

## RECREATION COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the **RECREATION COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 28<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2024** at 7:00pm

### PRESENT

**Councillor Jed Hillary** (Chairman) and:  
Councillors: Eddy Adam, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Arun M. Chandran, John Clark, George Gray, Ian Gray, Brian Haigh, Andy Hill, Wendy Hillary, Joanne Jones, Neville Jones, Sandra Kirby, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Ken Robson, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

### OFFICERS

Mr Dan Austin (Town Clerk)  
Mrs Tracey Woodhead (Finance Manager)  
Mr Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Manager)  
Mrs Judith Thexton (Head of Leisure and Events)  
Mr Lee Williams (Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator)  
Mr Andy Clark (Sports Complex Manager)  
Mr Chris Lawson (Golf Administrator)  
Mrs Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

### IN ATTENDANCE

One member of the public.

### 83. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Jim Atkinson, Peter Bergg, Dorothy Bowman, Neil Collinson, Sandra Haigh, Brian McAnaney and Anita Sparrow.

### 84. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No applications for dispensations had been received.

### 85. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Carl Robinson declared an interest in Agenda Items 6 and 7 relating to the Oak Leaf Golf Complex as a committee member of the Oak Leaf Golf Club.

### 86. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A member of the public asked if there is any truth in rumours that the Sports Complex will be sold.

The Chairman confirmed that there are no plans to sell the OakLeaf Sports Complex.

## 87. MINUTES

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

**RESOLVED** - that the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee held on the 17<sup>th</sup> January 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## 88. OAKLEAF GOLF COMPLEX UPDATE REPORT

The Head of Leisure and Events and Golf Administrator submitted a report and statistical information related to income at the Oakleaf Golf Complex for the six-week period ended 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

The Town Clerk advised that the golf course had been open more often than local courses, due to the less risk averse opening policy. It was highlighted that many range balls continue to be lost due to being plugged in the very wet ground conditions. To rectify this, 4,000 more balls have been ordered, but this is a short-term fix and there is significant risk of this continuing. Options are being investigated for drainage improvements on the range and a report will be submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee for consideration.

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

## 89. GOLF COMPLEX LONG-TERM IMPROVEMENT AND INVESTMENT PLAN

A report was submitted by the Town Clerk, Grounds Maintenance Services Co-Ordinator, Golf Administrator and Head of Leisure and Events setting out for Members' consideration and comment a Long-Term Improvement and Investment Plan for the Oak Leaf Golf Complex.

The Town Clerk provided an overview of the report and plan advising that the plan had been requested by the Council in light of decreasing usage and income at the golf complex, and a lack of planned capital investment. The Town Clerk thanked the Grounds Maintenance Services Co-Ordinator in particular for his efforts in preparing the plan.

It was advised that comments and feedback on the plan have been sought from the Oak Leaf Golf Complex and Golf Working Group.

The Town Clerk stressed that the Plan is intended to be a guide to the long-term improvement and investment required and is certainly not a commitment to spend, although it will be used to guide financial planning. It was stressed that any investment would be requested through a formal report to the relevant committee.

The plan highlights priorities with estimated costs and whether the improvements can be completed in house or using outside contractors. It was advised that some actions have already been completed or underway using existing budgets.

It was advised that the works identified as being the highest priorities could be broken down into three key areas:

1. Works that will help keep the golf course open more often and for longer.
2. Additional support to greenkeepers.
3. Driving range drainage improvements.

Finally, it was advised that the Golf Complex Service Review in the new financial year would seek to build on the Improvement and Investment Plan by looking at the management, staffing, marketing, memberships, fees and charges. relationship with the golf club etc.

The Town Clerk requested feedback from the Recreation Committee on the plan and in particular regarding what should be the key priorities.

Councillor Eddy Adam commended officers for the detailed report and commented that it was long overdue and a good steer for the golf complex but requires clarity on what return will be or likely be from the financial investments.

Councillor Arun Chandran commented that the key priority for the plan must be to maximise the usage of the golf course. If any proposed improvements do not achieve this, it cannot be a priority for the Council in the current financial climate. He thanked the officers for the work done so far but stressed that any future expenditure must have a good return and that officers be asked to further develop the plan with more detail regarding priorities, timescales, costings and cost benefit analysis.

