

At a Special meeting of the Dene Valley Parish Council held at the Dene Valley Community Partnership One Stop Shop, High Street, Eldon Lane on **Monday 11 August 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

1. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Public Participation

There were no members of the public in attendance.

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. Any Issues to be Raised with local County Councillors.

There were no County Councillors in attendance.

5. Matters arising/Chairs Update

Councillor Moore reported that he had raised the issue of the public right of way with highways at DCC but had received no feedback. The Chair informed the meeting that feedback should be provided and that changes needed to happen in this regard. The right of way was a PROW which was shown in the deeds of properties. There was a need

for the three local County Councillors to stand up for this. Councillor Moore also raised the issue of the ownership of an XL Bully in the area.

The Chair reported that she and Councillor Simm had attended County Hall to submit the Parish Council's bid for the former Surestart building and had waited 45 minutes to hand the bid in, due to staff not being available.

Councillor Moore wanted DCC to write to the neighbour to state this was a PROW and must not be blocked. The Chair replied that she would produce a note on Parish Council letterhead in an attempt for the Parish Council to work with the neighbour to address the PROW issue. Councillor Moore suggested that the XL Bully issue be raised with the Neighbourhood Warden in the first instance.

The Chair reported that she had a good repertoire with the Neighbourhood Warden and would draft a letter regarding the PROW issue and would share this with all Members of the Council.

Councillor Simm reported he had a conference call with the Probation Service later in the week to discuss possible areas of work for the Community Reparation Team.

Councillor Bird reported that the seat in Gibson Street had been replaced following a walkabout with Kate Ward and that local people were very pleased with the outcome.

Councillor Simm asked whether any progress had been made regarding joining the Open Spaces Society. The Clerk replied that no progress had been made but that he would join the Society on behalf of the Parish Council. The Annual Fee for membership was £45.

The Chair informed the meeting that there were not 111 boarded up properties in the Parish area, but there were 111 empty properties. The number of these which were boarded up was not known.

The Chair referred to the former Surestart building and informed the meeting that Councillor Simm had good positive engagement with Sam Rushworth, MP. Councillor Simm informed the meeting he had met with representatives from CPaL a week gone Thursday and had looked at the Surestart site – Councillor Simm was pleased that Sam Rushworth had attended the visit also and was very enthusiastic about the Parish Council's ideas and plans for the building. The CPaL representative had said the bidding process was about the quality of the bid rather than solely monetary value. Councillor Simm had prepared the bid document on the DCC application form and had included a three page document to back up the bid. Although the building would be owned by DVPC it would be a community asset which would have the ownership of the

community. The Chair was sure that young people would engage if given the opportunity. Councillor Mitchell considered that if young people were given ownership of the building than they would want to protect it. Ownership could come from the formation of a youth council.

Councillor Simm informed the meeting he had been in the MP's office last week and that a new £88m fund had been announced last week. The Parish Council could access some of this and the MP had written to the DfE about the Parish Council's bid as well as to local organisations such as Trades for Care.

The Chair informed the meeting that Councillor Simm had established a good working relationship with Sam Rushworth, MP and proposed he be the Parish Council's point of contact with the MP. This was agreed by the meeting.

Councillor Bird considered that progress had been fabulous but advised caution about raising community hopes too high as the community had been let down by various bodies on previous occasions.

Councillor Simm informed the meeting that he was hoping for feedback on the bid before the Parish Council's next meeting in September. A decision was expected 4-5 weeks after the deadline for the submission of bids. Councillor Simm advised the meeting of the monetary value of the bid and undertook to send the bid documents by email to all Members.

6. Start of Work on the new County Durham Plan – Call for Sites Now Open.

The Chair informed the meeting that the Call for Sites for the new County Durham Plan deadline had been extended and the Council discussed possible sites within the Parish which could be put forward for development. The following sites were identified:

- Opposite Millbank Terrace;
- St Philips site;
- The Hollow behind Spencer Street;
- The site currently used as a TSOA;
- Large field at Randolph Street;
- The 'Sainsbury's' field

It was agreed that the Clerk would forward the link to the Call for Sites to the Chair who would then forward the identified sites to the County Council.

