

FULL COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 31ST JANUARY 2024 – 7.00 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 31st January 2024 at 7.00 p.m.**

PRESENT

Councillor Carl Robinson (Chairman)

Councillors Eddy Adam, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jim Atkinson, Peter Bergg, Arun M. Chandran, John Clark, Neil Collinson, George Gray, Ian Gray, Brian Haigh, Jed Hillary, Wendy Hillary, Simon Hocking, Neville Jones, Brian McAnaney, John Moore, Ken Robson, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr. D. Austin (Town Clerk)
Mrs. T. Woodhead (Finance Manager)
Mrs. S. Stretch (Senior Administration Officer)

IN ATTENDANCE

Five members of the public and representative from the local press.

112. NOTICE OF MEETING

The notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

113. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Dorothy Bowman, Sandra Haigh, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Joanne Jones, Sandra Kirby and Anita Sparrow.

114. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

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

115. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

116. TOWN CENTRE PARKING

Councillor Arun M. Chandran gave an introductory statement regarding the Newton Aycliffe town centre managements' decision to implement time restrictions and monitoring, via ANPR cameras, in three car parks within the town centre, highlighting that it was important that the Town Council represented the concerns of the general public regarding the changes, whilst acknowledging that the Council had limited influence over the issue.

Councillor Chandran stated that it was the intention to forward all concerns and comments on the issue to the town centre management.

Councillor Ken Robson stated that he deplored the decision and suggested that a letter is sent from the Town Clerk to the town centre management to express the Council's concerns.

Councillor Jed Hillary expressed disappointment that no-one from the Town Centre Management had attended the meeting to address the concerns and queried which land was owned by Durham County Council (DCC) in the town centre area why DCC parking wardens were issuing parking tickets.

Councillor Eddy Adam stated he had never seen a DCC parking warden in the town centre and that the town centre area is owned and maintained by a private individual. Councillor Adam commented on the low public turnout at the meeting and stated that the Town Council's role was limited to raising any concerns with the town centre management who may or may not act upon them. He highlighted the lack of consultation by the town centre management with the shops, doctor's surgery and members of the public, and questioned what the impact would be on residential streets and how the fines are monitored. He added that money should be spent on improving the town centre rather than putting up signs and that there is insufficient evidence or data provided by the Town centre management to justify the installation of parking restrictions. He concluded by saying that not enough thought had gone into the proposals and the Town Council should raise all comments and concerns with the town centre manager.

Councillor Neil Collinson added that he felt it was disappointing that the town centre management had not attended the meeting and stated that as a private organisation, he did not believe that they will not be making money out of it.

Councillor Jim Atkinson stated that there are other car parks in the town centre that are not being monitored, and if implemented correctly, the proposal will actually help to free up parking spaces.

Councillor Tony Armstrong asked if something could be done with the derelict multi storey car park and added that more consultation is needed.

Councillor Wendy Hillary raised concerns about the users of Bewick Crescent car park, particularly users of the doctor's surgery and questioned whether the town centre management have links to the parking company.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran suggested that following the failed levelling up bid for the town centre, the multi storey car park should be demolished and replaced with car parking and requested that the town centre managers are asked what their intentions are with the multi storey car park. He further questioned why the town centre owners are not doing anything about the empty shops.

Councillor Neville Jones stated that all the decisions are made in London by the town centre owners and that the shop workers are going to be impacted as they will have to park on nearby roads.

Councillor Peter Bergg questioned who owns Bewick Crescent car park and raised concerns about parking provision for disabled drivers.

Councillor Michael Stead added that Newton Aycliffe had been let down by the Government with the levelling up bid.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran concluded by suggesting that all comments and questions from councillors and members of the public be forwarded to the town centre management following the meeting, with any response being published in the local press.

117. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A member of the public had been requested to comment by St Mary's Church, St Clare's Church and Newton Aycliffe Leisure Centre. He described the town planning situation, and that car parking has always been a problem as it was not considered effectively in the original design. He queried why the town centre was not handed over to the Town Council when it was sold, and asked if the Council could ask the town centre management to publicise which car parks are affected.

Another member of the public commented that for less mobile people, getting to the various shops/banking hub/etc can take over 2 ½ hours, and that there are not enough parking spaces in the town centre and that the multi storey car park should be demolished.

