

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the City of Durham Parish Council's Environment Committee meeting held on Tuesday 10th March 2026 at 10:30pm via Zoom.

Present: Councillors C Lattin (in the **Chair**), T Cleaver, G Holland, F Robinson and R Cornwell.

Also present: Mr Adam Shanley (Parish Clerk) and Ms Sue Childs (City of Durham Trust).

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies were received and **accepted** from Councillor V Ashfield.

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 10th FEBRUARY 2026

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th February 2026 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

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

Ms Sue Childs advised that she was attending the meeting with a particular interest in item 7 on the Agenda.

5. TO CONSIDER THE LATEST NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN REPORT

The Clerk introduced the Neighbourhood Warden report by drawing attention to a particularly serious issue relating to littering outside Jimmy Allen's premises. He described the situation as extremely concerning, noting that large quantities of glass and other waste had been left in the surrounding area following weekend activity. He referred to video evidence showing the scale of the problem, including the sound of glass being crushed underfoot, and advised that even organised litter-picking groups had struggled to deal with the extent of the waste.

The Clerk confirmed that he had already taken action by raising the issue publicly and engaging with enforcement bodies. He advised that he had requested the neighbourhood wardens to issue a significant fine and had also contacted the police, highlighting that the situation constituted a public safety concern under licensing legislation. In addition, he outlined his intention to request a voluntary variation to the premises' licence, particularly to restrict the use of glass containers at certain times.

Members expressed strong support for this approach. The Chair emphasised that the condition of the area was unacceptable and stated that responsibility for clearing waste should lie with the premises rather than the wardens. Members agreed that robust enforcement was necessary and that the Committee should formally support the actions being taken.

The discussion also addressed ongoing issues relating to bins left out in Back Western Hill. Members noted that bins were frequently left permanently on the street, causing obstruction and creating hazards for both pedestrians and vehicles. It was reported that vehicles had been damaged as a result of collisions with bins and that the situation was contributing to a poor visual environment.

The Clerk advised that a warning letter had been issued to residents indicating that enforcement action would follow if behaviour did not improve. However, he confirmed that the issue persisted. Members debated possible causes, including whether some properties lacked adequate storage space, although this was disputed. It was agreed that further enforcement action would be required and that additional communication should be issued where necessary.

The Committee concluded the item by expressing appreciation for the work of the neighbourhood wardens and acknowledging the challenges involved in addressing such issues.

6. PROPOSAL BY CLIMATE ACTION DURHAM REGARDING PLANS FOR CLEAN AIR DAY 2026 IN DURHAM CITY

The Committee considered the proposal from Climate Action Durham regarding plans for Clean Air Day 2026 in Durham City. Members had been provided with background information in advance and the item was introduced in the context of previous engagement with Climate Action Durham on environmental initiatives within the city.

During discussion, concerns were raised in relation to the proposed use of the Town Hall as part of the event. Members reflected on practical considerations regarding the suitability of the venue, including its internal environment and how effectively it could support the type of activities envisaged. The ongoing concerns around the Administration's stance on climate change were also highlighted during the discussion.

Councillor T Cleaver expressed his opposition to the use of the Town Hall and highlighted the significant costs proposed. Councillor T Cleaver advised that there were several other nearby venues such as Prince Bishops, St. Nic's Church and Alington House which were more than suitable for the Group's needs. This was echoed by Councillor G Holland who expressed equal concern about the suitability of the Town Hall.

Whilst Members remained supportive of the overall objectives of Clean Air Day and the work of Climate Action Durham, it was felt important that these practical considerations were taken into account when developing plans.

Members indicated that Climate Action Durham should be encouraged to explore suitable options for venues and delivery, ensuring that arrangements would maximise participation and provide a positive experience for attendees.

In the event that other venues were not suitable and CAD remained committed to the Town Hall booking, Members **agreed** a maximum contribution of 50% (up to £300) towards this booking only.

7. EAST DURHAM AND HOUGHALL COMMUNITY COLLEGE HOUGHALL CAMPUS - LANDSCAPE AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The Chair welcomed Ms Sue Childs to the meeting and thanked her and the City of Durham Trust for their letter and for Sue attending the meeting today.

Sue Childs introduced this item by outlining concerns regarding the management of the landscape at the Houghall campus. She explained that repeated planning applications to prune or remove trees had prompted questions about whether a coherent landscape strategy was in place. Particular concern was raised regarding the management of a nationally significant collection of sorbus trees located on the site.

Sue described observations from a recent site visit, noting that signage throughout the area created a strong impression of restricted access and contributed to a negative experience for visitors. She also identified areas that appeared neglected, including former agricultural land that had become overgrown and buildings that appeared to be unoccupied or awaiting demolition. This was contrasted with areas such as the equine centre, where significant investment was evident.

A substantial part of the discussion focused on the Houghall Discovery Trail. Sue Childs explained that this route, which includes heritage features such as the remains of a former mining settlement and railway infrastructure, appeared to be in a poor state of repair. Information boards were present but had deteriorated, with some no longer properly installed. There was uncertainty as to who was responsible for maintaining the trail, and members agreed that this lack of clarity was problematic.

Members with local knowledge reflected on historic use of the area and expressed concern that public access had declined, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. It was reported that individuals had been discouraged from using parts of the site, and concerns were raised that safeguarding considerations may have been used to justify restricting access. Members questioned whether this was proportionate, noting that students were typically supervised.

Discussion also took place regarding the status of Public Right of Way 31, which was understood to run through the site. While it was generally accepted that this remained a public right of way, there was some uncertainty regarding its exact route and maintenance responsibilities. Members agreed that this should be clarified through reference to official records.