7. Councillors Roles and Responsibilities

The Chair explained to the Council that the workload of Council business had expanded greatly over the last year and she was finding it increasingly difficult to meet all demands. There was a need for all Councillors to share responsibilities now that the momentum of the Council was growing. The Chair acknowledged the expertise and knowledge that all Members had and the following lead Members were identified:

- Footpaths – Councillor R Simm and Councillor J Moore – Councillor Moore to provide any feedback to Councillor Simm
- Allotments – Councillor Nicholson (investigate the possibility of Close House becoming an Association)
- Play Areas – Councillor R Coleman
- Surestart Building/development/community hub – Councillor R Simm
- Woodlands Project – Councillor J Nicholson
- Woodland Areas – Councillor J Moore
- PACT meetings/ASB/police liaison – Councillor T Bird
- Planning Issues – Councillor J Clark
- MP liaison – Councillor R Simm

Referring to PACT meetings it was agreed that a list of these meeting dates should be provided to all Members. Councillor Bird replied that PACT meeting dates were available on the police website. The Chair asked that Councillor Bird feedback meeting dates and also what had been discussed at PACT meetings. Councillor Bird reported that per 1000 population Dene Valley had more PCSO's and Police Officers than other areas. Councillor Bird asked that Members feed back to him any incidents which were not reported so that these could be raised at PACT meetings. Councillor Nicholson asked that all Members provide feedback to Councillor Bird on any incidents, reported or not as well as any matters relating to anti-social behaviour/criminality reported to DCC. Councillor Bird would be the Council's lead on anti-social behaviour and police liaison.

Councillor Nicholson informed the meeting that she would be happy to undertake a walk around the Parish area with Councillor Mitchell.

There was a need to obtain .gov.uk email addresses for all Members and the Clerk and the Clerk agreed to contact HugoFox to arrange for this.

9. Police Update

Councillor Bird provided the following incidents which had arisen since the last meeting:

- A car had been covered with white paint;
- A car in Gurney Valley had been damaged;
- Attempted car thefts in the area;
- There was to be a focus on speeding in the area and a speedwatch was to be undertaken although the date was as yet unknown.

The next PACT meeting was due to take place on 4 September at 5 p.m.

10. Play Areas

Councillor Coleman reported she had received no update regarding the repair works to be carried out to Auckland Park Play Area and would chase the company up after the meeting.

Councillor Nicholson reported that the play area at Riverside needed painting and suggested this could be a task for Community Reparation.

11. 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)

12. Footpaths

Councillor Moore reported that there were no issues with Footpaths in the Coronation area. Councillor Simm referred to Footpaths 49 and 98 and had received no feedback from DCC. Footpaths 51 and 69 were still cropped and he would report these to DCC.

13. Allotments

Councillor Nicholson reported there were no issues with Grange Avenue and both Coronation allotment sites. Referring to Close House, the Parish Council had arranged for all asbestos to be removed at a considerable cost, and there was an ongoing issue with illicit drug taking and anti-social behaviour on the site. The lock on the site had gone missing but had now been replaced. The allotment needed an association but there was a reluctance from tenants to take the lead on this. It was agreed that a meeting take place with tenants on the site

and Councillors Coleman, Nicholson and Clark would attend the meeting.

14. Any other business

Councillor Bird reported that the police had used drones in the area last weekend to track motorbikes/quads.

Councillor Clark reported that the hazard tape at Rosemount had been removed.

Councillor Moore reported that young people had been consuming alcohol in the top corner at Rosemount. Councillor Nicholson informed Councillor Moore this should be reported to DCC on line.

Councillor Simm reported the need for the Parish Council's Facebook page to be kept up to date. Councillor Nicholson replied that she was an administrator for the page and it was suggested that this could be an area of responsibility for the person who had expressed an interest in joining the Parish Council.

Councillor Nicholson informed the meeting that a lot of walkabouts had taken place regarding the development of Blackies Wood and that Eldon Estates were keen to assist in preventing quads from entering the woods from their side. Areas had been pinpointed and there was now a plan in place for more target hardening. They were interested in community woodland development. Councillor Moore expressed an interest in becoming involved with this.

15. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held on Monday 8 September 2025 at 6.30 p.m.

The meeting finished at 9.30 p.m.