Councillor Lindsey Aston asked for clarification around assessment of priorities and asked why works relating to the holes that were closed often, were not shown as high priority.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator explained that the plan focuses on keeping the golf course open more frequently, initially a minimum of 11 holes, then to focus on the other smaller areas to bring to 15 holes and eventually the full 18 open. For immediate impact the focus is on the holes that can be kept in play with minimal investment, which will then hopefully see more members returning allowing further investment to complete the medium/low priorities.

Following a number of questions about drainage on the golf course, Councillor Arun Chandran asked if enquiries can be made with Northumbrian Water regarding water drainage under the railway lines.

It was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam, seconded by Councillor Arun Chandran that agreement of the plan should be deferred and considered as part of the Golf Complex Service Review, before being reported back to the Recreation Committee for final approval.

The Town Clerk requested that this be subject to officers being able to factor in the highest priorities to the Medium-Term Financial Plan or bring reports forward on any urgent improvements. This was agreed.

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

- i) The report and Golf Complex Improvement and Investment Plan be received.
- ii) Agreement of the plan be deferred and considered as part of the Golf Complex Service Review, before being reported back to the Recreation Committee for final approval with more detail regarding priorities, timescales, costings and cost benefit analysis.
- iii) Officers factor in the highest priorities to the Medium-Term Financial Plan or bring reports forward on any urgent improvements.
- iv) Enquiries be made with Northumbrian Water regarding drainage of water underneath the railway lines.

## 90. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX USAGE COMPARISONS

The Sports Complex Manager submitted a report updating members on statistical information in relation to the attendance and income at the Oak Leaf Sports Complex for the month of January compared with the last five years.

Councillor Carl Robinson commended the Sports Complex Manager for the number of function room bookings in January.

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

## 91. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The Sports Complex Manager submitted a report to provide Members with an update on previous events and any staff training held in the period since the last meeting of the Recreation Committee and details of proposed new developments.

The Sports Complex Manager verbally updated Members that the bowls hall handrails were due to be installed imminently but that the bar alcove seating had been delayed due to material issues.

There followed a lengthy debate regarding the feasibility of introducing darts as a sporting activity within the sports complex.

Whilst the principle of introducing darts at the sports complex was positively received, concerns were raised about the proposed location of the proposed dart board in the bowls hall including whether there was enough space, the effect on the bowls users, and health and safety issues.

The Sports Complex Manager suggested the other option is the function room when not in use, but with the increase in bookings this meant less availability. The table tennis area is available but not a licensed area of the building.

Councillor Michael Stead suggested inviting a professional darts player to come and officially open the facility once it has been agreed.

It was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam, seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and;

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

- i) The report be received.
- ii) A trial of the reception desk opening and closing 30 minutes earlier daily, be implemented alongside the previously agreed changes to the bar opening times.
- iii) The Sports Complex Manager carry out further investigation into the most suitable location for a darts board to be installed in the Oakleaf Sports Complex, including consultation with the bowls club, and report back to the next meeting.
- iv) Following confirmation of external sponsorship towards the costs of installing the darts equipment, refer any additional budget requirement to the Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

## 92. PARKS UPDATE

The Works and Environment Manager submitted a report providing Members with an update relating to the parks.

Members were asked to consider an offer from County Councillor Ken Robson to purchase three picnic tables from his Members Initiative fund to be sited within the West Ward.

Officers had recommended that two of the additional picnic benches could be installed on the hard standing which was formally used for the exercise equipment on the central path within West Park, with the third picnic table to be installed near an existing picnic table in Simpasture Park between the infant play area and tennis courts.

Councillor Carl Robinson expressed concern that no requests had been received from the public requesting additional picnic benches in the West Ward and suggested there were better uses for the funding.

Councillor George Gray expressed concern about the proposed locations highlighting that Simpasture Park has two benches and seven seats already, and that the benches in West Park would likely be damaged like the exercise equipment had been.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that the locations had been proposed as they are away from residential property, in the centre of the park, in a pleasant location and with tarmac hardstanding already in place.

