

FULL COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 25TH JANUARY 2023 – 7.15 p.m.

Minutes of the proceedings of the **ORDINARY MEETING** of the **COUNCIL** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY 25TH JANUARY 2023 at 7.15 p.m.**

PRESENT

Councillor Ken Robson (Chairman)

Councillors Eddy Adam, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jim Atkinson, Dorothy Bowman, Arun M. Chandran, Neil Collinson, Bob Fleming, George Gray, Ian Gray, Brian Haigh, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Kate Hopper, Joanne Jones, Neville Jones, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward, and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mrs. Tracey Woodhead (Finance Manager)
Mrs. Sharna Stretch (Senior Administration Officer)
Mr. Chris Lawson (Golf Administrator)

IN ATTENDANCE

Representatives from Oakleaf Golf Club

A short presentation ceremony was held before the start of the meeting, at which the Mayor, Councillor Ken Robson presented local resident, Alex Brown with a Community Recognition Scheme Certificate and Local Hero Medal in recognition of his charitable fundraising achievements.

The Chairman proposed that Agenda Item 13 be brought forward as members of the Oakleaf Golf Club were in attendance.

101. NOTICE OF MEETING

The notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

102. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Peter Bergg, John Clark, Sandra Haigh, Jed Hillary, Wendy Hillary, Sandra Kirby and Andrea Miller.

103. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

There had been no requests for dispensations under disclosable or non-disclosable interests.

104. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Carl Robinson declared a pecuniary interest for Agenda Item 13 as a member of the Oakleaf Golf Club. Councillor Arun Chandran declared a non-pecuniary interest for Agenda Item 11 as a Member of the CDALC Executive Committee.

105. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

106. ITEM FOR CONSIDERATION FROM COUNCILLOR ARUN CHANDRAN, CHAIRMAN OF POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – OAK LEAF GOLF COMPLEX MEMBERSHIP FEES

The Council were requested to give consideration as to whether it wished to reconsider the following decision taken at the Special Policy and Resources Committee on 31st October 2022 that:

“The golf membership prices for adults, over 60s and 19 to 25’s be increased. with the introduction for different rates for parish residents and non-residents for a full year membership, as follows:

- £39 increase for non-residents
- £20 increase for residents when taking out a full 12-month membership;

If the Council chose to reverse the decision regarding non-residents fees and implement a £20 increase for all members and the financial impact of this would be a loss of income of approximately £2,550 to the 2023/24 Revenue Budget.

If the Council chose to increase all memberships by £39, this would generate an additional income of approximately £1,000 if all current members rejoined.

It was proposed by Councillor Lindsey Aston and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft that following consideration of the statements from the Oak Leaf Golf Club at the Policy and Resources meeting on Wednesday 18th January 2023 outlining their concerns regarding the introduction of a non-residents fee, that the non-resident’s fee be abolished and a flat rate increase of £30 per year be instead implemented for all adult and over 60 members.

A vote was taken on the proposal and was carried with a majority decision.
and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- (i) that the non-resident’s golf membership fee be abolished and a flat rate increase of £30 per year be implemented for all adult and over 60 members.

107. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Bob Fleming and

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 13th December 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

108. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor submitted a list of appointments for the period 6th December 2022 to 18th January 2023 for information.

The Town Clerk announced the passing of former Mayoress Mary Moran and advised that condolences have been given on behalf of the Town Council.

He further advised that he had held discussions with GAMP regarding accessing the Towns and Villages Funding previously set aside for the Simpasture Pavilion Refurbishment Project. Three possible options had been discussed including E.V. charging points at the Oakleaf Sports Complex, Byerley Park play area improvements and for repairs to a bridge at West Park Lakes.

RESOLVED – that the information be received.

109. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(a) Recreation Committee

It was proposed by Councillor George Gray, and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- (i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee held on the 11th January 2023 be received, and
- (ii) that the said minutes be approved and adopted.

(b) Environment Committee

Councillor Martin Ashcroft requested that the minutes be agreed subject to Minute 73 regarding allotments tenancy agreement changes being referred back to the March Meeting of the Environment Committee for reconsideration following the receipt of legal advice from the National Allotments Society.

Councillor Carl Robinson requested that the name 'Mr David Bate' be corrected to 'Mr David Batey' in the Minutes.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and seconded by Councillor Arun Chandran and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- (i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee held on the 11th January 2023 be received, and
- (ii) that the said minutes be approved and adopted subject to Minute 73 regarding allotments tenancy agreement changes being referred back to the March Meeting of the Environment Committee for reconsideration following the receipt of legal advice from the National Allotments Society, and the name 'Mr David Bate' be corrected to 'Mr David Batey'.

