

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the City of Durham Parish Council's Environment Committee meeting held on Tuesday 9th September 2025 at 10:00am via Zoom

Present: Councillors C. Lattin (Chair), V. Ashfield, F. Robinson and T Cleaver.

Also present: Adam Shanley (Parish Clerk) and Councillors R Cornwell and D Freeman

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed Members and attendees to the first meeting following the summer recess. Apologies for absence were received from Councillor G. Bignardi.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 8 JULY 2025

The Clerk confirmed that the minutes had been circulated. Councillor T. Cleaver advised that his apologies for absence on 24 June and 8 July had not been recorded; the Clerk undertook to amend this. With that correction, the minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No members of the public had registered to speak. The Clerk clarified that Councillor R. Cornwell and Councillor D Freeman were in attendance in a personal capacity to contribute to specific discussions.

5. NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN REPORT

The Chair noted with regret the continued absence of Warden Kirk and commended Wardens Brad and colleagues for maintaining high standards. Councillor V. Ashfield proposed sending a further card of support to Warden Kirk on behalf of the Committee. The Clerk agreed to arrange this via Ant.

The Clerk reported at length on issues at Fowler's Yard, particularly the unsightly and costly containers used as staff welfare facilities. He advised these had cost the County Council around £15,000 to date and had created environmental concerns. Senior officers had now committed to their removal.

Further discussion covered the deteriorated bin store behind the indoor market, where minor refurbishment was under consideration, and the potential use of land opposite Leonard's Coffee Shop for outdoor seating. The Clerk reported positive responses from officers, welcomed by local traders.

The Chair thanked the Clerk for his persistence and Members agreed to continue pressing for longer-term waste solutions at Fowler's Yard.

6a. ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PRIORITIES – TO DECIDE

I) To approve the content of this year's student recycling leaflet and "What to do if you have a local issue in Durham" leaflet.

The Chair introduced this item, noting that the student recycling leaflet required urgent approval before the start of the academic year. The Clerk explained that feedback had been received from a number of stakeholders, including residents, landlords and the University's sustainability contacts. In particular, the current "Z-fold" design was criticised, with reports that key recycling messages were obscured and that the leaflet was less effective than the previous A4 two-sided design which students could pin to a noticeboard.

The Clerk advised that while the leaflet's incentive of free bulb distribution had generated significant uptake and was clearly being read, there was concern that the recycling instructions themselves were being lost. Councillor V. Ashfield supported a return to the simpler design, with one side dedicated to recycling information and the other side to supplementary items such as the bulbs campaign and anti-contamination messaging. She further suggested that a QR code linking to Durham County Council's A-Z household waste guide be included, as this resource was particularly clear for identifying where specific items should be disposed of.

Members discussed whether the leaflet should continue to be branded as student-focused. Councillor S. [surname] and Councillor T. Cleaver noted that many older residents also struggled with recycling correctly and felt that the leaflet should be more inclusive in its tone. The Clerk responded that this could be achieved by softening the "student" emphasis whilst still recognising the University's support.

On distribution, Councillor V. Ashfield proposed that residence associations co-ordinate door-knocking in student areas to explain the leaflet, which she argued was more effective than simply posting. The Chair noted that "Livers Out" leaflets were due for distribution and suggested combining efforts. Councillor R. Cornwell confirmed that Crossgate Community Partnership volunteers were already preparing to deliver and would likely assist. The Clerk

cautioned that the professional delivery company did not distinguish between student and non-student households, but agreed to hold back surplus copies for use in hotspots later in the year.

The Committee also considered the "What to do if you have a local issue in Durham" leaflet. The Clerk confirmed that this would need revision following the University's decision to withdraw from its contract with private security (Mitey) and instead redirect funding to additional Police patrols. The Chair and Clerk were working to update references to the emergency plan, as arrangements had now been finalised.

