

RECREATION COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 25TH FEBRUARY 2026

Minutes of the meeting of the **RECREATION COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 25TH FEBRUARY 2026** at **7.00pm**.

PRESENT

Councillor John Moore (Chairman) and:

Councillors Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Dorothy Bowman, Arun M. Chandran, Neil Collinson, Luke Ellis, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Phil Hawkins, Andy Hill, Richard Hutchinson, Ken Robson, Brian Sowerby, Michael Stead, Tracey Williams, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mr Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Manager)
Miss Amanda Donald (Corporate and Policy Officer)
Mr Lee Williams (Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator)
Mrs Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

IN ATTENDANCE

Three members of Newton Aycliffe Sports Club were in attendance: Will Kelly, Bob Wood and Alan Nelson.

Four members of the public were also in attendance.

The Chairman proposed to move Agenda Item 13 – Newton Aycliffe Sports Club Proposal to Improve Moore Lane Sports Pitches to immediately following Public Questions. This was seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and agreed.

85. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tunde Akinsanya, Lisa Conners, Jacqui McFadden Lewis and Carl Robinson.

86. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No applications for dispensations had been received.

87. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

88. GUEST SPEAKER

Members received a presentation from Will Kelly of Newton Aycliffe Sports Club.

He explained that the Sports Club has been exploring ideas as to how the club facilities and surrounding area can be developed to benefit the local community and Newton Aycliffe Sports Club.

He highlighted that the Sports Club would like to work in partnership with the Town Council, initially to improve the Moore Lane football pitches, which are owned by the Council, via a grant funding bid.

He advised that the Sports Club currently have a Sunday team and an under 18's team and plan to get more youth football teams in the area to support long-term plans.

The Sports Club are seeking to work in partnership with the Town Council and secure grant funding from the Durham Football Association to help improve pitch quality. Funding applications can be submitted to the Football Association for funds of £12,800 spread over a 6-year period. The Sports Club have agreed to match fund the remaining costs through a grant already secured, so there will be no cost to the Town Council for the improvements.

The Sports Club also recognise there are issues with parking congestion on particularly match days at Newton Aycliffe Sports Club and issues with anti-social behaviour in the area and in the longer term are seeking to work with Council to make improvements to car parking and access, and implement measures to reduce anti-social behaviour such as reducing access for off road vehicles.

Councillor Tony Armstrong asked about plans for parking and congestion.

Mr Kelly explained that the initial focus is the pitch improvements, but there is a need to look at expanding current car parking. Mr Wood highlighted that additional parking is already being planned on the Sports Club site.

Councillor Ken Robson commented that this is an exciting opportunity to improve the area but asked if there would be an impact on the annual Fun in the Parks events and funfair on the Council's land.

Mr Kelly confirmed it would have no effect on local events with the land remaining a community space and not just for football. The events also generate footfall for the Sports Club, so they want to work with the community to continue with events and improve things.

The Works and Environment Manager added that he anticipated the project working in the same way as the partnership with Newton Aycliffe Youth Football Club at the Oak Leaf pitches, where all events such as the Fireworks Display continue to go ahead as normal, as the land is still Town Council owned.

Councillor Tony Armstrong asked if any club sponsors either current or previous, would be able to assist with the car parking project.

Mr Nelson confirmed that currently the club's current sponsors are very supportive and that sponsorship is vital to the club.

Councillor Michael Stead asked how long they felt it would take to get the pitches up to standard, considering the grant of £12,800 would be over 6 years.

Mr Kelly advised that the Council have put a lot of work into the pitch over the years, but the pitch quality remains poor and needs a lot of work. Verti-draining and re-seeding annually will help, and they hope to see an immediate improvement.

Councillor John Moore thanked the guests for their presentation.

89. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions or comments were received.

