

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Committee held on 16th February 2021 at 14:30pm via Zoom

Present: Councillors V Ashfield (in the Chair), E Ashby, L Brown, J Elmer and M Ross.

Also present: Parish Clerk A Shanley, Ms Alyson Learmonth, Ms Ruth Chambers and Ahmed (members of the public), Belinda Snow and Stephen McCallan (Durham County Council).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr D Freeman.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

None received.

3. TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 12th JANUARY 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th January 2021 were unanimously agreed as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chair welcomed Ms Alyson Learmonth from the Greening Up Sheraton Park Group (GUSP) to the meeting.

Alyson presented a proposal for a planting project at Faraday Court corner in Sheraton Park.

Alyson advised that planning drawings indicated low shrub planting on this corner but this was never implemented and so the corner has remained an unplanted and untended eyesore. Alyson advised that the addition of parking bays nearby has also left exposed sections raised to form an unsightly and unfinished corner.

Alyson advised that the substation at the corner of Faraday Court and Clay Lane is an unfinished and under-exploited site which could be used for some raised beds for planting herbs, providing an attractive softening of the corner and an attractive feature for drivers and pedestrians.

Alyson advised that there is a gap in planting between the substation and planting which borders the path. The brick store remains in this blank space without any surrounding planting.

Alyson advised that GUSP were working on a proposal for this corner to be developed into a small herb garden with three raised beds creating an attractive focal point and asked if there is scope for the Parish Council and GUSP to work together on this.

The Chair advised that the budget for the Environment Committee's planting projects had all been spent for this financial year but from April there may be scope for this project to form part of the Environment Committee's priority on improving unadopted footpaths, etc. The Clerk advised that he would be able to

share contacts at DCC, Banks and Northern Powergrid with GUSP in the meantime in order to seek the necessary permissions.

Alyson also advised that a local resident and artist at Sheraton Park is busy delivering a "mini beasts" projects which display insects in mosaic art form and asked if the Parish Council may be able to offer a grant to this individual for this work. The Clerk advised that the Parish Council would not be able to pay funds to an individual.

Alyson also advised that the possibility of a Section 106 application for public art for this area may be made in the near future. Cllr L Brown advised that Sheraton Park had already received a substantial amount of Section 106 funding and was sure that it had been agreed that the remaining funding should be for other areas within the Division.

Alyson advised that she would also be happy to work with the Environment Committee to see where each of the groups' plans are aligned and to identify opportunities for partnership working. Cllr E Ashby advised that she would be happy to support this work as a member of GUSP too.

Cllr L Brown asked who ran the Ustinov allotments as she believed this was Ustinov College and the University. Alyson advised that residents could be part of this but the governance is through the JCR.

The Chair thanked Alyson for her time and for presenting these proposals to the Committee. At this point, Alyson left the meeting.

5. DISCUSSION WITH BELINDA SNOW AND STEPHEN MCCALLAN ON NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN SLA

The Chair welcomed Belinda Snow and Stephen McCallan to the meeting in order to discuss the ongoing Service Level Agreement with DCC for an enhanced Neighbourhood Warden service for the City.

Stephen advised that work was continuing in tackling residents' complaints in the City in spite of lockdown.

Belinda advised that there had recently been a change of personnel at DCC and the former University Warden has now moved to another part of the County, however his replacement was working well with the University and local residents. The meeting thanked the former Warden for his incredible work.

Belinda advised that the Wardens had also been drafted in to deal with Covid-19 related issues.

Belinda advised that Stephen was continuing as the Parish Council Warden for the next few months but this may need to change in future. Belinda advised that she would make the Parish Council aware of any changes to personnel.

The Chair advised that much of the concerns being reported by local residents related to student properties.

The Clerk asked how the recruitment of new staff is coming along for example re: late night wardens.

Belinda advised that there is currently a backlog as a number of Wardens are needing to undergo NPPV training. Belinda advised that recruitment of Wardens is a long process.

The Chair asked for a report to be undertaken using the standard pro forma set up by the Parish Council. The Chair advised that this needed to be statistics-driven.

The Chair asked what the main issues in the City have been recently. Stephen advised that there is still a significant problem of begging in the City which he believes is primarily linked to alcohol and drugs.

The Chair and Cllr J Elmer asked that further support for those begging be prioritised as opposed to enforcement.

Stephen and Belinda advised that there is a significant amount of support available and this required a change of behaviour from individuals.

6. DISCUSSION OF ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PRIORITIES:

6a. To note:

i) Installation of Mosaic art work

The Clerk advised that the chapel within the hospital had been offered as the space for the mosaic art work. At its last meeting, the Committee agreed that this would not be an appropriate location within the hospital and therefore the Clerk is seeking an alternative solution with the management of the hospital.

ii) Durham in Bloom: update on Clean and Green proposals and Wear Rivers Trust project.

The Committee noted that the projects agreed with the Clean and Green team and the Wear Rivers Trust would be commencing in Spring 2021.

6b. To complete:

I) Proposal to fund a water dispenser in Durham City

The Clerk advised that he and Cllr E Ashby had had a very productive meeting with a representative of Northumbrian Water on a proposal to have a water dispenser installed in Durham City in order to eradicate single-use plastic water bottles. It is expected that a follow up meeting with Northumbrian Water's Technical and Regulatory teams would be organised in the coming weeks to further progress this proposal. There are a number of matters to consider, namely:

Where will the station be located?

