

## Revenue Budget Summary - Environment and Open Spaces

Budget Description	Budget Holders	2021/22 Gross Budget	2021/22 Net Budget
Environment and Open Spaces	Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Manager)	£100,350	£100,100

### **Purpose of the Budget:**

The purpose of the Environment and Open Spaces Budget is to fund the operational resources, including staffing, premises, vehicles, machinery, and equipment, required to effectively to manage and maintain green open space on Town Council owned and leased land within the Great Aycliffe Parish. The budget also provides for the running costs of Moore Lane Environment Centre.

### **Scope of Activity and Nature of the Service:**

The Environment and Open Spaces Budget provides the resources to manage and maintain all green open space, village greens, woodland, plantations, nature reserves and wildflower areas either owned by the Council or held under a lease or licence arrangement e.g. from Durham County Council.

This includes key land in a number of areas around the town including Byerley Park Nature Reserve, Woodham Burn, Simpasture Rail Halt and Butterfly Meadow, Great Aycliffe Way, School Aycliffe Wetlands, Cobblers Hall and South Agnew Plantations, Aycliffe Nature Park and Aycliffe Village greens.

Work carried out includes grass cutting, tree works including inspections, pruning, and felling, planting of bulbs, shrubs and trees, and the planting and maintenance of various wildflower areas.

The budget also provides for the running costs of Moore Lane Environment Centre and the costs of the various environment events, initiatives and projects run from the centre.

Environment and open spaces is a discretionary service area.

### **Contribution to Council Aims:**

The Environment and Open Spaces Budget contributes to the following Council Strategic Aims:-

*Aim 2: "To manage the Council's finances and assets in a responsible manner"*

*Aim 5: "To contribute to the environmental improvement of Aycliffe by managing and developing parks, play areas and green spaces"*

*Aim 6: "To help and encourage partnership working to improve the services and facilities for the residents of Great Aycliffe"*

### **Key Budget Changes for 2021/22**

The Environment and Open Spaces Budget This budget has increased by £850 per year to a net running cost of £100,100 per year.

This increase is as a result of rising environment waste disposal costs although this has been partly offset by reductions in under-utilised budgets such as environment events and wildflower meadow maintenance.

## **Performance Measures and Indicators**

The Environment and Open Spaces Budget contributes directly towards the delivery of a large number of targets linked to Strategic Aims 2, 5 and 6 within the Service Delivery Plan, as follows:-

- Continue to monitor energy consumption, implement energy saving initiatives and reduce usage where possible.
- Deliver the environment related work set out in the Asset Management Plan via the capital programme budget.
- Works and Environment Manager to arrange to work with local schools and community groups to develop volunteer opportunities.
- To continue to monitor the health and condition of trees on Town Council land in line with the Tree Management Policy and undertake a visual tree inspection of a specific area every six months to assess the health and condition of the trees.
- Works and Environment Manager to organise and help deliver 15 public countryside events.
- Complete at least 5 targeted Himalayan Balsam removing working parties along the Burn.
- Undertake maintenance and management of specific Durham County Council environmental areas as per the management agreement.
- Undertake a limited snow clearing and gritting service for Durham County Council as per the winter maintenance agreement for the benefit of residents.
- Proactively monitor Ash Tree Dieback and remove diseased trees as necessary.
- To continue partnership working with Durham County Council and build on existing initiatives.
- Work with the Youth Council, schools, community, and voluntary groups to hold a Town Pride Environment Week.
- The Works and Environment Manager and Town Pride Team to work with Durham County Council officers and Tidy Britain to ensure that the Great Aycliffe Parish has a targeted anti-littering campaign.
- Work in partnership with residents and friends' groups to improve our environmental areas.

## **Importance of Service to the Community**

The 2019 'Your Town, Your Choice, Your Voice' Satisfaction Survey provided some very positive feedback on public satisfaction with environment and open spaces, with the service being highlighted as the most valued service area by taxpayers and a top priority for further investment.

The environment is also one of the three key priorities within the Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan.

Satisfaction with the value for money and standard of maintenance of the various environment areas, varied by area but was generally very high across the board (between 75% and 100% rated as good or very good). Feedback in relation to those environment areas that scored at the lower end of the scale will be reviewed and used to prioritise future maintenance and investment where appropriate.

Feedback in relation to Moore Lane Environment Centre was less positive and the facility features amongst the services in which taxpayers wish to see less money spent in future years.

## **External Funding and Fees and Charges:**

The only income receivable in respect of the Environment Budget is from a recharge to a housing association at Aycliffe Village for grass cutting works.

The Environment Budget may also benefit from any grants or contributions that may become available, although no such funding had been confirmed at the time that the 2021/22 Budget was set.