

RECREATION COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 15TH OCTOBER 2025

Minutes of the meeting of the **RECREATION COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 15TH OCTOBER 2025** at 7.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor John Moore (Chairman) and:

Councillors: Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Dorothy Bowman, Arun M. Chandran, Neil Collinson, Luke Ellis, Jordan Gill, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Phil Hawkins, Andy Hill, Sandra Kirby, Jacqui McFadden, Carl Robinson, Kyle Robinson, Brian Sowerby, 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)
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

Two members of the public were in attendance.

49. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tunde Akinsanya, Lisa Conners, Richard Hutchinson, Ken Robson and Michael Stead.

50. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No applications for dispensations had been received.

51. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillor Arun Chandran later declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 10 as a volunteer for the Santa Tours.

52. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No questions were received from the member of public.

53. MINUTES

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

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee, held on the 3rd September 2025, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

54. 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 4th October 2025.

The Town Clerk drew attention to two additional items within the report requiring a decision.

The first issue highlighted a request to bring forward the capital budget to replace eight driving range mats, due to wear and tear from increased usage. This would require an additional capital budget approval of £1,500 to be referred to the Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

The second issue related to a request from Durham County Golf Union (DCGU) for the Council to consider hosting the Captain's and Vice Captain's Competition in May 2026 after the 2-25 competition had been won by the Oakleaf Golf Complex.

It was advised that this is a prestigious competition and would help raise the profile of the facility but would bring with it a number of associated costs relating to hospitality as well as lost green fee income, totalling £1,630.

It was advised that DCGU have offered a donation of £600, which would reduce the total cost to £1,030.

The Town Clerk added a verbal update received from the Golf Club that the DCGU had advised that the request for the provision of hospitality was not essential and had been based on what was delivered previously.

Councillor Carl Robinson commented that to host the competition is a rare and invaluable opportunity and the secondary income from drinks sales and driving range usage would likely offset the additional costs and lost income and may well inspire new members and help to retain current members.

Councillor Arun M Chandran proposed that all recommendations were agreed and to delegate authority to officers to determine the arrangements and funding.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft proposed that all recommendations were agreed with the exception of asking the Oak Leaf Golf Club for a donation, suggesting that instead a request for support in providing some marshals on the day to help co-ordinate parking, movement around the course etc.

This was agreed and seconded by Councillor Arun Chandran.

It was proposed by Councillor John Moore that the Oak Leaf Golf Club Captain and Vice-Captain who won the competition should receive some recognition for their achievement. Councillor Martin Ashcroft seconded this.

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

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) An additional capital budget request of £1,500 be referred to the Policy and Resources Committee to enable the replacement of eight driving range mats.
- iii) The Golf Complex hosts the 2026 Durham County Golf Union Captain's and Vice Captain's Competition on the proviso that the £600 donation from Durham County Golf Union to Oak Leaf Golf Club is passed onto the Council to partly offset the costs of hosting the event, and the Council agree to bear the remaining costs of hospitality, greenkeeper overtime and lost green fee income.
- iv) The Oak Leaf Golf Club be asked to support the event by providing marshal support on the day.
- v) The Durham County Golf Union and the Council's bar supplier be approached to discuss seeking sponsorship for the event.
- vi) A letter of congratulations be sent to the Oak Leaf Golf Club Captain and Vice-Captain who won this year's competition.

55. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX USAGE COMPARISONS

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

The Sports Complex Manager updated members on an incident that occurred the previous day where a gentleman suffered a heart attack at the Sports Complex. Two members of the public responded, as did staff. An ambulance was on site within five minutes, and a doctor also happened to be on site at the time. The gentleman is still in hospital but is reported to be doing well. The Sports Complex Manager commented that the way everyone responded was admirable.

Councillor Carl Robinson commended the staff involved and asked the Town Clerk to review the details for the location of the Sports Complex and other sites on the 'what3words' app, as the ambulance had apparently been directed to the train station initially. The Sports Complex Manager clarified that reception staff had guided the ambulance over the phone, and they had arrived within 5 minutes. Reception training had also been held earlier today and 'what3words' information will be displayed on reception and around the building, including outside for football pitch users.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft requested that the members of staff should be formally thanked and the members of the public also, if possible.