The Committee agreed to: instruct the Clerk to prepare a revised draft recycling leaflet in A4 two-sided format, incorporating a QR code to the County Council's waste guide, removing excessive student-only branding, and adding further emphasis on "wash and squash" anti-contamination advice. The Clerk would circulate the draft promptly for Members' comments before print. The Committee also agreed to update the "What to do if you have a local issue in Durham" leaflet to reflect the new policing arrangements and to edit the emergency plan information accordingly.

II) Purchase of bulbs and fruit trees as part of the Committee's planting budget + wider discussion on use of planting budget.

The Chair reminded Members of last year's successful bulb scheme, which had included free distribution to students and residents alongside planting in community spaces. Approximately £3,000 had been spent. The Clerk reported that £4,000 remained unspent in the planting budget due to the failure of Durham County Council to supply the ordered three-tier planters. He suggested that autumn planting of bulbs and fruit trees would be an appropriate use of the budget.

Councillor V. Ashfield referred to her earlier action plan on planters, noting that some had gone missing entirely, including one recently planted by students which had since disappeared. She proposed that some funds be allocated to replacing planters, with potential new sites including May Street. She also confirmed that the University Gardening Society had re-established contact and was willing to assist again, which Members welcomed.

Discussion turned to fruit trees. Councillor V. Ashfield advised that resident associations had previously suggested suitable locations, such as Hallgarth and Lawson Terrace, and proposed that they again be consulted for this year's planting. The Clerk argued strongly for prioritising trees over additional planters, given their greater long-term ecological value and lower maintenance. He suggested distributing free fruit trees for planting in private

gardens, as well as in public spaces, which would extend community ownership and visibility. Councillor S. [surname] and other Members supported this approach.

The Chair emphasised that planting needed to be environmentally responsible, ruling out tulips which had performed poorly in past years. Ms Liz Brown had already suggested a list of environmentally-friendly bulbs, including alliums and native species, which Members endorsed.

The Committee agreed to: allocate £3,000 to bulb purchases, strictly environmentally friendly species, and £2,000 to fruit trees for both public and private planting, to be distributed through residence associations. The balance of the budget would be held for replacement planters. Councillor V. Ashfield undertook to circulate her planter action plan to Members, and the Clerk would liaise with Ms Brown to finalise bulb orders.

III) Proposal to fund a new battery for Merryoaks Community Hall to link in with its solar panels.

The Chair explained that Merryoaks Community Hall has received a grant, but the condition is that they need to secure additional funding from elsewhere to complete the project. Carole is particularly supportive of this initiative as Merryoaks is one of the designated places of safety in the parish's emergency plan, and having an independent power source would be beneficial.

The Clerk noted that the Parish Council has a budget of £2,500 allocated for a "Clean Air Project" that could potentially be used to support the Merryoaks battery project. He suggested the Parish Council could provide half of the £4,800 the hall needs, with the expectation that Merryoaks would match the other half from their own funds.

The Committee discussed this proposal, with Councillors Ashfield and Freeman expressing support for the idea of providing partial funding rather than the full amount, as Merryoaks has demonstrated their ability to secure grants. The Committee **agreed** that contributing £2,500 towards the battery project would be an appropriate use of the Parish Council's funds. Overall, the committee was very supportive of this initiative to help Merryoaks Community Hall become more self-sufficient and resilient, particularly given its role as an emergency place of safety for the community.

IV) Proposal to adopt the Gilesgate duckpond project (fully funded through DCC Councillors).

The Clerk reported that Durham County Council ward councillors had agreed to fund in full the improvement works at Gilesgate Duckpond. Adoption by the

Parish Council would ensure future oversight and integration into the Parish's environmental projects. Councillor V. Ashfield welcomed the proposal, noting its ecological and amenity value.

The Committee agreed to adopt the Gilesgate Duckpond project formally, subject to the County Council's completion of initial works, thereby committing to its ongoing support.

V) Update on the supply of emergency boxes to places of safety as part of the community emergency plan project.