90. NEWTON AYCLIFFE SPORTS CLUB PROPOSAL TO IMPROVE MOORE LANE SPORTS PITCHES

Members received a report from the Works and Environment Manager requesting consideration of the proposal received from Newton Aycliffe Sports Club to work in partnership with the Town Council, initially to improve the Council's sports pitches at Moore Lane, via a grant funding bid, and, in the longer term, make improvements to car parking and access, and implementing measures to reduce anti-social behaviour.

Councillor Arun M Chandran commented that the Council would not consider selling or giving away any land, and proposed that all recommendations be agreed. Councillor Martin Ashcroft seconded this, with the addition that the Chairman and Vice Chairman be involved in any future discussions and the Recreation Committee be kept updated with any developments.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the Works and Environment Manager would provide updates to the Recreation Committee as required.

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.
- ii) The proposal for Newton Aycliffe Sports Club to apply for the Durham Football Association 'Pitch Power' improvement grant is agreed.
- iii) The Sports Club will be offered 'first refusal' on exclusive use of the football pitches each year, for the six-year duration of the grant payments, subject to paying necessary pitch fees and complying with the pitch hire terms and conditions.
- iv) Officers are given delegated authority to work in partnership with the Sports Club and other partners to identify measures to enhance parking and access, reduce congestion and create a safer environment for residents, visitors and members of the public.
- v) The Chairman and Vice Chairman be involved in any future discussions and the Recreation Committee be kept updated with any developments.

91. 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 14th January 2026, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

92. EVENTS SUB COMMITTEE MINUTES

Members received the minutes and recommendations of the meeting of the Events Sub-Committee held on the 18th February 2026.

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

RESOLVED – That the minutes and recommendations of the meeting of the Events Sub Committee held on the 18th February 2026, be agreed, confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

93. 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 15th February 2026.

The Town Clerk highlighted that green fee income is down due to the wet weather, but driving range income up substantially.

Membership numbers are up to 406, with over 100 junior members.

Attention was drawn to the Golf Administrator's update which highlighted that while the increase in junior membership numbers is good, they are currently unrestricted in terms of when they can book the course, which is causing some issues. Previously, when junior membership numbers were high, restrictions were put in place, and it is proposed that the previous restrictions are reinstated.

The Grounds Maintenance Service Co-ordinator advised that the North East Community Forest Phase 2 tree planting on the golf course is now complete.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft commented that this was a very well written report and proposed that the recommendations of the report be agreed.

A discussion was held around the proportionately low number of female members, and suggestions to increase numbers.

The Town Clerk advised the Oak Leaf Golf Club had indicated that they are keen to reach out to the lady members and get them more involved in the club.

Councillor Lindsey Aston asked if the Golf Club Committee had been consulted on the junior restrictions. The Town Clerk advised that this had been discussed at their previous meeting when the Junior Liaison Officer was in attendance.

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

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) Restrictions on junior memberships and junior green fee players are reinstated for the 2026/27 season as follows:
 - *No play allowed between 4.30pm and 6pm on weekdays*
 - *No play allowed before 2pm on weekends*
 - *No play allowed before 10am and between 4.30pm and 6pm during school holidays*

The exceptions to the above rules are where a junior is playing with an adult, as part of an organised competition, or has an appropriate handicap.

94. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX USAGE COMPARISONS

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

Councillor Martin Ashcroft added he was pleased to see the concerns about some of the low-income streams highlighted at the previous meeting have now increased. He asked if the bar graph in Appendix C could be enlarged in future reports to make it more visible.

It was proposed by Councillor Ken Robson, and seconded by Councillor Richard Hutchinson and:

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

95. 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.

Councillor Tony Armstrong asked if the new games room within the function room would reduce the capacity for meetings and functions.

The Chairman confirmed that the games room would not cause any reduction to room capacity but would help to maximise the use of the space.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft questioned whether any additional sports complex staff wanted to undertake first aid training.

The Corporate and Policy Officer explained that all Duty Manager's and receptionists are first aid trained. Only attendants and bar staff are not.

