

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 8TH JULY 2026

Minutes of the meeting of the **ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 8TH JULY 2026 at 7.55pm.**

PRESENT

Councillor Martin Ashcroft (Chairman) and:
Councillors Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Dorothy Bowman,
Richard Burchell, Arun M. Chandran, Chris Clement, Neil Collinson,
Luke Ellis, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Phillip Hawkins,
Sharon Hutchinson, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Kyle Robinson,
Ken Robson, Brian Sowerby, Michael Stead, Tracey Williams,
Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mr Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Manager)
Miss Amanda Donald (Corporate and Policy Officer)
Mr Lee Williams (Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator)
Mrs Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

IN ATTENDANCE

Ten members of the public were in attendance.

16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tony Armstrong, Lindsey Aston, Andy Hill, Richard Hutchinson, Sandra Kirby and Jackie McFadden Lewis.

17. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No applications for dispensations had been received.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

19. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A member of the public introduced himself as the complainant referenced in the allotments report and offered to answer any questions regarding the complaint.

Another member of the public discussed the site meeting which had taken place at the School Aycliffe Wetlands, thanking those councillors who had attended and commenting that it had been very useful and hoped some constructive actions would come of it. Regarding the life buoy request, she commented that having grandchildren herself, when they were smaller a life buoy would not have helped before they could swim, and now that they can swim, it would be unnecessary. However, she did suggest that what would be useful is an extra bar on the railings around the platform.

The Works and Environment Manager agreed to investigate installing an additional railing.

The site representative from St Oswald's allotments commented that he had received 43 complaints from tenants about the aggressive bees on site, with 28 tenants having been stung and 15 others not coming to work on their plot because of the bees. He stated he would be happy to answer any questions.

A beekeeper who has had an allotment since 2011 highlighted that the Allotments Report stated that the Regional Bee Inspector's visit had been positive and made recommendations. She asked the Committee to review the outcomes based on evidence and not hearsay or social media comments.

An allotment holder at St Oswald's acknowledged that bees are good for the environment, but they had had to go to hospital 3 weeks ago for a bee sting and was stung again yesterday on the ear and had to go to the GP. The bees are aggressive and attacking people and he asked if anything will be done about it.

The site representative from Clarence Chare allotments asked if moving 2 hives to Clarence Chare, as suggested in the report, is not compounding the problem and creating issues for allotment holders on a second site.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Coordinator advised that the Regional Bee Inspector had been requested to undertake a site visit to review the situation a few weeks previously after similar problems. At that time Aycliffe Bee Keeping Association and a beekeeping tenant had identified a plot with an active, aggressive hive, which was euthanised. Things then seemed to settle down, but 3 weeks later the issue has returned. When on site, the Inspector commented that although no tenants were breaching the beekeeping policy, one plot did have 2 hives, and he suggested making a change to create some control. He identified that the reason the bees may be aggressive is that their location is in proximity to poultry and allotment plots; bees don't like to be disturbed by noise etc, so he had recommended relocating them to other side of the site. Whilst writing the report the Grounds Maintenance Services Coordinator recalled previously having been requested to identify possible plots on other sites, one of which is an unused plot at Clarence Chare and away from the other plots. It backs onto woodland, with the nearest footpath 15 metres away and is protected by trees. This site could also be considered for moving the plots. He concluded by saying that nothing specific seems to be setting the bees off, as when visiting for an hour that morning nothing was happening, but by afternoon the issues had begun again.

The Chairman suggested that Standing Orders be waived for further open discussion of this issue under the Allotments Report. This was agreed.

20. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Luke Ellis, seconded by Councillor Ken Robson and:

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee, held on 27th May 2026, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

21. ALLOTMENTS REPORT

Members considered an update report from the Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator on issues relating to the allotments for the six weeks ended the 28th June 2026.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator gave a verbal update regarding the inspections and advised that unfortunately the waiting list remains high, with more people being added to the waiting list.

He advised that the disused plot at St Oswald's has now had everything removed and will be strimmed and re-let.

He further advised that an application had been received from a tenant at Clarence Chare who has a raised bed plot and wants to fence off a small part of land for their greenhouse and shed as they currently have nowhere to store tools.

Finally, a request has been received from Clarence Chare tenants to create an area to store wood chippings and as they want to ensure the structure is suitable, and safe, have asked if works staff can work with them to construct a bay.

