welcomed the latest excellent report from the Neighbourhood Wardens. The Committee particularly noted the exceptional work by Kirk and Ant in issuing 40 on-the-spot littering fines in the City and expressed concerns that this seemed to be concentrated on certain areas like North Road.

Councillor D Freeman also commended the Wardens for their work and highlighted their support in dealing with encampments and needles on the riverbanks, which he and the Clerk had spent a great deal of time on over the last few weeks following complaints from local residents.

The Committee sent its usual thanks to the Wardens for their work over the last month. The Chair highlighted that she was particularly pleased to be able to attend the forthcoming annual meeting of the City of Durham parish where she was aware that Kirk and Ant would be presented with the Citizen of the Year Awards.

6. DISCUSSION OF ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PRIORITIES:

6a. To decide:

I) To consider the responses received to date from DCC and other Local Authorities in the LA7 in relation to the proposed new Tees Valley Energy Recovery Facility (TVERF) in Teesside.

The Committee reviewed the responses received from Durham County Council and Hartlepool Council following the Parish Council's letter relating to the TVERF.

The Committee felt that the response from Hartlepool Council had been more informative than that which was received from Durham County Council on this issue and were satisfied with the new information provided as part of this response.

The Clerk highlighted that the Parish Council had requested a meeting with Alan Patrickson at DCC on this matter and advised that Alan has expressed his happiness to meet with the Council on this issue.

Councillor D Freeman highlighted that the County Council's position on the TVERF was unlikely to change, regardless of any political changes after the upcoming local elections or any objections from the Parish Council.

The Committee **agreed** that the concerns around recycling waste were still highly pertinent as part of this discussion; most notably due to the North East region lagging so far behind other regions in terms of recycling rates. The Committee agreed that this should be a matter for the new Council to pursue through a meeting with the new Corporate Director at DCC and that the meeting should have more focus on what the Parish Council and County Council could do collaboratively to promote more waste recycling, rather than trying to reverse the TVERF decision.

II) To discuss the future plans for the planting bed at Gilesgate roundabout

The Chair described the current bare, muddy planting bed at the Gilesgate roundabout which was formerly used as a specially-designed floral planting area. The Chair expressed her desire to do something to improve its appearance.

The Clerk highlighted that the Parish Council was contacted about this last year and at the time were quoted £3,500-£4,000 for these works. The Clerk advised that DCC has asked if the Parish Council might be willing to fund the planting of this area and DCC will continue to do this. On the basis of the funding, the Parish Council would be able to select their own design.

The Clerk updated Members that, in the absence of funding for this planting, the County Council has indicated that it will likely plant sustainable green planting, but no flowering plants, along the roundabout as a more cost-effective solution compared to the elaborate floral displays in the past.

Councillor E Ashby's suggested that local garden centres may wish to compete to produce a design of the Parish Council's logo in the bed.

The Committee acknowledged the high costs of any elaborate planting scheme, and decided they would likely need to accept the County Council's more basic planting plan for now. The Committee **agreed** to revisit this issue with the new parish council after the upcoming elections, in case they wanted to pursue additional improvements to the roundabout planting.

III) Consideration of a project to encourage landlords to take good care of the external appearance of their property

The Chair highlighted a recent case of a student property within her division, describing this as one of the worst examples she had seen in her time on the Council, with the exterior in very poor condition. The Chair highlighted that this had been like this for approximately 3 years and this had highlighted the very serious ongoing issue of some poor housing standards in the student market.

The Clerk advised, on the specific example raised, that Listed building consent had been granted approximately 3 years ago on the property for the repair works, and he had immediately highlighted this to the agent and planning enforcement teams who have confirmed that works are in the pipeline to resolve the issues raised.

The Committee also expressed concerns about the internal condition of properties as well as the external appearance.

On the wider issues of poor standards in HMOs, Hannah Shepherd spoke at length about the upcoming renter's rights bill and how this could potentially help address issues like this, by imposing stricter housing standards and maintenance requirements on landlords.

The Chair very much welcomed some aspects of the renter's rights bill in addressing some of the daily concerns Councillors are aware of in terms of the condition of HMO properties. The Chair also expressed a desire for the new Parish Council to take this matter forward and for a local project to be investigated in order to address this matter.

6b. To complete:

I) Update re: fundraising efforts to fund new green roof bus shelters

The Clerk confirmed that the Parish Council's fundraiser Claire had now submitted a full application for S106 funding for new green roof bus shelters within the Elvet and Gilesgate division (1 @ Church Street and 2 @ Lower Claypath) and the Clerk advised that the Council is awaiting a determination on this application.

Councillor D Freeman advised that he expected the decision on this application to be after the May elections as it was highly unlikely that the Section 106 Working Group would be meeting to determine these applications ahead of that time.

The Clerk advised that he would keep the Committee updated on this issue.

II) Update on the proposals to reduce air pollution in Church Street and surrounding streets

The Clerk noted that the Committee had previously agreed on certain recommendations to the County Council, including promoting the use of zero-emission buses, contacting the North East Mayor, and proposing a congestion zone around Elvet.

The Clerk raised a concern about whether it was appropriate for the current Parish Council to be making a significant policy decision like proposing a congestion zone, given that half the Council Members would be changing after the upcoming elections.

The Committee discussed this, with Rupert Friederichsen and David supporting the idea of the current council putting forward a motion to the new council to prioritise addressing air pollution in various parts of the city.

The Clerk suggested the Committee should take a more data-driven, evidence-based approach to developing specific proposals, rather than just writing a letter with general recommendations.

The Committee **agreed** that the Chair and Councillor Friederichsen should work on drafting a motion for the full parish council meeting, which would then be passed on to the new Council after the elections.

6c. To note:

I) Update following the meeting regarding the Durham City Green Corridor project being delivered by DCC and the National Trust

Committee Members who attended the recent meeting with the National Trust on the Durham City Green Corridor project expressed disappointment that the project had been running for 3 years now and yet still appeared to be at an exploratory phase, with very little “on-the-ground” impact being made.

The Committee **agreed** to continue to engage positively with National Trust colleagues on this project.

II) Update on the Wear Rivers Trust/ Durham City Riverscape Community projects – to include feedback from the recent Wear Rivers Trust meeting.

The Chair reported that she was very impressed with the work that the Wear Rivers Trust is doing, supported by the Parish Council.

The Chair advised that the Wear Rivers Trust is now able to work within the parish at Pelaw Woods, which was finally settled after 3 years of negotiating. The Chair advised that the Trust have already done a litter pick and are beginning work on removing balsam.

The Chair expressed her upset to hear that there is bird flu, mostly affecting the swans, in the area and further concerning issue is the increased sightings of invasive mink along the river, which are killing off water voles and ducks. There is no mechanism to quantify the level of this invasion.

The Chair reiterated her thanks for the work of the Wear Rivers Trust and the continued strength of the Riverscape community, thanks to their enthusiasm.

7. AOB

The Chair took the opportunity to thank all Members of the Committee over this term of the Parish Council and to express her deep gratitude and pride at the exceptional amount of work which the Committee had delivered. The Chair advised that it had been a real honour to be the Chair of the Parish Council's Environment Committee.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

TBC

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
(24th June 2025)**