

RECREATION COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 3RD SEPTEMBER 2025

Minutes of the meeting of the **RECREATION COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 3RD SEPTEMBER 2025** at **8:53pm**.

PRESENT

Councillor John Moore (Chairman) and:
Councillors: Tunde Akinsanya, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Dorothy Bowman, Arun M. Chandran, Neil Collinson, Luke Ellis, Jordan Gill, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Andy Hill, Carl Robinson, Kyle Robinson, Ken Robson, Brian Sowerby, Michael Stead, Tracey Williams, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mr Andrew Clark (Sports Complex Manager)
Mr Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Manager)
Miss Amanda Donald (Corporate and Policy Officer)
Mrs Judith Thexton (Head of Leisure and Events)
Mr Lee Williams (Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator)
Mrs Tracey Woodhead (Finance Manager)
Mrs Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

IN ATTENDANCE

Seven members of the public were in attendance.

38. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Lisa Conners, Phil Hawkins, Richard Hutchinson, Sandra Kirby and Jacqui McFadden.

39. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No applications for dispensations had been received.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

41. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No questions were received from the member of public.

42. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson and:

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee, held on the 9th July 2025, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

43. 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 eight weeks ended the 24th August 2025.

The Town Clerk provided an overview of the report highlighting that the Golf Complex continues to perform well, with a 14% increase on green fees income and an increase of more than 50% at the driving range. Golf memberships are up by 149 members compared to last year and there are now more members in the youth categories, which is positive for the future.

Attention was drawn to the staffing update within the report.

It was highlighted that the golf shop is still suffering from staff shortages due to delays recruiting and training the new staff with the situation having been compounded by the departure of the part-time Golf Shop Assistant. There had therefore been a heavy reliance of using casual staff and the existing staff working additional hours to keep the facility running.

This situation had understandably created pressure on the current staff and the Town Clerk expressed his thanks to the Golf Administrator and Golf Shop Assistant for the hard work and commitment they have shown.

It was highlighted that a request had been received from the Golf Administrator to permanently increase the driving range ball picker post hours to assist with the ongoing staffing difficulties and help retain the current temporary member of staff who has proved himself to be a valuable team member.

It was advised that the Corporate Management Team have given extensive consideration to this request but had, with regret, refused the request for a variety of reasons including the recently agreed staffing restructure and purchase of a second ball dispenser machine and the unbudgeted financial cost of the change and the significant risks this would create bearing in mind the significant financial challenges and budget pressures faced at the current time.

The Head of Leisure and Events spoke in favour of the request highlighting the staffing shortages, increased usage and membership numbers and the need to ensure continuity of service. It was highlighted that a compromise has been discussed to allow a temporary extension of hours to allow time for the new staffing structure to be fully recruited to, the new staff trained, and for outstanding holiday to be taken.

Councillor Carl Robinson commented that it would not be viable to go back on the recently agreed staffing structure as all parties had agreed that was the best plan at the time but understands the issues with recruitment. He further highlighted that the other factor to consider and which would help with the situation is that the new driving range ball dispenser needs to be operational.

Councillor Michael Stead asked about the budget assumptions around golf complex income and whether it is based on memberships being kept the same or increased member numbers. He raised concern that the current vacancy may be a difficult job to fill. He commented that circumstances can change and previous Council decisions can be changed. Councillor Stead further suggested that the feasibility of Sports Complex and Golf Complex staff working across the two services could be investigated to assist in covering staff shortages.

Councillor Lindsey Aston suggested that a month-by-month extension to the contract would not give any form of stability for the operative and asked that the contract be extended to the end of the financial year, by which time the new golf shop staff will be recruited, fully trained and the second ball dispenser machine installed, with a review before the year end.

Councillor Arun M Chandran expressed concern about the financial risks, particularly in relation to the council tax support grant being cut, and whilst he understands the staffing issues, there needs to be consideration to at what cost services are being provided and the need to be prudent in not creating additional ongoing revenue budget commitments.