The Chair reported that, now that the emergency plan is fully established, the Parish Council has agreed to support providing similar emergency supply boxes to every residents' association that has identified a place of safety.

The residents' associations have been conducting risk assessments and surveys to determine what supplies they would need in their boxes.

The Chair noted that the residents' associations have been very enthusiastic and responsive, with orders for the boxes coming in quickly. She said the only area still outstanding is SNCF, but she plans to follow up with them. The Chair and Clerk will then work together to collate all the orders and procure the necessary supplies, such as loudhailers and A-boards, to distribute to the various places of safety.

The Committee was pleased to hear about the progress being made and the residents' associations' engagement in this initiative to better prepare the community for emergencies. Carole and Adam were commended for their work in supporting this effort.

VI) Proposed recycling project to eradicate single-use plastic water bottles in the City.

The Chair returned to the Committee's aspiration to reduce reliance on bottled water by providing public fountains with refill facilities. She noted that this had been raised previously but delayed by uncertainties over water charges. The Clerk recalled that Northumbrian Water had earlier indicated high costs, but suggested renewed discussions, particularly as their regional headquarters was in Durham.

Members considered possible sites. The Market Place was felt to be problematic due to heritage considerations and traffic issues, but Millennium Square was suggested as central and suitable. The Clerk also referenced earlier offers from Prince Bishops and the Indoor Market to host a unit, though Members felt an outdoor location was preferable. Councillor V. Ashfield highlighted the

popularity of refill schemes abroad and stressed that free tap water availability in licensed premises was not a substitute for visible public provision.

The Committee **agreed** to instruct the Clerk to enter discussions with Northumbrian Water on potential partnership and cost-sharing, to sound out Millennium Square and other potential host sites, and to report back on feasibility, including insights from usage of the existing station fountain.

VII) Working together with local landlords to support improvements to Boyd Street.

Councillor V Ashfield reported that she and the Chair had met with a landlord on Boyd Street who has been proactive in trying to improve the appearance of the street. This landlord has already moved the bins to the side of the properties rather than having them on the front of the street.

The landlord proposed two ideas that the Committee discussed. First, he offered to contribute half the cost (around £15 per property) if the committee could provide the other half to install attractive plastic hanging baskets on the properties he manages on the street. The committee was generally supportive of this idea as a low-cost way to improve the street's appearance.

The second proposal was to remove a section of fencing between two properties at the end of Boyd Street, creating a small green space in the middle. The landlord suggested placing one of the Committee's three-tier planters in this central location, which would be visible from the end of the street. Victoria and Carole **agreed** to follow up with the owner of the other property to gauge their interest in this idea.

Overall, the committee was pleased with the landlord's proactive approach and saw these as positive, low-cost opportunities to enhance the streetscape on Boyd Street through public-private partnership.

6b. ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PRIORITIES – TO COMPLETE

i) Update on funding appeals to local landlords

The Clerk provided an overview of the funding raised through the annual appeals to local landlords. He noted that three years ago the total was around £4,000, which included contributions from the university. Last year, the total increased to just under £6,000, with the university again increasing their contribution. This year, the total has reached just under £6,000 from the private landlords, bringing the total funds available to over £9,800.

The Committee discussed how to best utilize these funds. Victoria and Adam agreed they should set aside around £4,000 to cover the costs of the extra

waste collections during the student move-out periods, as they had done the previous year. This would leave around £2,000 remaining from the current funds.

The Committee debated whether to use the remaining funds to provide gardening equipment or other support to help students better maintain their rented properties' front gardens, as this has been an ongoing issue. However, they ultimately decided the priority should be to continue funding the extra waste collections, as they felt that was the best use of the money raised specifically for clean and green initiatives.

The Committee **agreed** they need to continue publicising the appeals to landlords, as they were pleased to see the increased participation this year, and wanted to build on that momentum going forward.

i) Update on fundraising for green-roof bus shelters

The Clerk reported that the application for the funding to install green roofs on bus shelters is progressing well. He noted that they have satisfied the final requirement around maintenance, having secured a contractor who will conduct 20 visits per year to maintain the green roofs.

