

Revenue Budget Summary - Environment and Open Spaces

Budget Description	Budget Holders	2024/25 Gross Budget	2024/25 Net Budget
Environment and Open Spaces	Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Manager)	£123,800	£121,750
<p>Purpose of the Budget:</p> <p>The purpose of the Environment and Open Spaces Budget is to fund the operational resources, including staffing, premises, vehicles, machinery, and equipment, required to effectively to manage and maintain green open space on Town Council owned and leased land within the Great Aycliffe Parish. The budget also provides for the running costs of Moore Lane Environment Centre.</p>			
<p>Scope of Activity and Nature of the Service:</p> <p>The Environment and Open Spaces Budget provides the resources to manage and maintain all green open space, village greens, woodland, plantations, nature reserves and wildflower areas either owned by the Council or held under a lease or licence arrangement e.g. from Durham County Council.</p> <p>This includes key land in a number of areas around the town including Byerley Park Nature Reserve, Woodham Burn, Simpasture Rail Halt and Butterfly Meadow, Great Aycliffe Way, School Aycliffe Wetlands, Cobblers Hall and South Agnew Plantations, Aycliffe Nature Park and Aycliffe Village greens.</p> <p>Work carried out includes grass cutting, tree works including inspections, pruning, and felling, planting of bulbs, shrubs and trees, and the planting and maintenance of various wildflower areas.</p> <p>The budget also provides for the running costs of Moore Lane Environment Centre and the costs of the various environment events, initiatives and projects run from the centre.</p> <p>Environment and open spaces is a discretionary service area.</p>			
<p>Contribution to Council Aims:</p> <p>The Environment and Open Spaces Budget contributes to the following Council Strategic Aims:-</p> <p><i>Aim 2: "To manage the Council's finances and assets in a responsible manner"</i></p> <p><i>Aim 5: "To contribute to the environmental improvement of Aycliffe by managing and developing parks, play areas and green spaces"</i></p> <p><i>Aim 6: "To help and encourage partnership working to improve the services and facilities for the residents of Great Aycliffe"</i></p>			
<p>Key Budget Changes for 2024/25</p> <p>The Environment and Open Spaces Budget has increased by £1,050 per year to a net running cost of £121,750 per year.</p> <p>This increase is a result of increased utility costs and insurances.</p>			

Performance Measures and Indicators:

The Environment and Open Spaces Budget contributes directly towards the delivery of a large number of targets linked to Strategic Aims 1, 2, 5 and 6 within the Service Delivery Plan, as follows:-

- Continue to monitor energy consumption, implement energy saving initiatives and reduce usage where possible.
- Works and Environment Manager to arrange to work with local schools and community groups to develop volunteer opportunities by helping deliver public countryside events when the opportunity arises.
- Deliver the environment related work set out in the Asset Management Plan via the Capital Programme Budget.
- To continue to monitor the health and condition of trees on Town Council land in line with the Tree Management Policy and undertake a visual tree inspection of a specific area every six months to assess the health and condition of the trees.
- Complete at least 5 targeted Himalayan Balsam removing working parties along the Burn.
- Undertake maintenance and management of specific Durham County Council environmental areas as per the management agreement.
- Proactively monitor Ash Tree Dieback and remove diseased trees as necessary.
- To continue partnership working with Durham County Council and build on existing initiatives.
- Work with Durham County Council Officers, Tidy Britain, schools, community, and voluntary groups to hold a Town Pride Environment Week incorporating an anti-litter campaign.
- Work in partnership with residents and friends' groups to improve our environmental areas.

Importance of Service to the Community:

The 2024 'Your Parish, Your Choice, Your Voice' Satisfaction Survey provided some very positive feedback on public satisfaction with environment and open spaces, with all environmental areas receiving a high satisfaction score for maintenance.

The environment is also one of the three key priorities within the Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan.

South Agnew Plantation had the lowest score, with 67% rating it as very good or good, while St Clare's Church frontage and memorial garden scored highest at 96%, followed by Aycliffe Village Greens at 91%.

With regard to value for money, Cobbler's Hall Plantation was considered the worst value for money, with 61% rating it as very good or good value for money, whereas St Clare's Church frontage received a score of 91%.

External Funding and Fees and Charges:

The only income receivable in respect of the Environment Budget is from the sale of dog bags and a recharge to a housing association at Aycliffe Village for grass cutting works.

The Environment Budget may also benefit from any grants or contributions that may become available, although no such funding had been confirmed at the time that the 2024/25 Budget was set.