

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 9 March 2026 at 6.00 p.m.**

Present

Councillor Jayne Nicholson in the Chair

Councillors J Clark, R Coleman and T Mitchell

Also in attendance

County Councillor M Ramage
Locum Clerk – Jenny Linsley
Safer Places Officer - Kate Ward
South Church Residents Association Chair - Cheryl Hudson

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T Bird and J Moore

2. Public Participation

There were no Members of the Public in attendance

3. Chairs Update

The Chair apologised for the email that she had sent to a number of people, with comments made in relation to the Parish Clerk, Ian Croft, and offered her immediate resignation, however by a show of hands by the Councillors in attendance, Councillor Nicholson was asked to continue as Chair of DVPC.

Councillor Nicholson explained that she had received an email that morning from Councillor Bob Simm and Parish Clerk Ian Croft giving their immediate resignation. Councillor Nicholson took the advice from CDALC and they suggested that they contact a Locum Clerk to check their availability to take the minutes of the meeting, and subsequently Mrs Jenny Linsley was approached to attend the meeting at very short notice to take the minutes.

Following Ian Crofts immediate resignation with no period of notice due to him never being provided with a contract of employment the Locum Clerk suggested that the vacancy for a permanent Parish Clerk needed to be advertised, shortlisted and a suitably qualified person appointed with a contract of employment. The Councillors voted by a show of hands to appoint Mrs Linsley as the Locum Clerk in the interim until such time as the vacancy for a permanent Parish Clerk was filled.

Councillor Bob Simm had resigned due to the delay in bringing a number of projects to fruition and the red tape involved in dealing with DCC, Grant funding and frustration in general, Councillor Simm had been at the forefront of the PROW and the proposed installation of flower planters at the village signs throughout the Parish. Councillor Nicolson explained that the Council had limited powers, lack of funding and there was the need for transparency when dealing with public funds.

4. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 9 February 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. Matters Arising

a) Councillor Mitchell advised that there needed to be a big spring clean-up, particularly around Close House, and there was a need for a co-ordinated effort throughout Dene Valley (including Eldon & old Eldon), equipment was available, however volunteers were needed. Councillor Nicholson suggested the Neighbourhood Warden could be contacted to see if DCC Clean & Green could help.

b) The matter of S106 money was discussed at length. The monies came from the development in William Street in 2011 and therefore should be spent in the Dene Valley area, the money allocated to the sculpture on the Coundon roundabout should be clawed back, Councillor Ramage indicated that Stephen Reed (DCC Planning) was best placed to advise on this. One of the proposed uses for the money was for the planters, however Bob Simm had been asked for details of where the planters should be placed and the permission sought from the Land Owner. The Locum Clerks suggested that CPAL at DCC could assist with this, Councillor Nicholson and Kate Ward said that they would link up to see where funds could be taken from, Councillor Ramage advised that he could receive funding applications up to £1000, he suggested that small speed limit signs could be placed in the planters.

c) Project work had not progressed further due to the number of councillors and time constraints.

d) Blackie Woods, the site had received target hardening and boulders were strategically placed. There are 3 spare boulders, and the councillors agreed to donate these to Eldon Parish Council, who would need to make a contribution of £45 to the farmer (Jamie Finch) to relocate the boulders.

e) TCSO site was open up to 4 weeks per year, however the GRT community felt the site was unsafe, and the fly tipping left behind was an expensive clean-up operation

f) Councillor Nicholson raised the matter of trespass by the SW Durham Hunt across DCC & Eldon Estates Land; these had been reported on numerous occasions and the fact the hunt was not “trailing” as there was footage of hounds chasing and destroying a fox.

g) A discussion regarding the Sure Start Building was held, Councillor Clarke advised that the original building was owned by the Salvation Army, after a fire, the building was sold to DCC. Councillor Ramage advised that DVPC should have received a nomination form and Section 123 Best Price information.

6 Allotments

Close House tenants have been burning illegal waste; the general view is that all plots need a tidy up. There is a small increase in the annual rents, letters to be distributed to all tenants to collect in the rent.

7. Finance

The schedule of receipts and payments, were presented to the council for inspection.

8. Police

Safer Places Officer Kate Warsd reported that had been 63 calls in relation to ASB matters, Close House Club had been secured a bollard on Wesley Street had been removed, allowing vehicular access. There had been a quad in the park. The use of Drones was discussed to capture images of ASB. The two CCTV cameras had been stolen and subsequently recovered, they lamppost columns that they had been attached to two had been sawn in two, despite having a lower electrical supply. It was hoped that the footage could be recovered once the cameras had been returned to the manufacturers,

9. Play Areas

The refurbishment of Auckland Park should be addressed, however due to ASB and vandalism, the use of CCTV was considered, as a local resident was willing to install cameras on his property which overlooked the park. Kate Ward said that this was not an option due to CCTV protocol. Trevor Burn had been approached to carry out fencing works, a further suggestion was the planting of laurels which established themselves quickly or indigenous hedgerows.

Riverside Park had requested an additional item for their play area. Installation of lights at the MUGA could be match funded and monies from Councillor Ramage’s budget. There was a suggestion that the residents should be surveyed, to see what improvements need to be made to the recreational

areas. Councillor Ramage advised DVPC to do apply for a CVA for Randolph Park, Councillor Nicholson to speak with a solicitor.

10. Planning Issues

Councillor Clark circulated a list of the recent planning applications.

11. Footpaths & Highways

The Councillors discussed various key areas in the Parish where traffic calming measures were needed. Bob Simm had been spent a lot of time looking into the existing PROW and had met with Peter Garrod to look at funding options to improve them.

12. Any other Business

Councillor Mitchell commented about the upcoming big spring clean and how residents in the area had no pride in the area, which was strewn with litter. There was asbestos in Close house properties and posed a risk to residents. There is a road closure in place to allow for amenities to be installed at a new build. Councillor Nicholson had been approached by the Yorke Family to install a defibrillator and Bleed Pack at Spencer Street.

Cheryl Hudson of the South Church Residents Association advised that they were working on a community day at the Red Alligator and food and drink would be available. Part of South Church was unparished and was at risk of being absorbed into Bisho Auckland Town Council, Dene Valley were happy to collaborate with SCRA to outline plans for their future. The next meeting date is 18th April at 10am at the Red Alligator.

A joint meeting had been arranged with Edon Parish Council at the request of Sam Rushworth MP to discuss future investment through the area. The meeting is to be held on 27th March at 1pm at Eldon Community Centre.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Parish Council would be held on Monday 13 April 2026 at 6.00 p.m.

The meeting finished at 8.04pm

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