

RECREATION COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 9TH APRIL 2025

Minutes of the meeting of the **RECREATION COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 9TH APRIL 2025** at 7:00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Michael Stead (Chairman) and:
Councillors: Eddy Adam, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Dorothy Bowman, Arun M Chandran, John Clark, Neil Collinson, George Gray, Ian Gray, Brian Haigh, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Wendy Hillary, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Ken Robson, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mrs Judith Thexton (Leisure and Events Manager)
Mr Andrew Clark (Sports Complex Manager)
Mr Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Manager)
Mr Lee Williams (Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator)
Mrs Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

IN ATTENDANCE

Nine members of the public were in attendance.

86. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tony Armstrong, Peter Bergg, Joanne Jones, Neville Jones, Sandra Kirby and Brian McAnaney.

87. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No applications for dispensations had been received.

88. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Carl Robinson declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 6 regarding the Oakleaf Golf Complex Report, as a member of the Oakleaf Golf Complex and Oakleaf Golf Club.

89. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No questions were received from the members of public.

90. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill, and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and:

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee held on the 26th February 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

91. OAK LEAF GOLF COMPLEX REPORT

Members considered a report providing an update on income, memberships and works undertaken at the Oak Leaf Golf Complex for the six weeks ended the 30th March 2025.

The Head of Leisure and Events advised that income and memberships are up on previous years, with the recent influx of additional members largely due to the closure of Hallgarth Golf Course.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator updated members on the tree planting project on the golf course highlighting that the work was complete and the appointed officer from North East Community Forest had signed off the work.

Councillor Eddy Adam thanked officers for the report and commented whilst it was good to see an increase in income and that membership numbers are up by 81. However, it was unclear whether more female players had joined as this is an ongoing concern for the Golf Course. He asked that information on the breakdown of the membership be reported to the Recreation Committee going forward.

The Head of Leisure and Events and Town Clerk agreed to forward the female memberships information and include a breakdown of memberships within future Golf Complex Update Reports.

Councillor Carl Robinson commented that the recent work that has been done on the course has been very professionally completed and will enhance the course and playability in future years.

He also praised officers for preparing the Welcome Pack for all members, commenting that this is a great introduction to the club and its facilities.

He went on to comment that as a golf member, he had received an email from the Golf Club Competition Secretary advising that he felt he had no choice but to resign and that one of the main reasons for this was interference in club matters by golf shop staff and a feeling that the Council wants to take over running of the club. He referenced previous discussions regarding the relationship between Council and Club at previous Golf Working Group meetings and his previous concerns around the reporting of the results from the Golf Survey. He also highlighted that the Club Committee had requested a meeting with the Town Clerk to discuss their concerns.

The Town Clerk explained that earlier in the week he and the Finance Manager had held an informal meeting with representatives from the Golf Club Committee to discuss the reasons for the resignation of the Club Competitions Secretary and to agree a way forward.

The club had formally requested that the Town Clerk asked the golf shop staff if they could temporarily take on the management of competitions and handicaps.

Following a discussion with the Golf Administrator the Town Clerk had this request, as an interim measure only, subject to this being able to be managed within the current staffing capacity, bearing in mind there is currently a vacancy within the golf shop staff.

He advised that his understanding of the reasons for the Competition Secretary's resignation was partly due to the issues with the Golf Shop staff's involvement, but that the Golf Shop staff had only intervened when competition rules had not been adhered to, for example allowing members to enter competitions after the deadline and to raise concerns about handicaps not being added to the system.

The Town Clerk highlighted that another key reason for the resignation of the Competition Secretary was the amount of work involved following the addition of over 80 new members.

He concluded by reiterating that officers were keen to ensure a good working relationship with the Golf Club, and are ready to assist and help the club as required.

Having responded to Councillor Carl Robinson's comments, the Town Clerk highlighted the golf club issues do not form part of the Golf Complex Update Report and the matters raised should have been dealt with outside of the meeting.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft asked that it be recorded in the minutes to send thanks those involved in developing the Welcome Pack.

The Town Clerk advised that the bulk of the work by the Senior Golf Shop Assistant who had done an excellent job.

Councillor Arun M Chandran raised concerns regarding the items raised by Councillor Carl Robinson in that, having declared a non-pecuniary interest, he should not have spoken or commented on this item.

Councillor Carl Robinson argued that the Standing Orders permitted him to speak on a non-pecuniary interest, if the public can speak at the meeting.

Councillor Eddy Adam stated he was disappointed that the issues from Councillor Carl Robinson were raised in this way and felt it was inappropriate as the issues could have been raised with the Town Clerk outside of this meeting. He added that personal comments were made against officers which was inappropriate. He asked for clarification on the situation in relation to Councillor Robinson's interest.

The Town Clerk clarified that until recently Councillor Carl Robinson had a pecuniary interest as a Golf Club Committee member, but as he is no longer on the committee, the interest is now non-pecuniary meaning that he may speak, if members of the public are permitted to speak at the meeting but not make any proposal or vote on any proposal.

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary, and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

92. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX USAGE COMPARISONS

Members considered a report from the Sports Complex Manager setting out the Sports Complex usage comparisons for February.

The Sports Complex Manager highlighted that the new leisure management till and bookings system had gone live on 1st April and the implementation of the system had been very time consuming for both the sports complex and golf complex, with various teething issues in the background but these have been managed and the front of house operations had continued as normal.

