

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the City of Durham Parish Council's Environment Committee meeting held on Tuesday 8th July 2025 at 10:00am via Zoom

Present: Councillors C. Lattin (Chair), V. Ashfield (Vice Chair), G. Bignardi, F. Robinson and S. Walker.

Also present: Parish Clerk A. Shanley, Councillors R Cornwell and D Freeman and Linda Lovell, Janet George, Steve Lindsay (members of the public).

Also present: Parish Clerk A Shanley, (member of the public).

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor G. Holland and the Chair accepted Councillor S Walker attending as Councillor Holland's substitute for the purposes of this meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th June 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Members of the public (Ms George, Ms Lovell, and Mr Lindsay) addressed the Committee under agenda item 6a(i) (Elvet Waterside consultation). Their comments are recorded under that agenda item.

5. NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN REPORT

The Clerk advised that a positive new report had been received from Anthony Watterson, covering issues arising during the student move-out period. Members noted the University's appreciation for the additional Warden provision and commended the work undertaken.

The Committee agreed to write formally thanking the Neighbourhood Wardens for their continued efforts.

6. ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PRIORITIES

6a. To decide

- i) Consultation on the proposed restoration of the former bowling green at Elvet Waterside (process)**

The Chair reminded Members that discussion should focus on the consultation process rather than the project content. Councillor Ashfield clarified that Full Council had considered and accepted plans with suggested alterations, and that not all suggestions

appeared in the latest drawings; therefore, Members had not approved the final content as now presented.

Members and residents raised strong concerns about the consultation process: limited notice (one week), technical problems on-site (devices not working), inconsistent messaging about the end date, lack of a visible online response form at first, and the absence of proper data capture (no names/backgrounds of respondents taken). Residents reported that feedback acknowledgements were missing initially, and that the extension to 15 July was insufficient if the format itself was unchanged.

Public participants (Ms George, Ms Lovell, Mr Lindsay) and Members described the approach as top-down; they asked for a bottom-up process engaging residents' groups (including those who have maintained the site) to explore what local people actually want for the green, instead of consulting only on a pre-determined scheme. Ms Lovell recalled decades of local campaigning to keep the site for public leisure and referenced historic petitions (thousands of signatures) for family-friendly use, seating and simple amenities; she noted the site's popularity with visiting families and dog-walkers along the river loop.

Councillor Ashfield relayed comments from the "Pointers" (city volunteers who meet visitors): frequent requests from visitors for places for small children to run around near the river, with Pointers indicating little support for a full adult gym at that spot. She also highlighted Durham's demographics (student-heavy; many older residents; relatively few mid-age adults) and argued that needs for younger children were being under-weighted. Process shortcomings cited included unclear end dates (some staff said "today," others "a week"), lack of on-site recording, and no online form visible at the time of the event.

The Clerk clarified that the Parish Council's earlier letter related purely to Section 106 funding arrangements and noted the Council had asked for more children's equipment, retention of the hedge, planting to mitigate material choices, picnic benches, marketing of the former toilet block as a café with toilets available for non-paying users, and an offer to help with consultation. He confirmed DCC officers had said all feedback was being collated, and apologised that acknowledgements had not reached some respondents initially.

Following debate (including views that officers believe they had already considered demographic factors and alternative provision elsewhere), the Chair proposed a formal representation about process.

The Committee agreed to: instruct the Clerk, working with the Chair, to write to Durham County Council setting out concerns that the consultation method was not fit for purpose; to request genuinely participatory engagement with local groups (and visitors' representatives) before finalising the scheme; and to seek clarity on how feedback will be recorded, acknowledged and reflected in revisions.

ii) Wear Rivers Trust – balsam eradication along the River Wear

The Chair reported that, after years of delay, DCC had now issued an agreement allowing the Wear Rivers Trust (WRT) to work on Council-owned land; this followed recent escalation and recognition that balsam was already in flower at some locations, making timely action urgent. The Clerk welcomed the update, noting previous

backwards-and-forwards over permissions (including an episode where a licence charge had reportedly been considered just to pull balsam).

