

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the City of Durham Parish Council's Environment Committee meeting held on Tuesday 10th February 2026 at 10:30pm in the Waiting Room, The Miners Hall. Flass Street. Durham. DH1 4BE.

Present: Councillors C Lattin (in the **Chair**), V Ashfield, G Bignardi, T Cleaver, F Robinson and S Walker.

Also present: Mr Adam Shanley (Parish Clerk) and Ms Claire Dodds (Wear Rives Trust).

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor G Holland. The Chair accepted that Councillor S Walker was attending today's meeting as a substitute for Councillor G Holland.

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 13th JANUARY 2026

The minutes of the meeting held on 13th January 2026 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

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

None received.

5. REPORT FROM WEAR RIVERS TRUST ON PROPOSALS TO MONITOR THE QUALITY OF THE RIVER WEAR

The Chair welcomed Ms Claire Dodds, project officer for the Wear Rivers Trust, to the meeting and advised that Claire was attending to update the Committee on the work of the Wear Rivers Trust as well as to present a funding proposal.

Members were reminded that protecting and enhancing the River Wear has been identified as a key strategic objective of the Parish Council within its forthcoming programme of work.

The Chair highlighted that the Parish Council recognises that this objective cannot be delivered in isolation and has therefore developed partnerships with

organisations including Durham City Riverscape Community Group and the Wear Rivers Trust to address significant environmental issues affecting the river.

In setting its budget for 2025–26, the Parish Council approved a dedicated fund to support the work of partner organisations. Approximately £6,000 remains available within the current financial year, with a further allocation of £2,500 agreed for 2026–27.

Claire began by noting in particular that Durham County Council has granted consent for the Trust to carry out works at Pelaw Woods, representing a significant and welcome step forward in progressing environmental improvements

Claire advised that the Wear Rivers Trust, established in 2008, is an environmental charity dedicated to protecting, enhancing and restoring the River Wear and its wider catchment. The Trust operates across the full length of the catchment, from upland headwaters through rural and urban areas to the estuary, and works in partnership with landowners, statutory bodies, local authorities, environmental organisations and volunteers. Its activities include habitat restoration, water quality improvement, public engagement and coordination of the Wear Catchment Partnership.

Claire advised that a central element of its work is addressing the ecological challenge posed by invasive non-native species, which threaten biodiversity, destabilise riverbanks, alter habitats and, in some cases, present risks to infrastructure and public health. Claire presented a funding proposal for the 2026–27 financial year focused on the Durham Peninsula area, the total funding request amounts to approximately £6,000.

The proposal sought to enhance capacity for monitoring water quality, training staff and volunteers in pesticide application, undertaking targeted spraying of invasive species, conducting site surveys, and recruiting and coordinating volunteers.

The Chair reminded Members that concerns have been raised locally regarding water quality in the River Wear and its tributaries. Claire advised that her proposal includes the purchase of three water quality testing kits and the delivery of a training session for established volunteer groups, namely Friends of Keping, Durham City Riverscapes and Durham Amateur Rowing Club.

Claire advised that these groups would undertake monthly monitoring, record results using a dedicated application and escalate any identified breaches to the appropriate regulatory bodies, such as the Environment Agency or Northumbrian Water. This initiative would provide baseline data and support evidence gathering for future funding applications.

Claire also highlighted that the proposal also addresses current capacity constraints within the Trust relating to the spraying of Giant Hogweed, Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam. As previously trained personnel are no longer available, Claire advised that funding is being sought for one staff member and three volunteers to obtain PA1 and PA6W spraying qualifications

Claire highlighted that this would increase the Trust's ability to carry out treatment works in Pelaw Wood, Flass Vale, Aykley/Hopper Wood and the wider Durham Peninsula. Provision is also included for the purchase of glyphosate and for staff time to undertake targeted spraying, including work on unstable banks in Pelaw Wood where hand-pulling is not appropriate.