The new online bookings system had also now gone live and has been promoted to encourage members to book online, and hopefully encouraging younger people to use the facilities.

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

93. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX NEW DEVELOPMENTS

A report was received from the Sports Complex Manager, updating members on new developments relating to the Oakleaf Sports Complex since the last meeting.

The Sports Complex Manager verbally reported on the difficulties in staffing the kitchen due to staff absences, highlighting that this is being managed as best as possible through agency cover and reduced menus.

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

94. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX HEATING SYSTEM REPAIR

Members considered a report from the Oak Leaf Sports Complex Manager advising Members of an emergency requirement to repair the sports complex heating system which had been identified during the annual service, and for which an additional capital budget approval would be required.

The Sports Complex Manager explained that the repair had been identified as a health and safety matter that needs addressing urgently.

Councillor John Moore queried whether the repair was to the heat exchanger or the boiler as this was not clear from the report.

The Sports Complex Manager confirmed that the professional advice was that the entire unit needed to be replaced which included heat exchanger and boiler.

Councillor Jed Hillary identified that the quote was not attached to the report as an appendix as indicated in the report.

It was agreed that the appendix would be included with the item on the Policy and Resources Committee Agenda requesting the additional capital budget.

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary and seconded by Councillor John Clark that the repairs be authorised, and that an additional capital budget approval request for £6,850 be referred to the Policy and Resources Committee.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The replacement of the heat exchanger and fan on the sports complex heating system be authorised.
- iii) An additional capital budget approval request of £6,850 be referred to the Policy and Resources Committee for approval.
- iv) The quote for the work be included with the Policy and Resources Committee Agenda Item.

95. PARKS UPDATE

A report was received from the Works and Environment Manager providing an update on issues relating to the parks.

The Works and Environment Manager drew attention to the West Park update, explaining that a number of dead birds have been collected and tested by Defra and they have since confirmed that bird flu is now prevalent within County Durham. He advised that if councillors or members of the public find any dead birds they are advised not to touch them or collect them, but report it to the Town or County Council.

Councillor Arun M Chandran praised the community service helpers on the work done at West Park, commenting that they did an excellent job.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that the probation team had confirmed that they will be back to make improvements around the park etc and saw no reason why this service cannot be utilised more.

Councillor Carl Robinson queried the claim for funding from GAMP for the drainage at Simpasture Park and asked if the funding still guaranteed bearing in mind the Area Action Partnerships have now ceased to exist.

The Works and Environment Manager clarified that whilst the funding has not been formally agreed, the indication is that the funds are still available and will be agreed post-election.

Councillor Eddy Adam commented on the bird flu issue and the Canadian goose that was found. He asked what the best way was to contact officials outside of office hours regarding finding dead birds in the lake area as the RSPCA do not attend.

The Works and Environment Manager clarified that all members of the council should have his contact details. Technically speaking, any dead birds should be reported to Durham County Council and they should be collecting, but if it is on Town Council land, officers are happy to manage the situation.

Councillor Andy Hill praised the operatives working on St Oswald's Park, commenting that the park looks very good. He identified that West Park rose beds had not been cut yet and that Simpasture Park was looking a little unkempt.

The Works and Environment Manager agreed to have these areas looked at and advised he would pass on the praise for the St Oswald's operatives.

Councillor Ken Robson asked for an update on the safety concerns regarding the bridges near Whinlatter Place.

The Works and Environment Manager confirmed he had contacted Durham County Council to report the issues on several occasions and would continue to do so.

Councillor Jed Hillary commented that it was a good report and thanked the Works and Environment Manager. He agreed it would be helpful to make use of the probation team where possible and identified that there are some narrow footpaths at Simpasture Park due to overgrown grass that needs trimming.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

96. EXTERNAL EVENT APPLICATION

Members considered a report from the Head of Leisure and Events requesting Members' consideration an event application from Aycliffe and District Bus Preservation Society, in relation to holding a 2025 vintage bus rally on Town Council land in and around the Council Offices.

Councillor Carl Robinson asked if the new bollards in the Council Offices visitors car park may be an issue for the event. The Head of Leisure and Events clarified that the bollards can be easily removed.

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary, and seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) Permission be granted for the Aycliffe and District Bus Preservation Society to use the former lorry park for the vintage bus event on 16th August 2025, subject to officers receiving all the relevant paperwork.
- iii) The Council Offices be open for the duration of the vintage bus event, with officers in attendance to undertake community engagement.
- iv) Standing Orders be waived to allow officers to immediately advise ADBPS of the Recreation Committee's decision, so that they can finalise the arrangements for the event to take place on 16th August and promote the event, without the need to wait for the Recreation Committee Minutes to be ratified by Full Council.

97. YOUTH MINI MUSIC EVENT

Members considered a report from the Head of Leisure and Events requesting members' consideration of whether officers should progress with the planning and organisation of the new mini music festival event for teenagers, given the current anti-social behaviour issues currently being experienced in Newton Aycliffe, or whether an alternative event should be pursued.

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

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received and the information provided regarding the anti-social behaviour concerns related to the proposed music festival event and the concerns of officers around the risks this presents be noted.
- ii) The music festival is not progressed and officers arrange an alternative youth event, similar to the Fun in the Parks, over a weekend in September, as described in the report.

Chairman