The Clerk confirmed prior Parish funding of ~£1,800 for volunteer recruitment, with ~£4,800 still available in the Parish's river improvement budget for further WRT priorities (education/training acknowledged, but on-the-ground taskforce seen as most critical). Members reaffirmed invasive species as a key focus alongside riverscape litter work.

The Committee agreed to: welcome confirmation of DCC permission; continue to support WRT's programme (including considering additional spend from the remaining budget if required); and receive further updates as the season progresses.

iii) Community Emergency Plan – proposed use of funding

Ahead of the next day's Emergency Plan meeting, the Chair reported that resident groups wish volunteers to be readily identifiable (high-visibility jackets). Some Finance discussion had queried this priority, but the Chair supported it given volunteers' active roles. The Clerk suggested ID-specific hi-viz to link jackets to individual wearers.

Councillor Walker raised safeguarding/liability concerns about issuing Parish-branded hi-viz to unvetted individuals, noting many organisations check references/DBS for volunteers. Members discussed balancing visibility with oversight. The Clerk reminded Members of £4,000 available this year and that he is exploring Apex radios (as used for ShopWatch) so "places of safety" could communicate during power or signal failures.

The Committee agreed to: defer a purchase decision on hi-viz (and any branding/ID scheme) until after the Emergency Plan meeting with volunteers; ask the Clerk to continue scoping Apex radios (coverage, functionality, costs, charging) and report back; and revisit both items at the next Committee with volunteer feedback.

iv) Criteria for an award highlighting poorly maintained private rented properties (external appearance)

Members considered the previously mooted "Rotten Tomatoes" idea. Concerns were raised about tone, potential legal challenge, and the limits of judging only from externals (while acknowledging internals matter more to tenants, externals matter to the heritage streetscape). A moderated, light-touch, constructive approach was favoured: showcase good and poor practice side-by-side (e.g., on Parish channels / Durham City Matters), focused on external presentation (front doors, frontages, planting) across the city, not strictly rentals only.

Councillor Cornwell urged liaison with Durham Students' Union (DSU) given students' stake in housing standards; the Clerk noted past schemes (e.g., bulb giveaways) showed students do care and suggested working with DSU on both highlighting good examples and supporting improvements (including issues around garden maintenance responsibilities in tenancy agreements). The Chair proposed contacting Hannah (University lead now in post) and identifying the new DSU housing officer when appointed.

The Committee agreed to: progress a public "good & poor practice" strand (externals only), co-designed with DSU; avoid adversarial "awards" framing; and invite

residents/students to submit examples, with equal emphasis on celebrating good stewardship.

v) Proposed recycling project to eradicate single-use plastic water bottles (drinking water fountains)

The Chair proposed reviving work on public water fountains (including dog bowl, drinking spout, and bottle-filler) inspired by a Northumberland exemplar. Previous obstacles centred on water costs from Northumbrian Water (NW); Members noted water demand would likely be high in Durham (large student/visitor footfall) but also that bills are rising. The Clerk recalled earlier offers from Prince Bishops and the Indoor Market to host; Members felt a secure location is important and that the Market Place may face design/traffic objections. Millennium Square was suggested as central and practical.

Councillor Bignardi queried refill availability in cafés/bars and at DCC facilities; the Clerk noted free tap water is a mandatory licensing condition, but many people prefer not to enter premises solely to request a refill; a visible public unit would normalise refill culture and cut plastic. Councillor Freeman supported approaching NW (regional HQ in Durham), observing that sewage charges wouldn't apply to fountain outflow and urging a secure site; the Clerk agreed and favoured working with NW + private sector first, given Market Place complexities. Members also referenced the railway station fountain as a local example and discussed potential retailer engagement (e.g., discouraging bottled water sales). Budget would need identifying this year, or external support.

