

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 28TH FEBRUARY 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the **ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 28TH FEBRUARY 2024 at 9.30pm.**

PRESENT

Councillor Ian Gray (Chairman) and

Councillors: Eddy Adam, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Arun M. Chandran, John Clark, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Wendy Hillary, Joanne Jones, Neville Jones, 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 Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

IN ATTENDANCE

One member of the public.

70. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Jim Atkinson, Peter Bergg, Dorothy Bowman, Neil Collinson, Sandra Haigh, Brian McAnaney and Anita Sparrow.

71. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No applications for dispensations had been received.

72. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest had been received.

73. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A member of the public asked why trees and bushes on the town do not seem to be dealt with until they become a problem, why perennial plants from flower beds are disposed of, when they could be donated to local groups, and whether users of the cemeteries could be encouraged to plant memorial trees with a plaque.

Councillor Ian Gray advised that the Council is limited as to what it can do with hedges because of birds and wildlife as it is a criminal offence to cut them down. The Works and Environment Manager further clarified that the issue of trees was covered in the Environment Report on the agenda and that surplus perennial plants from Council flower beds are given to organisations that approach the Council for them. The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator advised that the cemeteries already have some memorial trees and there are options for families to purchase these.

74. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Michael Stead and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill and;

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee, held on 17th January 2024, be confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

75. ALLOTMENTS REPORT

Members considered a report from the Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator updating members on issues relating to the allotments.

An additional verbal update was given to advise that three of the outstanding rent payments from tenants have now been paid.

Councillor Jed Hillary raised concern that there was still no update on drainage works and this has been ongoing since before the new year.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator advised that the drainage works have been planned in but had been delayed due to the very wet ground conditions.

There was a lengthy debate and a number of questions regarding the issue of the replacement of the beekeeping plot fence following the removal of a pigeon loft from a neighbouring plot.

Councillor Jed Hillary expressed concern regarding the Aycliffe Beekeepers Association (ABKA) request that the Council should pay towards the cost of the replacement fencing, due to the precedent this would set because all other tenants are responsible for their own fencing.

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary, seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson that ABKA be requested to pay for the fence.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran highlighted that beekeeping is an important issue for the environment and the community, and so it is in the Council's interest to assist where possible. Councillor Joanne Jones suggested that ABKA could apply for a donation for Policy and Resources Committee to consider.

A vote was held on the proposal, and it was agreed by a majority decision that funding would not be provided by the Council and that ABKA be requested to pay for the fence.

Following a lengthy debate and a number of questions regarding the keeping of cockerels on allotments sites, following the recent noise complaint, it was proposed by Councillor Arun M. Chandran, seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft that the Council's Allotments Tenancy Agreement should be amended to prevent the keeping of cockerels on poultry sites.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the report be received.
- ii) funding would not be provided by the Council for the replacement of the fence on the beekeeping plot and that ABKA be requested to pay for the fence.
- iii) the Allotment Tenancy Agreement be amended to remove permission for the keeping of cockerels on poultry sites.

Councillor George Gray left the meeting.

76. 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.

There followed a lengthy debate about tree management and ownership and the Town Council's role in reporting issues relating to dangerous trees on non-Council land.

Councillor John Moore wished to have it recorded in the minutes his concerns about the dangerous trees within North Agnew Plantation and also a number of problem trees throughout Woodham Village and wished to thank the Works and Environment Manager for his recent assistance and advice.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that whilst being mindful that the Council have our own trees to look after, there is a duty of care to local residents and Council Officers feel a sense of responsibility to contact the land owner of the North Agnew Plantation regarding the concerns outlined in the report.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran advised that the land owners will need approval from Durham County Council before any work can be done and to ensure the Council Officers also notify Durham County Council.

It was proposed by Councillor John Moore, seconded by Councillor Arun Chandran, that the Council writes a letter to local land owners of North Agnew Plantation and Durham County Council highlighting the concerns around the dangerous trees in this area.

Councillors asked a number of questions regarding bus shelters including the inspection process. Councillor Carl Robinson highlighted issues with the bus shelters in Aycliffe Village and Councillor Andy Hill highlighted a resident's concern regarding the town centre bus shelters. These were noted by the Works and Environment Manager.

Councillor John Woodward wished to have his thanks for the works undertaken to the bus shelters on Burnhill Way and Greenfield Way recorded in the minutes.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the report be received;
- ii) the Council writes a letter to the owners of the North Agnew Plantation and Durham County Council highlighting the concerns around the dangerous trees in this area.

77. CEMETERIES REPORT

Members considered a report from the Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator updating members on issues relating to the cemeteries.

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

78. LICENCE TO SITE TABLES AND CHAIRS ON VILLAGE GREEN

The Town Clerk submitted a report for members to consider a request by the operators of The County Restaurant and Public House for a further licence to allow the continued use of a section of Aycliffe Village Green, immediately to the front of the establishment, for outside dining and socialising.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) The request from the County Restaurant and Public House for a further licence to use part of the village green for the purpose of temporarily siting tables and chairs for outside dining and socialising be agreed.
- ii) The new licence be for a period of one-year and based on the current licence agreement, to be reviewed on an annual basis in line with any feedback from local residents.

Chairman