Overall, the Clerk expressed optimism that with the support of the local residents' groups, the two county councillors, and the public transport team, they should be able to get this application approved next month.

Update on blue plaque commemorating former Councillor Sam Green

The Clerk provided an update on the plans for the plaque unveiling event on November 16th. The Clerk advised that the Parish Council had secured the attendance of Sir Ed Davey, leader of the Liberal Democrat Party, to unveil the plaque at late Councillor Green's former home.

The Committee discussed the logistics around this event, with the Clerk suggesting a shorter 5-minute unveiling ceremony to maximize the 45 minutes they have with Sir Ed, followed by a reception at nearby Hild/Bede College.

The committee was overall very supportive of the plans and the opportunity to celebrate Councillor Green's legacy in this way.

iv) Volunteers for Viaduct planters

Councillor V. Ashfield reminded Members of the ongoing challenge of securing volunteers for maintenance of planters across the Viaduct area. She noted that during the summer she had focused on tidying and lightly replanting existing planters with perennials, as heavy replanting risked creating a significant

watering burden. She highlighted priority sites still in need of adoption, including planters at the bottom of Mitchell Street, New Street, and Atherton Terrace, as well as those on Sutton Street.

The Clerk advised that new contacts had been made with student groups, including the Gardening Society, and that the Waddington Street Centre had expressed willingness to support further. Members discussed the importance of Committee leadership in coordinating these volunteers and noted the value of encouraging students to adopt planters under light supervision from residents.

The Committee **agreed** to issue a renewed appeal for volunteers through residents' groups and student societies, with Members encouraged to adopt planters themselves where possible and to circulate Councillor V. Ashfield's planter action plan to inform priorities.

v) Drop-in with local primary schools on clean air initiatives

The Clerk reported on plans to hold a drop-in session with local primary schools to discuss clean air initiatives. He noted that the project aimed to raise awareness among children about pollution reduction, walking to school, and sustainable travel. The Chair welcomed the initiative, observing that instilling awareness at a young age could have long-term benefits for community behaviour. Councillors expressed support for the idea and looked forward to updates once a date was confirmed.

The Committee agreed to support the planned drop-in event with primary schools and to receive further updates as arrangements progressed.

6c. TO NOTE – Update on the Tees Valley Energy Recovery Facility (TVERF)

Councillor G Holland noted that several years ago he had suggested the committee visit one of these energy recovery facilities in the Tees Valley area to see firsthand how they operate and the level of emissions/air quality associated with them. He emphasized that these are very efficient plants that process large quantities of waste and convert it into energy, powering places like Billingham.

Councillor G Holland felt it was important for more committee members to visit one of these facilities to better understand the process, as there seemed to be a split among the County Councillors on supporting the facility. David acknowledged that the existing plant is reaching the end of its life, and the proposed new plant would be even cleaner. However, David was unsure if the

current administration in Durham would ultimately decide to move forward with the new facility, as they are reviewing all capital expenditures.

The Committee **agreed** it would be valuable to organise a visit to one of the existing Tees Valley energy recovery facilities so members could see the operations firsthand and better inform themselves on the pros and cons of this type of waste-to-energy technology.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair invited items of other business. No substantive matters were raised. Members briefly noted that the issue of security provision at Durham Bus Station had been raised by Councillor F Robinson with confirmation from Councillor D Freeman that the reduction in security staff had contributed to recent deterioration. Members expressed concern and agreed this should be kept under review.

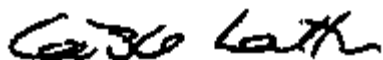
The Committee agreed to: note the concerns about security at Durham Bus Station and to revisit the issue if further evidence emerged.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Tuesday 14th October 2025 at 10:30am
Tuesday 11th November 2025 at 10:30am

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

Signed,



Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council's Environment Committee
14th October 2025