Councillor Chandran proposed that the recommendations in the report be agreed, and, as a temporary measure, the contract of the temporary Driving Range Ball Collector post be extended for three months and then reconsidered on a quarterly basis in line with the golf shop staffing situation. After this time, the post would revert to a 12-hour permanent position as per the agreed staffing structure

Councillor Carl Robinson expressed his disappointment in the poor results from the grant funded tree planting project and the high failure rate amongst the whips, and asked if this will affect the next round of planting.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator explained that, as part of the contract with the North East Community Forest, the Council receives the funds to then appoint a contractor for the tree planting. The three-year contract in place with the contractor includes watering and maintenance, and the replacement of any trees that fail, falls with the contractor. The North East Community Forest representative advised that the golf course trees have done better than other areas, but the whips have not, possibly due to the planting being in late March. However, the feathered and standard trees have done well. Any further updates will be brought to the committee and the next round of tree planting will go ahead.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The Corporate Management Team's decisions and actions be endorsed regarding the staffing issues, and it is agreed to extend the temporary driving range ball picker contract for three months and then reconsidered on a quarterly basis in line with the golf shop staffing situation, after which time, the post would revert to a 12-hour permanent position as per the agreed staffing structure
- iii) It is agreed that instead of a free membership, as agreed in the last Recreation Committee Meeting, the golf scorecard sponsor receives driving range cards to the same value as an Over 60 membership, as requested.

44. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX USAGE COMPARISONS

Members considered a report from the Sports Complex Manager setting out the Sports Complex usage comparisons for July and August.

Councillor Carl Robinson highlighted that income information is provided in the report but not the outgoings and costings behind these. The Sports Complex Manager agreed to information on expenditure can be added to the report moving forward.

Councillor Tracey Williams complimented the staff team at the Sports Complex and highlighted that they have covered staff shortages and are always friendly and cheerful with customers.

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

45. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Members considered a report from the Sports Complex Manager, with updates on new developments relating to the Oakleaf Sports Complex since the last meeting.

The Sports Complex Manager updated members that the four boilers have all been replaced recently and are working well. An additional sum had been required from the maintenance budget to provide for a new pump. The toilet refurbishment is also now complete.

An open day is being held this weekend with a full programme of events and members were asked to share this on social media to raise awareness.

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

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The 8.00pm closing time for the sports complex on the two days of the Ayclive event continues moving forward and that Ayclive ticket holders continue to be allowed into the sports complex for future events, subject to door staff being provided by the organiser.

Councillor Lindsey Aston left the meeting.

46. PARKS UPDATE

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

Councillor Andy Hill suggested that the flowerbeds along Simpasture, which are underneath the trees, should be removed. The Works and Environment Manager agreed that these do get very water logged and advised that he would be bringing a report to next meeting regarding the flower beds around the town.

Councillor Michael Stead asked if vandal proof soap dispensers can be purchased for St Oswald's toilet facilities. The Works and Environment Manager explained that various dispensers have been installed in the past, including vandal proof dispensers, all of which have been vandalised by being knocked off the walls, burned or emptied out daily, but further options will be explored.

Councillor Andy Hill asked when the West Park play equipment is scheduled for repairs. The Works and Environment Manager explained that the rocker failed a while ago and is very expensive to replace so has been put on hold whilst waiting to see what else we need to replace. The slider has also failed but there is a need to stay within budget. St Oswald's is used more regularly at the moment and therefore the replacement of the slide in this park had been given priority.

It was proposed by Councillor Ken Robson, seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) A replacement plastic slide be purchased for St Oswald's Park Play Area at a cost of £4,846 from the Play Equipment Maintenance Revenue Budget.

47. FOOTBALL PITCHES UPDATE

Members considered an update report from the Works and Environment Manager in relation to the 2025/26 football pitch allocations and improvements.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

48. EXCLUSION NOTICE

Members considered a report from the Corporate and Policy Officer.

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

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The Land and Property Exclusion Notice of twelve months is endorsed.

Chairman