(c) Policy and Resources Committee

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- (i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on the 18th January 2023 be received, and
- (ii) that the said minutes be approved and adopted.

110. APPROVAL OF THE 2023/24 PRECEPT

A report was submitted from the Finance Manager to seek approval from the Council for the setting of the Council's 2023/24 Precept, thereby allowing the submission of the Precept Request Form to Durham County Council and the setting of the Town Council proportion of the Council Tax.

Councillor Michael Stead wished to have it recorded in the minutes his concern that the Town Council had not done enough to identify further savings and income generation opportunities and that it has significant reserves that could be utilised to keep the Council Tax increase to a minimum.

Councillor Arun Chandran stated the Council had undertaken a robust budget setting process, that it was too late to refer the decision back now, and that the report tonight is agree to the signing of a legal document i.e. the Precept Form.

Councillor Eddy Adam echoed these comments and added that the Town Council have been debating the budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan for 3 to 4 months and there have been many opportunities to debate other options.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft wished to have it recorded the Council's thanks to the Finance Manager for all her hard work on the budget over many months.

The Finance Manager advised that if the Precept was not set and signed off at this meeting there was a risk that the Town Council would have no precept at all.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- (i) that the report be received.
- (ii) that the 2023/24 Council Precept at £1,890,739 is approved;
- (iii) that the Chairman is authorised to sign the attached Precept Form;
- (iv) that the Precept Form is sent to Durham County Council on 26th January 2023; and
- (v) the information provided regarding the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of the Council's balances and reserves are noted.

111. DEVOLUTION DEAL FOR NORTH EAST

Information received from the County Durham Association of Local Councils was submitted by the Town Clerk on the Devolution Deal for the North East of England for members to receive, discuss and advise what, if any, actions it wishes officers to take ahead of any formal consultation process by Durham County Council.

A lengthy debate was held regarding this issue.

Councillor Tony Armstrong voiced his concerns about the devolution proposal, as it could mean a loss of decision making and powers would be taken away locally.

Councillor Arun Chandran gave his thoughts on the report that had been discussed at Durham County Council and outlined the proposed benefits of the devolution proposal, stating that the proposal would benefit our area as it would provide investment for the next 30 years.

Councillor Chandran proposed that the Council receive the information and that officers take no action other than to invite a representative from Durham County Council to attend a future meeting to discuss the proposals.

Councillor Jim Atkinson outlined his concerns about the proposal and stated that the downsides to the proposals are not being reported.

Councillor Eddy Adam outlined his concerns including what guarantees there are that the funding will continue over the full 30 years bearing in mind possible changes of government, the lack of a public referendum or vote, the creation of another level of bureaucracy, and the possibility of a precept to fund administration costs. He concluded by seconding Councillor Chandran's proposal to invite a representative from Durham County Council to attend a future meeting.

Councillor Bob Fleming expressed similar concerns including what will happen in 30 years' time and previous referendum results voting against similar proposals.

Councillor Michael Stead outlined his support for the devolution deal stating it would give our area more funding for services and more say over issues such as transport, the economy and housing.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- (i) that the report be received
- (ii) that officers invite a representative from Durham County Council to attend a future meeting to discuss the issue.

112. PARISH MEMBER RECRUITMENT FOR DCC STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Following notification of vacancies for a parish and town council members on Durham County Council's Standards Committee by County Durham Association of Local Councils, the Council was requested to nominate a maximum of two members for the position.

It was proposed by Councillor Bob Fleming and seconded by Jim Atkinson and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- (i) that applications from Councillors Tony Armstrong and Phillip Hawkins be submitted to the CDALC Executive Committee.

113. OUTSIDE BODIES

Reports were given by representatives on the undermentioned Outside Bodies:-

- (a) **Youth Council**
There had been no meeting. Councillor Tony Armstrong made a brief statement highlighting his wish for a specific section relating to the priorities of the youth of the town to be included on the next townwide survey.
- (b) **County Durham Association of Local Councils**
There had been no meetings.
- (c) **Aycliffe Village Hall Association**
Councillor Neville Jones advised that there had been a meeting on 9th January and the minutes were available from the Town Clerk.
- (d) **Woodham Village Community Association**
There had been no meetings.
- (e) **Great Aycliffe and Middridge Local Councils' Committee**
There had been no meetings.
- (f) **Larger Local Councils' Forum**
There had been no meetings.
- (g) **Aycliffe and District Bus Preservation Society**
Councillor Ian Gray gave an update report.
- (h) **Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway**
Councillor Jim Atkinson gave an update report.
- (i) **Western Area Partnership**
There had been no meetings.

CHAIRMAN.