

At a meeting of the Dene Valley Parish Council held at the Dene Valley Community Partnership One Stop Shop, High Street, Eldon Lane on **Monday 8 September 2025 at 6.30 p.m.**

Present:

Councillor J Nicholson in the Chair

Councillors T Bird, J Clark, R Coleman, T Mitchell, J Moore and R Simm.

Also in attendance:

Clerk Ian Croft
South Church Community Partnership - Cheryl Hudson
Candidate to become a Councillor - Samuel Ashmore

1. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Public Participation

There were no members of the public in attendance.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 11 August 2025 (copy attached)

The minutes of the Special meeting held on 11 August 2025 were approved by the Council as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the following amendments:

- Change XL Bully to alleged XL Bully
- There were three other Councillors in attendance at the site visit to Surestart Building – Councillors Coleman, Mitchell and Nicholson
- A typo on page 3 – change ‘access some of thi’ to ‘some of this’

4. Any issues to be raised with local County Councillors

There were no County Councillors in attendance

5. Matters arising/Chairs Update, to include update of former Surestart Building

Samuel Ashmore was in attendance and had expressed an interest in being Co-opted onto the Parish Council. He was a local resident in the Parish and wished to see improvements in the area.

The Council agreed unanimously to co-opt Samuel Ashmore onto the Council. The Clerk would send Councillor Ashmore a Register of Interests form to complete.

Councillor Moore was pleased to report that the right of way/access issue appeared to have improved. The Chair added that she would circulate a copy of the letter she had sent regarding this matter to all Members.

The Chair informed the meeting that her walkabout with Councillor Mitchell had to ascertain the number of boarded up houses had not yet taken place.

Councillor Simm referred to the funding pot of £88m he had raised at the previous meeting and undertook to find out more detail about how the Parish Council might be able to access this.

Councillor Simm informed the meeting that he had emailed Adam Marr at Durham County Council to find out progress on a decision on the former Surestart Building

The Chair informed the meeting that she had responded to the County Council's Call for Sites for the new County Durham Plan and had included the old allotment site, South Church Industrial Estate, the TSOA sited, The Hollow, Clayhole and the 'Sainsbury' field.

Councillor Coleman informed the meeting she believed there were plans for a shop to be constructed where the cabins were currently located at the Prince Bishops construction site.

The Chair informed the meeting that it was proposed the site at end of Coronation would be suggested as woodland. The Chair also informed the meeting that the Blackies Woodland was to be named Gurney Pit Plantation and would contain history boards. Target hardening works were ongoing

6. Dene Valley Parish Council Asset Register

The meeting considered a circulated list of Parish Council Assets to be contained on an Asset Register.

The meeting agreed that the Asset Register was an accurate reflection of the Parish Council assets, subject to number of seats being quoted as 8 and the value of seats to be increased to £350 per seat

7. Finance Update

The Clerk provided the meeting with details of income and expenditure for the Council to the end of August 2025. The Chair meeting agreed the balances and the Chair signed the accounts and the bank statements.

8. Police Update

Councillor Bird informed the meeting that the scope of PACT meetings was for matters which community and not for individual incidents.

Councillor Bird then outlined the following incidents:

- 3 incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour
- Fighting in Spencer Street
- Damage to containers at Auckland Park
- Nuisance on Spencer Street
- Fire to freezer on John Street
- Racist graffiti at end of Spencer Street

Councillor Bird informed the meeting that sentencing had taken place regarding the cannabis farm.

Councillor Bird reported that a Community Safety Co-ordinator – Lucy Broen -had been appointed for the area and would be based at Bishop Auckland Police Station.

Councillor Simm referred to his forthcoming meeting with Joy Allen and Sam Ashworth, MP which was to take place on 26 September 2025 to discuss policing matters and asked Councillor Bird whether he would want to attend the meeting. Councillor Bird expressed an interest in attending the meeting and Councillor Simm agreed to arrange for this to take place.

The meeting agreed that a plaque should be placed on a seat for Railton Lennox and also agreed that the Parish Council should offer a memorial seat opposite the One Stop Shop.

9. Play Areas

Councillor Coleman reported a broken swing at Auckland Park Play Area and it was agreed that this be added to the already planned repairs.

Councillor Simm informed the meeting that although he had spoken to the Probation Service regarding reparation works, he had received no response adding that Kelly Robinson from the Service had not attended the arranged Teams meeting.

Councillor Coleman suggested that the Tesco blue token scheme could be a possible source of funding for any playground projects.

The Chair reported that she had approached all three County Councillors regarding their MIF funding. All three Councillors seemed positive but a pro-forma is needed to be filled in. Peter Garrett at Durham County Council has been approached.

10. Planning Issues

Councillor Clark circulated details of planning applications which had been received or determined in the Dene Valley Parish and surrounding areas since the last meeting (for copy see file of Minutes)

11. Footpaths

Councillor Simm informed the meeting he had reported two footpath issues as follows:

- Shepherds Bridge – change of footpath direction – person at Durham County Council to get back ‘in due course’.
- Crops taken in on other footpath

The Chair reported the footpath to Howlish as being overgrown and had reported this to Durham County Council. Councillor Simm added that he too had reported this matter.

12. Allotments

The Chair reported there were no issues with the Grange Avenue Allotment site. No issues with Grange Avenue.

The Chair reported that the lock on Close House Allotments had been replaced and that issues on the site appear to have calmed a bit. A meeting was to take place about forming an Association for the site at 10 a.m. on 21 September 2025 at the allotment site. A lot of money had

been spent by the Parish Council on this site in recent times and this may need to be reflected in allotment plot rents for 2026/27.

The top allotment site at Close House was not fit for purpose and it was suggested a bonfire be held on this plot on 5 November to burn the waste timber on the site. This would not be a parish Council organised event and County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service would need to be informed if this was taking place.

13. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration

- Councillor Moore reported there had been an accident on the road at the end of Coronation last week and stressed that Durham County Council needed to take a look at the bend on this road. This problem had been ongoing for years. Councillors Simm and Moore agreed to contact Highways at Durham County Council.

Councillor Mitchell suggested that the Parish Council could investigate establishing possible relationships with businesses on industrial estate when funding for projects was identified.

Cheryl Hudson reported that the next meeting of the South Church Community Partnership would be held next Wednesday at 10 a.m. at St Andrew's Academy

In discussing the start time of Parish council meetings it was agreed that this be moved forward to 6.00 p.m. and that 12 meetings would be held each year.

An agenda item for future meetings was agreed as being Highways.

The Chair reported she had discussed with the Clerk and that bullet points of business discussed would be circulated within a week of the meeting taking place.

The meeting discussed what was to be displayed in the newly erected Notice Boards. It was suggested that such items as developments in the area, sites put forward for development, repairs to be done, email addresses of Members, PACT dates, meeting dates, link to website could be the items displayed. It was agreed that another 4 notice boards should be ordered along with 7 header boards.

14. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on Monday 13 October 2025 commencing at 6.00 p.m.

The meeting finished at 9.05 p.m.