The Committee expressed strong support for engaging with the college and other stakeholders to address these issues. It was suggested that a collaborative approach involving local organisations and neighbouring parish councils could help

to establish a more coherent strategy for the management of the site, balancing educational needs with environmental protection, heritage preservation and public access.

The Committee **agreed** to explore engagement with Houghall College and relevant stakeholders to establish a clearer and more collaborative approach to landscape management, public access and heritage preservation.

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

The Committee considered the briefing note relating to the Durham City Student Landlord of the Year Award and discussed the potential role of the Parish Council in supporting or contributing to the scheme. The Clerk introduced the item by outlining how the existing system operated, noting that it was based on student feedback collected across the full tenancy lifecycle, including property condition, management responsiveness and overall experience. He highlighted that the system already provided a comprehensive and publicly accessible ranking of landlords, raising the question of whether it was appropriate or necessary for the Parish Council to introduce an additional set of criteria.

The discussion explored the purpose of any Parish Council involvement. Members considered whether the aim should be to reinforce the existing student-led process, to promote better standards among landlords, or to focus more specifically on issues of concern to residents, such as the external appearance of properties, waste management and wider community impact. It was noted that introducing separate criteria could create difficulties, particularly if Parish Council judgments differed from student rankings, which might lead to challenge or confusion.

Members reflected more broadly on what the Council was seeking to recognise. It was suggested that the Committee's primary interest was not simply in landlords who performed well from a tenant perspective, but in those who acted as responsible contributors to the wider community. This prompted discussion about whether the concept should be reframed to focus on landlords as "good citizens", taking into account how their properties were managed externally and how they engaged with the city more generally.

At the same time, concerns were raised about the robustness of the available data, particularly where landlords managed only a small number of properties. It was suggested that, in such cases, feedback could be too limited or anecdotal to provide a reliable basis for formal recognition. Members therefore considered whether the Parish Council should proceed with its own award at all in the current year, or whether the matter should be deferred.

Following further discussion, a consensus emerged that the Parish Council should not introduce its own separate landlord award at this stage. Instead, it was agreed that the Council should support and promote the existing student-led scheme, using the allocated budget to raise awareness and encourage participation among students. Members noted that this approach would help strengthen the existing system without duplicating or complicating it.

In addition, the Committee considered a further proposal to broaden the scope of recognition. It was suggested that, rather than focusing solely on landlords, the Parish Council could introduce a new award recognising a partner organisation that had made a positive contribution to city life. This would allow the Council to acknowledge wider contributions to the community, including improvements to the environment and the overall quality of life in Durham.

Members expressed support for this idea, and it was proposed that criteria for such an award should be developed, focusing on the organisation's impact on the city and its residents. It was noted that detailed criteria would need to be drafted and brought forward for consideration by Full Council, with the intention that nominations could follow thereafter and that the award could be presented alongside existing civic awards.

The Committee **agreed** not to introduce a separate Parish Council Student Landlord of the Year Award at this stage, and instead to support and promote the existing student-led scheme.

The Committee further **agreed** to develop proposals for a new partner organisation award, with criteria to be drafted and presented to Full Council for consideration.

9. UPDATE ON PLANTING PRIORITIES FOR 2026-27

The Clerk provided an update on planting priorities for the forthcoming year, with particular focus on the expansion of the hanging basket scheme across the city centre. He began by thanking local businesses for their support, noting that a significant number had agreed to host hanging baskets on their premises. As a result, a comprehensive planting plan had now been developed for both June and October, with approximately 90 hanging baskets to be installed across the city centre.

The Clerk advised that the project had progressed well overall, although Silver Street remained a challenge in terms of securing participation. Despite this, alternative approaches were being explored, including identifying additional locations and slightly over-ordering baskets to allow for flexibility. He also confirmed that installation costs were being clarified, including the provision of brackets and ongoing maintenance such as watering. Members noted that once installed, the brackets would remain in place, enabling the scheme to be expanded and built upon in future years.

Further discussion took place regarding specific locations. It was confirmed that Back Silver Street, including areas such as Fowler's Yard, would be fully included within the scheme, with strong support from local businesses. This area was expected to benefit significantly from the introduction of hanging baskets, particularly as it was not currently included in Durham County Council planting programmes. Members noted that this would help enhance the visual appearance of what was currently a relatively underdeveloped area.

The Chair added that the scheme would extend across a range of key city centre locations, including North Road, Sadler Street, Elvet Bridge and Lower Claypath,

ensuring that all main shopping streets would benefit. It was also noted that residential properties had been included in the scheme, following engagement with landlords, which represented a positive development and broadened the impact of the project beyond commercial premises.

Members welcomed the progress made, noting that the city centre would benefit from a significant improvement in visual appearance as a result of the scheme. The Clerk also reported positive feedback from earlier planting work, including spring bulbs, which had been well received by residents and were beginning to come into bloom. It was confirmed that planting activity would continue later in the year, with further opportunities to build on the success of the current programme.

The Clerk further advised that, once the spring planting cycle was complete, certain planters previously identified for removal would be taken out, including three-tier planters, as part of a wider rationalisation of planting arrangements.

In addition, the Clerk informed members that approximately £3,000 remained within the current financial year's budget. He proposed that this could be used to support East Durham and Houghall College in relation to its planned display at the Chelsea Flower Show, noting that this represented a significant opportunity for a Durham-based institution. Members indicated support for exploring this proposal further through Full Council.

The Committee welcomed the update and commended the progress made in delivering the planting programme, recognising the scale of the work involved and the positive impact it would have on the city centre.

The Committee **agreed** to note the update on planting priorities and supported the continued development and expansion of the hanging basket scheme across the city, committing any additional funding to ensure this project's delivery.

10. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

14th April 2026 at 10:30am via Zoom
12th May 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,



**Chair of the Parish Council's Environment Committee
(14th April 2026)**