Councillors Joanne Jones and Arun Chandran both spoke in support of the recommendations from the officer and saw the picnic benches as an improvement to the local area for residents.

Councillor Michael Stead commented that there is a lack of bins at West Park.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that extra bins have been ordered and one will be installed at the park near the picnic benches.

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary, seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam and ;

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that;

- i) The report be received;
- ii) Officers advance the County Councillor's offer of purchasing three additional picnic benches from his Members Initiative Fund, to be sited at the officer's recommended locations.

## 93. TOWN PARK REPLACEMENT PLAY UNIT

The Works and Environment Manager submitted a report providing Members with an update and options for the replacement of the damaged play unit within the Town Park.

Three designs and associated quotes had been received ranging from £16,700 to £18,560. A further design was circulated at the meeting at a cost of £23,295.

It was advised that the additional design, whilst more expensive was worthy of consideration as it has a climbing element, slide for older children and seating area suitable for the older children/teens.

It was advised that once an appropriate design had been agreed, officers will look to consult with local schools and seek external grant funding. It was advised that County Councillors and Great Aycliffe and Midldridge Partnership (GAMP) have been approached for funding.

Councillor Eddy Adam advised he had followed up with GAMP but not had responses from all of the County Councillors. Councillor Adam also advised that GAMP may require match funding to be in place.

The Town Clerk advised that match funding could be offered by way of future maintenance and insurance of the equipment.

A lengthy discussion was held around the breakdown of the equipment quotes, the different designs and pricing, the lifespan of the equipment, maintenance and part replacement costs, warranties, cost of installation and post-installation checks.

Councillor Michael Stead suggested that officers undertake research on play equipment installed elsewhere, including alternative options available for installation and comparing warranties.

It was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam, seconded by Councillor Arun Chandran that officers proceed in seeking external grant funding for the project and consult with local children on the designs, once funding is in place, reporting back to the Recreation Committee in due course.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that;

- i) The report be received;
- ii) Officers proceed in seeking external grant funding for the project and consult with local children on the designs, once funding is in place, reporting back to the Recreation Committee in due course.

#### **94. CHRISTMAS LIGHTS AND TREES**

A report was submitted by the Works and Environment Manager providing information regarding the Council's annual Christmas display within the parish, with a view to Members considering possible alternatives in the future.

The report specifically addressed the request made during the budget setting exercise that officers investigate options for planting trees at St Clare's Church and Aycliffe Village rather than purchasing trees every year.

The report recommended continuing to provide a cut tree at St Clare's Church, but to consider planting a tree in Aycliffe Village, whilst authorising officers to consult with Durham County Council regarding further improvements on their land at the A167 junction and St Mary's roundabout.

Councillor Lindsey Aston expressed concerns around the planting of Christmas trees, questioning the height of growth, the risk of it blowing down in strong winds, how will it be maintained and whether residents had been consulted.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that a Nordmann fir is recommended which would be 6-8ft at the time of planting, with a useful life of around 25 years and would be planted in the current tree location. He further advised that there is a very small risk of it coming down in strong winds, as with any tree and that residents have not yet been consulted.

Councillor Jed Hillary raised concerns regarding the County Council not fixing the light columns that have failed, requesting that officers contact Durham County Council to either have them repaired or replaced.

The Works and Environment Manager confirmed that the purpose of the column tests is for the issues to be rectified and that he will follow this up.

A discussion was held around the Durham County Council owned land at the roundabout near St Marys Church and A167 junction.

It was suggested by Councillor Jed Hillary that the Council could propose to DCC an improvement scheme for St Mary's Roundabout, noting that other DCC roundabouts on the town have been improved, and there is an opportunity to ask for a new living tree to be placed there and that Officers approach GAMP for funding.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson that the recommendations of the report be agreed.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that;

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The Council continues to provide a cut Christmas tree at St Clare's Church.
- iii) The Council plants a Christmas tree on Aycliffe Village Green.
- iv) Officers chase up all lighting column issues with Durham County Council to ensure issues are rectified for Christmas lighting.
- v) Officers consult with DCC and GAMP regarding planting a new living tree and electrical upgrades to the festive lighting on St Mary's roundabout and the A167 junction, with a future report submitted to the Committee on options and costs

**Chairman**