Councillor Arun M Chandran, in response to the comment made by the beekeeper under 'public questions', advised that the Council made decisions based on actual evidence and not by social media speculation. The fact is that 28 tenants have been stung, and this cannot be ignored. The Council has a duty of care to the tenants, who were there long before the beehives. Having bees was a great idea and had worked well for a long time. He highlighted that the proposed resolution put forward by the Regional Bee Inspector is not ideal and must be a temporary measure to see if it alleviates the issue. He highlighted that there is a further need to look at all available council land for alternative sites for the beekeeping plots that could be made relatively secure. If the Council do not have the land available, officers may need to ask Durham County Council or other land owners. He requested a report back to the next meeting with options.

Councillor Arun M Chandran proposed that all of the recommendations of the report be agreed, specifically including the adoption of the Regional Bee Inspector's recommendations, to move the bee plots to another location as a temporary measure and that officers in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee be delegated authority to make the decision as to the most appropriate location. He further proposed that officers investigate alternative locations for beekeeping plots and bring a report back to the next meeting.

Councillor Michael Stead seconded the motion.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Coordinator commented that the representatives from Aycliffe Bee Keeping Association (ABKA) were in support of the idea of moving sites and asked if they had a preferred site.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft asked the meeting to waive standing orders to allow the public to speak. This was agreed.

The Secretary of Aycliffe Beekeeping Association commented that they are in full support of trying to resolve the issue. He believes the two plots highlighted by the Regional Bee Inspector are in the wrong place and the perfect solution would be to find a site that can be curated and have the problem solved temporarily until a long-term solution is found.

He highlighted that he is very happy to have a look at the proposed plot at Clarence Chare, adding that flight path of the bees needs to be considered.

Councillor Michael Stead queried what work had been done by the beekeepers in trying to fix the problem.

The Secretary of Aycliffe Beekeeping Association advised that the hives had been split to give the bees more space and empty boxes had been added to give them more space. Previously, the queen in the hive identified as being the source of the aggressive bees had been euthanised and all male bees removed as they carry the aggressive gene. They had replaced the queen with a new queen in the hope of having a calm hive. However, after further problems, the aggressive hive had eventually been euthanised.

Councillor Michael Stead asked the officer if he had considered looking at an area for just bee hives.

A beekeeper who also has a poultry plot at Clarence Chare commented that although the Clarence Chare plot is out of the way, it needs assessing to see if it is suitable as it is under a lot of trees and bees don't do well with no sunlight. She advised that you could bring in the calmest bees, but over generations they can go back to being more aggressive. There is no control over who the queen mates with, so one suggestion was starting a queen rearing programme. It is also not easy to move bees as it takes a lot of planning, they must be moved three miles away for three weeks then brought them back, or they will keep going back to their original site. In addition, a lot of money has been spent on aviary fencing and gravel. Bees are livestock and consideration of them needs to be given. Threats have been made against bee plots on social media, so there is a need to consider all the information and not be reactive.

A beekeeper commented that they have two hives in their father's garden with four children next door and had no issues at all, so it is not necessarily the case that every bee is aggressive, and you cannot tell which bees are from hives and which are from the wild.

A pigeon keeper at St Oswald's commented that he had had issues with bees this year and been stung five times, showing his most recent sting on his arm from yesterday which he had had a reaction to. He had built a six-foot fence around his plot to try and relieve the issue. He advised that he cannot work on his plot now and cannot train his young birds.

A beekeeper advised that moving aggressive bees to a new site is not recommended and he had grave reservations in moving aggressive bees to another site, as they would go back to where they were born.

The site representative at St Oswald's commented that there had been animosity since the beehives had come to the site, and plot holders are frustrated with the situation and so it needs dealing with as soon as possible, ideally with a decision agreed at this meeting.

Councillor Tony Beddard proposed an amendment that any proposals to move plots to new sites, should be subject to a period of consultation for allotment holders and the public to come back with any issues, and to ensure any feedback received is considered from a health and safety perspective.

Councillor Carl Robinson proposed reinstating Standing Orders and moving progress and this was seconded by Councillor Ken Robson.

Councillor Arun M Chandran advised he did not accept the amendment, stating that doing nothing is not an option and there is a need to try to satisfy both the beekeepers and allotment tenants.

