

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 14TH OCTOBER 2026

Minutes of the meeting of the **ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 14TH OCTOBER 2026 at 8.40pm.**

PRESENT

Councillor Andy Hill (Chairman) and:

Councillors Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Arun M. Chandran, Chris Clement, Neil Collinson, Luke Ellis, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Phil Hawkins, Sharon Hutchinson, Sandra Kirby, John Moore, Kyle Robinson, Michael Stead and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

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

IN ATTENDANCE

Two members of the public were in attendance.

33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tunde Akinsanya, Richard Burchell, Jackie McFadden Lewis, Carl Robinson, Brian Sowerby, Tracey Williams and Anne Woodward.

34. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No applications for dispensations had been received.

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

36. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A member of the public commented that the flowerbeds on Central Avenue were damaged and appeared to be quite dangerous.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-Ordinator clarified that these flower beds were the responsibility of Durham County Council.

The member of the public commented that improvements to Moore Lane football pitch would be difficult due to off road bikes

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-Ordinator agreed and identified that hopefully with deployable CCTV some of those issues can be addressed.

Another member of the public thanked the Council for the prize he had received as winner of the hanging basket section in the Annual Garden Competition.

37. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, seconded by Councillor Luke Ellis and:

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee, held on 2nd September 2026, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

38. 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 4th October 2026.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Coordinator drew members attention to the allotment waiting lists, outlining a proposal to convert a vacant double plot for pigeons at St Oswald's site into four new allotment plots, as there was nobody on the waiting list for a pigeon plot. He added that this would involve a considerable amount of work as currently there was recycled ballast on the ground that would need to be removed and the ground underneath rotavated.

Councillor Tony Armstrong asked how long the plot had been vacant. The Grounds Maintenance Services Coordinator explained that four plots had previously been vacant, two of which had recently been allocated to people on the waiting list. The remaining double plot had been brought to Members' attention around four months earlier, after the tenant surrendered it in poor condition. The former tenant returned to make improvements, but there was now no waiting list and local interest in pigeon keeping had gradually declined.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, seconded by Councillor Luke Ellis and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The vacant pigeon plots 5 and 6 at St. Oswald's Allotments should be reallocated to create four new allotment plots and officers bring a report back to the committee with further information and costs.

39. 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 4th October 2026.

The Works and Environment Manager made members aware of a power outage on the town earlier that day and that two large generators had been installed by National Grid at the Golf Complex. Extra security on site had also been paid for by National Grid.

He gave a verbal update on the tree management update in the report, stating that the independent tree assessor had reported back and had been very complimentary about the current management of ash dieback, adding that it was now peaking, so should reduce in the next few years.

He had however, highlighted two sycamore trees in the Cobblers Hall plantation and Woodham Burn, which he suspected to have 'sooty bark disease' and this disease had not been identified in the North East before, so he would be taking samples. If confirmed, this could create further issues with the tree works budget, as the trees need to be felled and burned on site due to the danger of spores, if moved. The disease has been present in the South of England for a while and is brought on from drought. The assessor is not completely sure, but he does suspect this disease.

Consideration was also requested for the request at the last meeting for a cut Christmas Tree for Aycliffe Village, It was advised that the additional cost would be £510 which may result in a small overspend on the Christmas Lights Revenue Budget.

Councillor Tony Beddard wished to thank the Works and Environment Manager who had quickly dealt with an issue reported by a resident.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, seconded by Councillor Neil Collinson and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) A Christmas tree be purchased for Aycliffe Village, at an additional cost to the Christmas Lights Budget of £510.

40. 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 4th October 2026.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Coordinator drew attention to the update regarding a resident who had complimented a works operative's willingness to go above and beyond to assist at the cemetery.

Councillor Tony Beddard commented that it had been quite a moving item to read and suggested providing some level of discretionary reward, suggesting a voucher of £50 for the Oakleaf Sports Complex or similar.

The Town Clerk advised that the Council cannot give a monetary award but could give a commendation under the Staff Commendations Protocol, suggesting that a certificate be presented by the Mayor at a future meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Tony Beddard, and seconded by Councillor Luke Ellis and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The works operative be presented with a Staff Commendation Award by the Mayor at a future meeting.

41. 2027/28 DRAFT ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS

The Finance Manager presented a report for Members' consideration, comments, and approval regarding the draft 2027/28 Revenue and Capital Budgets for the Environment Committee.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, seconded by Councillor Tony Beddard and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The draft 2027/28 Environment Revenue and Capital Budgets be agreed.

42. EXEMPT BUSINESS

In light of the exempt nature of the business to be discussed at the next agenda item, the public were requested to leave the meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, seconded by Councillor Luke Ellis, and;

RESOLVED – that it was in the opinion of the Council that due to the confidential nature of the following item, it was advisable to exclude the press and public.

43. CEMETERIES COMPLAINT

Members considered a report from the Grounds Maintenance Services Co-Ordinator advising Members of a complaint relating to an administrative error involving a reserved burial plot at West Cemetery, explaining how the matter was being investigated and addressed and outlined the controls being introduced to prevent the likelihood of recurrence.

The investigation was being undertaken by the Town Clerk.

Councillors asked a number of questions regarding the how the mistake had occurred, requested clarification on the current cemeteries' procedures, and details of what measures and controls the Council can put in place to prevent the risk of a recurrence, requesting that Members needed a full explanation of the outcome of the investigation in due course.

The Town Clerk stressed that the investigation was a confidential process, but further details on the outcome and resolution of the complaint and the recommended improvements to the cemeteries' procedures and controls to prevent a repeat occurrence, would be reported to a future meeting.

Councillor Tony Beddard proposed that the Council consider appointing an independent arbitrator, if required following the investigation, to provide an impartial mediator, and assist with both an independent review of the cemeteries' processes, proposed remedial actions, and any legal considerations.

Councillor Sharon Hutchinson seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED – as follows:-

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That further details on the outcome of the investigation, the resolution of the complaint and the recommended improvements to the cemeteries' procedures and controls to prevent a repeat occurrence, be reported to a future meeting.
- iii) That the Council consider appointing an independent arbitrator, if required following the investigation, to provide an impartial mediator, and assist with both an independent review of the cemeteries' processes and proposed remedial actions, and any legal considerations.

44. RE-ADMISSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill, seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that the press and public be re-admitted to the meeting.

Chairman