How would it be cleaned and secured?

How often would water testing take place?

What are the costs involved? What are the specific funding streams available?

What opportunities are there for partnership working with the University on this project?

II) Young People's Challenge

The Chair advised that a number of schools within the parish area had now agreed to take part in the Single-Use plastics challenge scheme and that she, the Clerk, Cllrs L Brown and J Elmer had met to agree a number of potential schemes the schools may wish to run. These include:

- To provide (metal?) water bottles and for the school to ban single use water bottles.
- To provide long-life packed lunch boxes.
- Schools or local WIs to make cotton masks to replace plastic ones.
- Provide a central hand gel point with biodegradable bottles.
- Get a DCC Officer to give a talk to all local schools on how to tackle single-use plastics.
- Pupils to lobby families to:
 - Abolish cling film
 - Use biodegradable dog poo bags
 - Stop single use coffee cups

The Clerk reminded the Committee that the funding had been agreed and that he required confirmation from the schools of their projects in order to make the funding available to them.

III) Progressing the blue plaques scheme

The Clerk reminded the Committee that the Parish Council had now agreed to launch its own blue plaque scheme. The Clerk advised that he would be publicising this along with the application form in the coming days.

6c. To decide:

i) Climate change commitment and plan

The Chair presented a climate change commitment and plan to the Committee. It was **agreed** that this should go directly to each Parish Council Committee in order for them to discuss the priorities and how each Committee would go about deliver on this.

ii) DCC response on the use of glyphosates

Cllr J Elmer advised that he has recently raised the issue of the use of glyphosates with Durham County Council. In particular, he had expressed concern regarding the use of glyphosates and the impact this has on the urban rewilding and biodiversity of public spaces in County Durham.

Cllr J Elmer advised that glyphosate is the now the most widely used chemical herbicide in the world with usage increasing more than 20-fold since 1990. This has created huge levels of dependency on the product both for farming and amenity uses, for example Round-up and Weedol are available over the counter and contain the active compound.

Cllr J Elmer highlighted that stopping the use of glyphosate is by no means easy but numerous Council's across England are piloting and transferring their practices to the range of alternatives that exist.

Cllr J Elmer advised that he had received a response from Durham County Council to state that the County Council intends to continue the use of glyphosates in light of there being little to no alternative. The Committee **agreed** that Cllr J Elmer should draft a letter to the Leader of Durham County Council and proposing that the City of Durham parish area be used as a trial area for alternatives.

iii) Consideration of Durham In Bloom priorities for 2021-22

The Committee considered their priorities for Durham in Bloom for 2021 and **agreed** the following:

- Bishops Mitre display in Durham Market Place
- Floral displays (potentially of CoDPC logo) next on banks running alongside the steps going up to the railway station
- Creation of a wildflower meadow at Aykley Heads
- Hanging baskets running the length of two separate locations - Claypath and North Road
- Purchase of bulbs for community planting
- Wash bridge over A167 and introduce 2xfloral towers either end
- Floral display (potentially CoDPC logo) at Gilesgate roundabout
- Floral planting at Hallgarth Street roundabout
- Floral planting at Potters Bank roundabout
- Floral tower/ tub at Stonebridge roundabout
- Community planting projects with plants to go to Resident Groups / graveyards/ common areas

iv) Proposal to install wildlife signage at Riverwalk Centre

The Chair welcomed Ms Ruth Chambers to the meeting at this point. The Committee considered the following proposal from the Chair:

Proposals

I have heard from a number of residents recently that there is increasing concern about the mess on the riverbanks and one local resident in particular has asked the Parish Council to consider a positive counter-proposal about signage.

Immediate action

1. Signage

Approach the management of Riverwalk to ask if the Riverwalk Centre would provide spaces for signboards overlooking the river to raise awareness of what people might usually miss, for example the more common varieties of animals and birds seen here, e.g. otters and salmon, heron, common tern, dipper, sand martins, goosanders, cormorants, swans, mallards and geese. They could perhaps also provide a small amount of information about them. We could ask Riverwalk if they would also like to sponsor the boards but otherwise the Parish Council could provide the boards. Perhaps approach DCC for ecology help /information / advice.

Decision

Agree the proposals above, investigate collaboration of Riverwalk and of necessary budget.

Cllr E Ashby advised that she would like to see some historical signage be installed at Riverwalk as the view took in the historical building which formed part of the World Heritage Site. It was **agreed** that the Committee should investigate installing the historical signage at Riverwalk.

The proposal for wildlife information boards was very much welcomed and it was **agreed** that the Committee should investigate a Section 106 proposal for this and to potentially have these installed at Pennyferry Bridge.

v) Proposal to launch a "Pride in our Street" competition

The Chair advised that, given the length of the meeting, this item should be re-agenda-ed for a future meeting.

vi) Consideration of disability audit for Durham City

The Chair advised that, given the length of the meeting, this item should be re-agenda-ed for a future meeting.

7. AOB

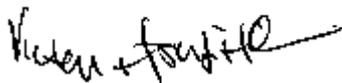
None received.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The date of the next meeting was agreed for Tuesday 16th March 2021.

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

Signed,



Chair of the Parish Council's Environment Committee