Members noted that effective treatment requires repeated intervention over a minimum of three years to achieve sustained control

In addition, the proposal included a walkover survey of Aykley/Hopper Wood to determine the extent of Himalayan Balsam on land for which permissions have been granted and to facilitate engagement with neighbouring landowners.

Volunteer recruitment formed a further element of the proposal, with engagement planned through Durham University and Colleges, Durham Cathedral, Durham Amateur Rowing Club, Houghall College, community groups and local schools. Members noted that activities involving children would be delivered in accordance with the Trust's safeguarding policy.

Claire also proposed to lead a series of volunteer events in Pelaw Woods, Blaid's Wood and Aykley/Hoppers Wood to undertake strimming and hand-pulling of Himalayan Balsam in order to prevent further spread. Claire further advised that the Trust will also attend EcoFest on 21st June as part of its outreach and awareness-raising work

The Committee expressed its strong support for the work of the Wear Rivers Trust and requested a formal written proposal from the Trust, in order that this could be presented with a recommendation to approve the full funding request to the next Full Council meeting.

The Chair thanked Ms Dodds for her attendance and contribution to the meeting. At this point, Claire thanked the Committee and left the meeting.

6. TO CONSIDER THE LATEST NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN REPORT

The Committee warmly welcomed the latest Neighbourhood Warden report and noted its heartfelt thanks to Antony Waterson and Brad Ford for their extensive work in particular in addressing waste related issues around the city.

7. JUDGING CRITERIA FOR THE DURHAM CITY STUDENT LANDLORD OF THE YEAR AWARD

This item was deferred until the next meeting owing to a technical difficulty with some Members being able to access the meeting virtually. The Clerk reported that there was still sufficient time to consider this matter at March's meeting and again onwards to Full Council, if the aim is still to present this award at the annual meeting of the parish in May which the Committee agreed was still the intention.

8. REPORT ON PLANTING PRIORITIES FOR 2026-27

The Committee considered a report outlining proposed planting priorities for the 2026–27 financial year, following the Council’s resolution to allocate £20,000 to support greening initiatives across the parish.

The Committee noted that the overarching aim of the programme is to enhance the quality of the parish area, increase biodiversity and respond to the climate crisis, while delivering environmental, social and visual benefits for residents and visitors.

Members noted that the proposed allocations include £4,000 for parish-wide spring bulbs, £4,000 for a fruit tree giveaway event in November, £1,000 for Viaduct planters, £2,500 for hanging baskets within the Viaduct area and £8,000 for hanging baskets on the main shopping streets.

The spring bulbs and fruit tree initiatives will be delivered in Autumn 2026. The fruit tree giveaway, first trialled in November 2025, was reported as a success and is to be repeated, providing further opportunity for community engagement and the distribution of pollinator-friendly planting.

The Committee agreed to retain the Viaduct planters at the Colpitts public house, Mistletoe Street and Allergate, acknowledging the contribution of local volunteers in maintaining them.

Members noted that certain other planters had been removed without approval and agreed that several remaining planters within the Viaduct area should be offered to local groups for maintenance or reuse. It was further agreed that a number of three-tier planters in prominent locations be removed, as they are not being planted and maintained as originally envisaged in partnership with Durham County Council.

In place of the removed planters, the Committee supported the installation of summer floral hanging baskets on selected residential streets within the Viaduct area and on shopfronts along North Road, Saddler Street, Silver Street, Back Silver Street, Lower Claypath and Elvet Bridge.

Members noted that several businesses have already agreed to participate and that this investment is intended to enhance the street scene within the town centre boundary. It was further noted that baskets will not be installed on Listed Buildings without existing brackets due to consent requirements.

The Committee **approved** the proposed planting plan for 2026–27 and **agreed** to put this forward as a recommendation to the next Full Council meeting.

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

10th March 2026 at 10:30am via Zoom

14th April 2026 at 10:30am via Zoom

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

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. J. Lath". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Chair of the Parish Council's Environment Committee
(10th March 2026)**