Another member of the public queried why a Town Councillor was championing the idea, asked who places the signs up around the town and expressed concern that parking in residential streets will increase.

Another member of the public questioned how students would be impacted by the changes and what would happen if they received a fine.

The Chairman then closed the debate and added that all questions and statements will be forwarded to the town centre management and any responses received will be circulated through the local press and the Council's social media.

118. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M. Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Neil Collinson and;

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 13th December 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

119. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor provided a list of appointments for the period from the 6th December 2023 to 24th January 2024.

The Mayor reminded members that there are still tickets available for the Civic dinner on Friday 16th February.

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) that the announcements be received.

120. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(a) Recreation Committee

Councillor George Gray queried the accuracy of the minutes of the Recreation Committee meeting and the decision not to move the picnic bench in West Park, suggesting that the position of the picnic bench as stated in the report was incorrect.

Following a discussion about the accuracy of the minutes and clarification from the Town Clerk on the Standing Orders regarding the approval of committee minutes, it was agreed that the draft minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting and that it was not possible to reopen the debate on the subject or make any further statements in relation to the debate and decision.

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary, and seconded by Councillor Simon Hocking; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee held on the 17th January 2024 be received, and
- ii) that the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

(b) Environment Committee

It was proposed by Councillor Ian Gray, and seconded by Councillor Arun M. Chandran; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee held on the 17th January 2024 be received, and
- ii) that the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

(c) Policy and Resources Committee

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M. Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on the 24th January 2024 be received, and
- ii) that the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

121. SETTING OF THE 2024/25 COUNCIL PRECEPT

The Finance Manager submitted a report to seek approval from the Council for the setting of the Council's 2024/25 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 asked the Finance Manager what would happen to the Council Tax increase figure if the proposed £75,000 contribution to capital reserves was retained at £50,000. He added that the Liberal Democrat Group was happy to support the budget and the council tax increase this year but hope that the Council will take the next year to look for efficiency savings and not look to add further to the reserves.

The Finance Manager explained that if the Council did not have sufficient balances, then the council tax would need to be increased by even more in order to fund medium-term capital investment, and this is why it is important to ensure a prudent replenishment of balances.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran proposed that the Council approve the precept as set out in the report, adding that the council tax increase would have been 2.65% if Durham County Council had not cut the Local Council Tax Support Scheme Grant.

Councillor Jed Hillary added that with the cost-of-living crisis, the savings made by the Council are commendable and that the Council needs to maintain reserves and that keeping the precept under 5% was commendable.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M. Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) that the 2024/25 Council Precept be approved at £1,974,773;
- ii) that the Precept Form be signed by the Chairman;
- iii) that the Precept Form is sent to Durham County Council following the Council Meeting; and
- iv) that the information provided regarding the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of the Council's balances and reserves be noted.

122. LEAVE OF ABSENCE

The Town Clerk submitted a request from Councillor Anita Sparrow requesting a leave of absence for ill health reasons.

Councillor Peter Bergg wished to record thanks to Councillor Sparrow for not claiming the member's allowance during the period of absence.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M. Chandran and seconded by Councillor Martyin Ashcroft that the request be approved.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) that the request be received; and
- ii) that the Council approve a leave of absence until further notice;
- iii) that it be noted that the Councillor will not be claiming Members Allowance for the period of the absence.

123. OUTSIDE BODIES

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

- (a) **County Durham Association of Local Councils**
Councillor Arun M. Chandran advised that the next meeting will be held in February and that if members had any suggestions for items for discussion, these should be raised with the Town Clerk.
- (b) **Aycliffe Village Community Association**
There is no Council representative on this organisation at the present time.
- (c) **Woodham Village Community Association**
There had been no meetings.
- (d) **Great Aycliffe and Middridge Local Councils' Committee**
There had been no meetings.
- (e) **Larger Local Councils' Forum**
There had been no meetings.
- (f) **Aycliffe and District Bus Preservation Society**
Councillor Ian Gray gave a verbal update.
- (g) **Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway**
Councillor Jim Atkinson gave a verbal update.
- (h) **Western Area Partnership**
Councillor Ken Robson gave a verbal update.

CHAIRMAN.