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) Letters of thanks be sent to the staff and members of the public who assisted with the Sports Complex customer who recently suffered a heart attack on site.

56. 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.

It was requested that the staffing review is deferred until January, that the sports complex closes at 5pm on New Year's Eve and that members consider whether a feasibility study into introducing Padel Courts at the sports complex should be undertaken.

Councillor Lindsey Aston proposed an addition to the recommendation of early closure of the Sports Complex on New Years Eve, to allow the Sports Complex Manager to use his discretion if the opportunity arose in future years to hold a function, so that he could implement this without needing to bring a report back to this committee.

Councillor Lindsey Aston asked what would be removed to allow the introduction of Padel Courts.

The Sports Complex Manager explained he would investigate options as to where it could be held internally and the cost of installing them outside.

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

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The Sports Complex Manager's recommendation to delay the staffing review until the end of January 2026 be endorsed.
- iii) The Sports Complex Manager's recommendation to close the Sports Complex early at 5pm on New Years Eve this year, and every New Years Eve in future is agreed, but allowing the manager discretion to vary this in future years to host an event or allow function room bookings if requested.
- iv) The Sports Complex Manager will carry out a feasibility study on introducing Padel Courts at the Sports Complex.

57. 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 gave a verbal update to members advising firstly, that he was seeking to bring a report forward to a future meeting in relation to the replacement of Aycliffe Village Infant Play Area and secondly that a second burnt-out car had been discovered yesterday at Horndale Park. Police have advised there have been four cases within the town within the last two weeks, two of which were on Town Council land.

Councillor Arun M Chandran advised that there had previously been an issue of burnt-out car issues in the 1980's and to deter this, the boulders were installed at the edge of the complex field. He asked that officers investigate this as an option for other areas such as West Park and Horndale Park.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) Officers to investigate installing boulders as a deterrent for burnt-out cars on Council land.

58. SANTA TOURS

Members considered a verbal report from the Head of Leisure and Events on the shortage of volunteers for the Santa Tours Event and a request for Councillor's assistance in sourcing additional volunteer support.

The Head of Leisure and Events advised that the Santa Tours rely upon thirty-six volunteers to safely complete the twelve routes around all the streets on the town and each is required to work for approximately six hours in total on Christmas Eve.

The three roles required for each route consist of a navigator who reads the map, assists the driver and Santa, plus a driver and a Santa. It is usually a struggle to fill the role of Santa due to unpredictable weather conditions, stretching and climbing up and down out of the van.

It was clarified that no DBS checks are required as volunteers are not left unsupervised with children, and no special driving licence is required for drivers.

It was advised that when officers started the process of finding volunteers for the 2025 Santa Tours, the first port of call was to reach out to all those who volunteered last year. The response was limited for various personal reasons and ten places still needed to be covered.

Throughout October, several appeals have been made for volunteers across various media platforms with some success, but the current situation is that one place remains unfilled, and two volunteers are unsure of their work commitments so cannot confirm until the end of October.

In addition, there is nobody on the reserve list, which is a concern as some volunteers will inevitably drop out and must be replaced.

Officers will continue to try to source more volunteers in the hope that all places can be filled as well as a reserve list, but the Head of Leisure and Events requested that Councillors share the information from the website and social media to try and reach as many residents as possible.

A further report will come to the November Recreation Committee Meeting if officers have been unable to fill all places.

Councillors Tracey Williams, Sandra Kirby and Tony Armstrong offered to volunteer this year.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) Councillors share the information with residents to try and source more volunteers.

59. TOWN PARK REPLACEMENT PLAY UNIT

Members considered a report from the Works and Environment Manager advising of a successful Section 106 Agreement funding bid for the replacement of the damaged play unit within the Town Park and setting out options for consideration including the outcome of a consultation exercise with local children.

The Works and Environment Manager summarised the report and praised the pupils at St Mary's school for their input during the consultation. Following the consultation and taking into account feedback from the works maintenance team, the recommended play unit was the Kompan mini space net.

