I am here today on behalf of the Diocese of Durham and of the Acting Bishop of Durham, Sarah, who could not be with us, but sends you her greetings and congratulations.

So it is my pleasure to be with you to see Shildon Alive receive this award, a testimony to the amazing staff and volunteers who make such a difference to so many people’s lives through the astonishing number of ways that you get alongside people, support, train, advise, feed them, and create community.

From small beginnings, over ten years Shildon Alive has grown to make such an impact for so many.

It is good to be here at *the church* for the award to be received. For Shildon Alive is a St John’s project and is rooted deeply in Christian values, not least that every person is loved by and precious to God, and – so that people will know this and experience it – that we are called to show that love ourselves in practical ways, which is exactly what Shildon Alive does.

One of the earliest leaders of the church, a man called Iranaeus, said this 1800 years ago: “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.”

“The glory of God is a human being fully alive.”

I think some of what he meant is that when we see people living up to their God-given potential – thriving, growing, learning, confident – we see what God intends and wants for us, and it’s really good. Seeing people flourishing, we see behind that the goodness and love of God.

Now there are things that *stop* us being fully alive – hunger, worries about money, fear for our safety, homelessness, crippling self-doubt, loneliness. Shildon Alive works with people struggling with all those things, to help them be fully alive. What you do is brilliant, and this award celebrates that – and that is great.

I’ve been asked to say a prayer, so let’s pray:

Loving God,

thank you that each of us is precious to you,

that you want every one of us to live fully and joyfully.

Thank you for Shildon Alive,

for its fantastic staff and volunteers,

for all that it does to help the people of Shildon to be fully alive,

released from the things that prevent that.

We pray that you will continue to prosper Shildon Alive in all that it does,

making a difference to so many people.

We ask this in Jesus, name. Amen.