

## ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 29<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the **ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 29<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2023 at 8pm**

### PRESENT

#### **Councillor Ian Gray (Chairman) and**

Councillors: Tony Armstrong, Lindsey Aston, Jim Atkinson, Dorothy Bowman, Arun M Chandran, John Clark, Neil Collinson, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Wendy Hillary, Joanne Jones, Neville Jones, Sandra Kirby, Brian McAnaney, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Ken Robson, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

### OFFICERS

Mr Dan Austin (Town Clerk)

Mr Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Manager)

Mr Lee Williams (Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator)

Mrs Sharna Stretch (Senior Admin. Officer)

### IN ATTENDANCE

Three members of the public.

#### **49. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Eddy Adam, Peter Bergg, Sandra Haigh, and Simon Hocking.

#### **50. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS**

No applications for dispensations had been received.

#### **51. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest had been received.

#### **52. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

A member of the public asked if there could be better maintenance of trees and bushes around town. The Works and Environment Manager offered to discuss this out of the meeting to establish which areas were the problem areas and who was the land owner.

#### **53. MINUTES**

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill, and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson and

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee, held on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023, be confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

#### **54. PLANNING SUB COMMITTEE MINUTES**

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson, and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson and

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the meeting of the Planning Sub Committee, held on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023, be confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman, and the recommendations agreed.

#### **55. ALLOTMENTS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING NOTES**

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator thanked the Chairman and the Mayor for attending the AGM.

The Chairman thanked the Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator for a well-organised meeting.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that the notes be received.

#### **56. ENVIRONMENT REPORT**

An update report was submitted by the Works and Environment Manager to bring Members up to date regarding issues relating to the environment for the six weeks ended 19<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that the report be received.

#### **57. CEMETERIES REPORT**

Members considered a report from the Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator updating members on items relating to the cemeteries for the six weeks ended 19<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that the report be received.

#### **58. TREE COMPLAINT – SCHOOL AYCLIFFE**

A report was submitted by the Works and Environment Manager for members to consider a resident's complaint regarding a tree neighbouring his property and the determine what, if any, action should be taken in relation to the complaint.

Consideration was also requested of two potential clauses to be added to the Council's Tree Management Policy to cover complaints of this nature.

A discussion was held regarding this issue, the Chairman agreed after seeing the tree in question that it is a unique situation and he proposed that the tree be removed. This was seconded by Councillor Ken Robson.

Councillor Carl Robinson agreed that the tree should be removed, and further proposed that the two additional clauses referenced in the report be added to the Town Council's Tree Management Policy.

This was seconded by Councillor Ian Gray.

Councillor Arun Chandran further proposed that the neighbouring households be informed of the removal of the tree and given a period of 14 days to respond.

Councillor Jed Hillary expressed concern that removing the tree would open up the Council to requests from other households.

It was clarified that the addition of the two clauses to the Tree Management Policy would allow officers discretion to consider each request in line with the requirements of the policy but allow more scope to take action where there was significant overhanging of properties.

The Works and Environment Manager added that it is the Council's policy that for every tree that is removed, at least three replacement trees are planted.

It was also stressed that the removal of the tree was subject to confirming with the Durham County Council Tree Officer that there would be no liability in relation to heave.

A vote was then requested and the proposals were agreed by a majority decision.

Councillor Jed Hillary wished to have it recorded that he had abstained from the vote.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that:

- i) the report be received.
- ii) the tree is to be felled in support of the resident's complaint, subject to Durham County Council's Tree Officer confirming that there is no liability to the Town Council linked to heave.
- iii) the additional clauses referenced in the report regarding any trees that have previously been planted in inappropriate locations after the construction of the dwelling, and any trees which directly overhang a building by more than 25% be added to the Tree Management Policy.
- iv) the neighbouring households be informed of the removal of the tree and given a period of 14 days to respond.

*Councillor Lindsey Aston left the meeting at this point.*

## **59. WOODLAND BURIAL SITE UPDATE**

The Grounds Maintenance Co-ordinator provided members with a summary of previously reported information to allow them to reconsider the development of a woodland/natural burial site on land adjacent to West Cemetery.

Councillor Neil Collinson proposed that the recommendations of the report be agreed and that financial provision be made for the project in the Medium-Term Financial Plan over a period of three years and that officers progress the registration of a change of use for the land in question. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Hill.

Councillor Joanne Jones stated that whilst the woodland burial site was a good idea, the Council should focus on addressing the drainage issues in the current cemeteries first.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator updated members on the planned drainage improvements at West Cemetery.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran stated that the woodland burial service should be cost neutral or cost-benefit to the Council, that residents should come first with non-residents paying more for the woodland burial, and that once open, the Council would need to implement the Durham County Council woodland burial rules rigidly.

A vote then took place on the proposal with the following results:-

For: 10      Against: 8      Abstentions: 3

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that:

- i) the report be received and;
- ii) the project should proceed;
- iii) the budget provision included in the next Medium Term Financial Plan update be increased to £55,000, to be spread over a period of three years to 2026/27.
- iv) officers progress the registration of change of use for the land at a cost of £231.

## **60. GREEN ARTS USE OF MOORE LANE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE**

The Town Clerk submitted a report regarding the agreement for Green Arts to use Moore Lane Environment Centre, to request the addition of a new group to the contracted-out tenancy agreement and to consider how future requests to add new groups activities and events to the agreement be dealt with.

Councillor Tony Armstrong wished to have his thanks recorded for the officers work in ensuring a new home for Green Arts and the maintenance of an arts provision in Great Aycliffe.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson, and seconded by Councillor Jed Hillary and

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that:

- i) the report be received;
- ii) the Creative Forum group be added to the approved list of permitted groups and activities appended to the Contracted-Out Tenancy Agreement;
- iii) The Town Clerk be granted delegated authority to consider requests of this nature without having to go back to Council for approval, subject to ensuring that that any activities are not for profit or commercial gain, limited to a maximum of 35 attendees including staff, and that any additional groups have the relevant insurance, risk assessments, safeguarding arrangements etc in place.

## 61. PLANNING SUB COMMITTEE VACANCY

Members were asked to consider nominating replacements to the two vacancies on the Planning Sub Committee.

It was proposed by Councillor Michael Stead, and seconded by Councillor Arun M. Chandran, and

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that:

- i) Councillor Brian McAnaney be appointed to the Planning Sub Committee and;
- ii) Councillor Joanne Jones be removed from the Planning Sub Committee following a request to stand down, therefore leaving two vacancies on the sub-committee.

**Chairman**