A vote then took place on the amendment with the following results:

For	6
Against	13

The amendment from Councillor Tony Beddard failed.

A vote was held on the original motion from Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Michael Stead with the following results:

For	19
Against	3

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The changes proposed by the Regional Bee Inspector to update the beekeeping tenancy agreement and relocate the tow beekeeping plots be approved.
- iii) The movement of the two beekeeping plots be a temporary measure with the location to be agreed by the officers in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman.
- iv) Officers investigate options for alternative locations for beekeeping plots both on Council land and other landholders such as Durham County Council and bring a report back to the next meeting.
- v) The overview of the complaint about the bees be received and actions taken to address the concerns as set out above.
- vi) The request for an extension adjacent to the raised beds at Clarence Chare be approved.
- vii) Permission be granted to create a wood chippings store bay at the Clarence Chare allotments site with assistance from the Council's works department.

22. ENVIRONMENT REPORT

Members considered an update report from the Works and Environment Manager on issues relating to the environment for the six weeks ended the 28th June 2026.

The Works and Environment Manager provided a verbal update on the site visit to School Aycliffe Wetlands with the Chairman and Vice Chairman and residents and advised it had been a constructive meeting. Regarding the footpaths in the area, the plan previously had been to complete the walkway around the bottom of the site. However, it had been agreed that as a wetland, people often think the water gently rises and subsides, but this is not the case. The water rushes in at high volume and velocity, so in the winter, the walkways will always be at risk of being swept away or damaged. This has been an ongoing issue for over 20 years. It is a flood plain and should be managed as such.

It had therefore been agreed at the site visit that the grassed top loop should be maintained to allow access down the side of the golf course to the viewing area but not maintaining the walkways from the viewing platform, creating the main circular route, as a formal footpath, on a trial basis and allowing water to naturally inundate that area.

Councillor Carl Robinson agreed that there needs to be an understanding of the situation with the nature of flood plains and that nothing can be done about it.

Councillor Tony Beddard raised concern that if changes are made to the maintenance of a footpath and the quality of that footpath deteriorates, officers should consider erecting signage to warn of slip hazards and to inform the public of the risk of change as it is now an unmaintained area.

The Works and Environment Manager agreed that additional safety signage should be installed as there would be erosion over winter but that the agreed actions would mitigate a lot of problems by having informal seasonal access, which is how it should be.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft proposed that Members agree the proposals for the management of School Aycliffe Wetlands including the provision of safety signage and that the garden competition results be agreed. This was seconded by Councillor Arun M Chandran.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The garden competition results are agreed.
- iii) The walkways in School Aycliffe Wetlands at the bottom of the site from the viewing platform, creating the main circular route, are no longer maintained as a formal footpath, on a trial basis and safety signage is erected advising of the changes and risks.

23. CEMETERIES REPORT

Members considered an update report from the Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator on items relating to the cemeteries for the six weeks ended the 28th June 2026.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

24. LIFE SAVING EQUIPMENT REQUEST

Members considered a report from the Works and Environment Manager outlining a request from a local resident to install a life buoy at School Aycliffe Wetlands. The resident is a member of the Rotary Club Newton Aycliffe and has offered to pay for a suitable lifesaving device to be installed.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that consideration had also been given within the report to Aycliffe Nature Park as there are similar risks and the footfall on this site is much greater. Previously replacement and maintenance costs for lifesaving equipment have been significant due to anti-social behaviour.

Councillor Arun M Chandran raised caution that whilst considering every risk is always worthwhile, there is a need to be realistic. He suggested that the signage indicates it is a wetland and a flood plain. If residents wanted to donate a life buoy that could be allowed, but the Council will not be responsible for owning or maintaining it.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson that the recommendations of the report be agreed that life buoys are not installed at School Aycliffe Wetlands or Aycliffe Nature Park.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft further proposed that officers investigate an additional railing for the viewing platform at School Aycliffe Wetlands. This was seconded by Councillor Arun M. Chandran.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The request for a life buoy at School Aycliffe Wetlands not be approved.
- iii) The request for a life buoy at Aycliffe Nature Park not be approved.
- iv) Officers investigate the feasibility of adding a further railing to the viewing platform at School Aycliffe Wetlands.

Chairman