The Works and Environment Manager further recommended asking the supplier to add a maintenance package to the quote to ensure that the full Section 106 Agreement funding allocation was used.

Councillor Tony Beddard thanked the Works and Environment Manager for the report but raised concern that the consultation with the school children did not include any consultation with children with disabilities, proposing that the project be delayed to allow local disability schools and groups be consulted and the opportunity to explore alternatives with more inclusive equipment.

This was seconded by Councillor Jaci Beddard.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that the Council have always provided for accessibility and inclusivity in its play areas but equally did not want to restrict able bodied children, so needed a variety of equipment to use.

Councillor Arun M Chandran highlighted that the report was requesting the like for like replacement of one unit and proposed an amendment that the officer recommendation for the Kompan mini space net plus the maintenance package be approved and that officers undertake a review of disabled access and inclusive equipment across its play areas and opportunities to add additional equipment via the play area capital programme and report this back to the Recreation Committee.

This was seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft.

Councillor Jaci Beddard clarified that disabled accessible equipment is equipment that disabled children can use as well as the able bodied. She highlighted that only one of the options within the report (the cantilever swing) would meet DDA requirements, but not the others.

The Works and Environment Manager agreed but explained that this project is to replace one unit like for like, and that there would be more capacity to incorporate inclusive and accessible play within a larger design for example at Aycliffe Village. He agreed that consultation exercises for future play area projects should include local disability schools and groups.

Councillor Neil Collinson asked if there are time limits on the Section 106 funding and it was confirmed that this would likely be the case.

Councillor Lindsey Aston commented that she appreciated all of the comments made and proposed an amendment that a like for like replacement of this unit, with the accessible option of the cantilever swing would be preferable as it would be used by many different children of all abilities.

This was seconded by Councillor Tracey Williams.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft agreed with all comments made but raised concern that to go back to the four companies and have them resubmit proposals with an inclusive unit large enough to fill that area, would likely cost more than the funding available. He suggested taking the comments made at this meeting on board for any future projects.

The Town Clerk agreed that for future play area projects, officers would seek to consult more widely with schools and ensure that consultation includes disabled schools and groups and involving the Councillors with expertise in disabilities. He further suggested that in relation to this project the preference would be to make a decision to replace the unit, highlighting that cantilever swing option would provide the desired inclusion.

It was agreed to move to a vote.

A vote was taken on the first amendment, that the Kompan mini space net is purchased plus a maintenance package and that officers undertake a review of disabled access and inclusive equipment across its play areas and opportunities to add additional equipment via the play area capital programme and report this back to the Recreation Committee, with the following results:

For	14
Against	8

This became the substantive motion.

A vote was then taken on the second amendment, that the Streetscape cantilever swing is purchased and that officers undertake a review of disabled access and inclusive equipment across its play areas and opportunities to add additional equipment via the play area capital programme and report this back to the Recreation Committee, with the following results:

For	12
Against	7

This became the substantive motion.

A vote was taken on the substantive motion with the following results:

For	19
Against	0
Abstentions	2

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The Streetscape cantilever swing be installed as the replacement unit at the Town Park using the Section 106 Agreement funding.
- iii) That a maintenance package / service kit is requested using the remaining Section 106 Agreement funding.
- iv) Officers undertake a review of disabled access and inclusive equipment across its play areas and opportunities to add additional equipment via the play area capital programme and report this back to the Recreation Committee

60. 2026/27 DRAFT RECREATION COMMITTEE REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS

Members considered a report from the Finance Manager setting out the draft 2026/27 Revenue and Capital Budgets for the Recreation Committee for approval.

The Finance Manager outlined a number of risks and challenges identified within the report, which had been built into the draft budget and provided a summary of the draft revenue and capital budget proposals.

Councillor Carl Robinson thanked the officer for the report.

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

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The draft 2026/27 Recreation Revenue Budget be agreed.
- iii) The draft 2026/27 Recreation Capital Programme Budget be agreed and the projects be allocated as per the Officer's recommendations outlined within the report.

Chairman