

ENVIRONMENT UPDATE REPORT

AGENDA ITEM No. 7

MEETING: ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

DATE: 8th JULY 2026

REPORT BY: WORKS AND ENVIRONMENT MANAGER

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to bring Members up to date regarding issues relating to the environment.

2.0 Community Enhancement Garden Competition

2.1 Nominations have been requested, via social media, local press, and via councillors and community leaders, since April, with 27 nominations received by the week ending 26th June.

2.2 Officers arranged to take the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Environment Committee around the nominated properties to judge the entries during the week commencing 29th June.

2.3 Categories to be judged were best front garden (or garden visible to the public), best hanging basket/tubs, and best community garden.

2.4 Following the judge's visits, the proposed winners are:

Best Front Garden	
First Place	41 Ryder Court
Second Place	5 Murton Close, Aycliffe Village
Third Place	2 Neile Road

Best Hanging Basket/Tubs	
First Place	104 Oakfield
Second Place	31 Annand Way
Third Place	6 Silkin Way

Best Community Garden	
First Place	Bethany House Care Home
Second Place	Pioneering Care Partnership (PCP)
Third Place	Neville Community Centre

2.5 Of note, it was particularly appreciated that 31 Annand Way is a relatively new build, with little opportunity to establish a garden. The residents have therefore made the best use of planters to produce an attractive display which benefits local wildlife.

- 2.6 It was also acknowledged that the new development at Syd Howarth Close, has a good variety of perennial planting which appears to have been planted by the developers; the Adderstone Group. This is a good example of how new developments can be enhanced by simple relatively affordable planting to brighten up and enhance an area which can otherwise look void of colour and interest.

3.0 Bedding Plants

- 3.1 All annual bedding has now been planted out at Aycliffe Village, St Clares Church, St Mary's Church planters and Stephenson Way and West Cemetery.
- 3.2 Beds at Williamfield Way Have now been stripped, prepared and passed back to Durham County Council and the half-moon bed under the tree at St Clares has been renovated and grassed over as previously agreed by the Council.
- 3.3 Perennial beds are to be planted at the entrance to the Oakleaf Sports Complex during the week commencing 6th July.

4.0 Invasive Weeds

- 4.1 Giant Hog Weed has continued to be identified along Woodham Burn with over 50 additional plants being identified. Plants have been poisoned in situ when located and any flowering heads removed before they can seed.
- 4.2 Officers have continued to work with Durham County Council and the Tees River Trust to identify and treat additional plants beyond Council land reported by the public, which, without treatment, will produce further problematic seeds and plants in future years.
- 4.3 Works operatives have spent considerable time pulling and strimming Himalayan Balsam throughout Woodham Burn.
- 4.4 The effort of Aycliffe Tidy Team in helping to identify Giant Hogweed and control Himalayan Balsam should also be acknowledged. They not only report isolated Giant Hogweed sightings to the Council but also assist in pulling balsam as a group and individual volunteers which is invaluable in the attempt to control these invasive weeds.

5.0 Trees

- 5.1 As most trees are now in full leaf, an independent tree inspection has again been organised to identify any trees with significant defects. The main focus is to help monitor Ash Dieback Disease, which continues to have a dramatic effect on the decline of the species in the parish.
- 5.2 Many Ash trees, particularly in the Woodham Burn area, which previously have shown limited signs of the disease are now in rapid decline and will require attention in the near future. Officers will make safe those trees that have clearly been dramatically damaged and in decline by the disease prior to inspection if there is risk of tree failure. However, in the medium term the inspections help to identify and prioritise the main trees, particularly those in high-risk areas, bordering properties, highways, footpaths and in high profile areas

6.0 Durham County Council Management of Green Open Space

- 6.1 Following increasing complaints to the Town Council, some of which were quite aggressive, regarding the standard of maintenance on Durham County Council land, officers have raised concerns with their peers at the County Council.
- 6.2 It has been identified that due to financial constraints, a political decision has been made limit or stop spraying of herbicide around 'obstacles', including street lighting, posts, bins, seating and trees.
- 6.3 Officers are now directing complaints directly to the Durham County Council Contact Centre on 03000 26 0000 and if necessary, providing residents with the contact details of their local County Councillor.

7.0 School Aycliffe Wetlands

- 7.1 The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Environment Committee and other councillors who have expressed an interest were invited to join a local resident for a walk around School Aycliffe Wetlands on Friday 3rd July. Any significant findings and agreed actions relating to this walk around will be verbally reported to the Environment Committee meeting on the 8th July.

8.0 Recommendations

- 8.1 It is recommended that Members:
 - i) Receive the report.

Contact Officer: Steve Cooper