The Committee agreed to: ask the Clerk to open discussions with Northumbrian Water on costs/partnership; sound out host options (with Millennium Square as a preferred first approach); and report on feasibility (including usage insights from Durham station).

6b. To complete

i) Plans to launch the next round of funding appeals to local landlords

The Chair and Vice-Chair scheduled in-person landlord/agent visits for Friday (2:00pm) to relaunch contributions, meeting at Millennium Place and covering agents around Elvet. The Clerk noted the University (via Dasha) had indicated £2,500 towards Green Move-In; Members agreed this would be a helpful proof-point when approaching agents.

The Committee agreed to: proceed with Friday's agent outreach, using the University's pledge as leverage, and to invite additional volunteers to join.

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

The Clerk updated that DCC Clean & Green cannot maintain the roofs; however, Andrew Adike Horticulture is willing to undertake ongoing maintenance, with an emerging estimate of around £1,500/year for two visits across three shelters (exact figure to follow). Given an added cost to the Parish, any decision would go to Full

Council. Members discussed the need to keep the shelters as a Council asset so DCC remains responsible for structural repairs (e.g., broken panes), with the Parish only taking on the green roof maintenance; the Clerk will put this in writing for the application. The Clerk also referenced that the funding bid remains under consideration and that related professional time (by Claire) is currently on hold (5 of 20 budgeted days used) pending outcome. Members noted potential changes to Section 106 governance by the new administration as a wider context to watch.

The Committee agreed to: await the maintenance costings from the contractor; ensure asset/repair responsibility sits with DCC; and, once figures are confirmed, refer to Full Council for approval.

iii) Update on proposed blue plaque commemorating former Crossgate Councillor Sam Green

The Clerk had approached the National LGBTQ+ Museum (via Councillor Cornwell's suggestion) and received three potential names for an unveiling: Lisa Power, Michael Cashman (to be approached also via Mary Foy), and Peter Tatchell. Members discussed sensitivities around potential controversy; other names (e.g., Miriam Margolyes) were suggested. The Clerk asked Members to help ensure no one connected with Sam is overlooked for invitations.

The Committee agreed to: continue pursuing a VIP unveiling, develop a draft invitation pro-forma, consult on invite lists (to capture contemporaries of Sam locally), and report back on availability of the suggested figures.

iv) Need for volunteers to support maintenance of the Viaduct planters

Members noted current volunteer shortages (end-of-term student unavailability). Councillor Ashfield proposed tidy-only work over summer for certain planters (many hold perennials), with limited replanting now to avoid watering burdens during potential drought. She listed priority sites needing adoption/tidy: bottom of Mitchell Street, bottom of New Street, and end of Atherton Terrace, plus planters on the Elvet side of Sutton Street; replanting this week at Allergate (Hanover Court) and "the Culverts" (pubs to assist). Ideas for new helpers included the Waddington Street Centre and contacts at Hild Bede; it was noted Unite are no longer at Rushford Court. Councillor Walker recounted prior issues with plants purchased for Rushford planters not appearing as intended. The Clerk offered to draft a fresh volunteer call once Councillor Ashfield circulates a location list; possible named residents were mentioned for approach.

The Committee agreed to ask Councillor Ashfield to circulate the full list of planter locations; ask the Clerk to issue a targeted volunteer appeal (adopt-a-planter/tidy for summer, with replanting timed for September student return); and to approach suggested partners (e.g., Waddington Street Centre, Hild Bede) for support.

7. AOB

Updates were provided on ongoing clean air monitoring and river pollution issues. The Clerk confirmed these would return to future agendas for fuller discussion.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Tuesday 9th September 2025 at 10:00am via Zoom
Tuesday 14th October 2025 at 10:00am via Zoom
Tuesday 11th November 2025 at 10:00am via Zoom

There being no further business, the Chair thanked all participants for their attendance and 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
(9th September 2025)**