The Town Clerk added that all first aid trained staff receive a small allowance, so additional first aiders would have budget implications.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft reiterated that the point he made previously that sometimes if the receptionist has finished their shift and the Duty Manager needs to do first aid, there could be an issue, and suggested ideally having at least two first aid trained staff in the building at all times.

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

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

96. 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 provided a verbal update that the local police had been working with the shops around the town centre, introducing exclusions after 5pm for children under 16 years old due to anti-social behaviour. Police had contacted officers, as offenders were running into the Town Park to escape or hide, and asked for the park to be closed earlier at 6pm. This was agreed and will be reviewed weekly.

Councillor Brian Sowerby asked if the rapid response CCTV cameras were operational in the Town Park. The Works and Environment Manager advised that the cameras are overseen by the police, and are not in use at the moment.

Councillor Andy Hill thanked officers for the work with the Probation Service to widen the footpaths at Simpasture park.

Councillor Arun M Chandran reiterated these thanks highlighting that the wider footpaths will be particularly helpful for wheelchair users.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Michael Stead and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

97. DEFIBRILLATOR PROJECT UPDATE

Members received a report from the Works and Environment Manager providing an update to Members on the proposed installation of defibrillators and trauma kits in various locations on Council property.

The proposed locations are the outside of the Oak Leaf Sports Complex, Stephenson Way Cemetery and St Oswald's Park, whilst it was also proposed to replace the Council Offices defibrillator, allowing the existing defibrillator to be issued to the Park Patrol Service as a mobile unit.

Councillor Michael Stead proposed that the report be deferred to allow officers time to explore options offered by other providers such as Red Sky Foundation, which is a large charitable foundation and offers match funding.

Councillor Luke Ellis seconded this proposal.

Councillor Tracey Williams raised concerns regarding recent incidents where defibrillators could not be accessed due to needing a code and where the nearest defibrillator location was unknown.

The Works and Environment Manager explained the 999 call handlers provide the code as there is a dedicated system with codes to access each defibrillator and they should also know the location of the nearest defibrillator.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft asked if various sized pads would be supplied for the defibrillators for both adults and juniors, especially given the proposed locations.

The Works and Environment Manager clarified that defibrillators are issued with standard size adult pads but there is the option to get junior sized also. Adult pads can be used on infants, but it can be more complicated.

Councillor Lindsey Aston raised concern in including child pads with the defibrillator as if these were used in error on an adult they don't deliver enough volts and requested that child pads were not purchased.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft suggested that the Works and Environment Manager could consult with medical professionals for advice on junior pads.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft proposed an amendment that the recommendations of the report be agreed, that officers make further investigations regarding the purchase of junior pads, and look at alternative providers such as Red Sky Foundation going forward for any future projects.

Councillor Andy Hill seconded this amendment.

Councillor Michael Stead questioned the costs quoted and highlighted that better value could be obtained by looking at alternative providers.

The Works and Environment Manager clarified that the defibrillators can be purchased cheaper elsewhere, but the local provider highlighted in the report takes full responsibility for the defibrillators once installed, including undertaking inspections, maintenance and replacement of consumables such as batteries and pads. This results in better value over the life of the defibrillator.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft asked when the installation would be going ahead. The Works and Environment Manager explained that once agreed, the purchases and installations could go ahead quite quickly.

Councillor Tony Armstrong queried members' declarations of interest, as Councillor Michael Stead had recommended a company.

The Town Clerk advised that any declarations of interest should already have been declared on the members register of interest and declared earlier in the meeting.

Councillor Michael Stead confirmed that he had no declarations of interest to make.

Councillor Ken Robson agreed that best value should be considered consistently but in this instance the investment for life saving equipment should go ahead, then for any future projects look at alternative providers.

Councillor Arun M Chandran moved that the amendment be put to vote.

A vote was held on Councillor Martin Ashcroft's amendment with the following result:

For: 13
Against: 8

The amendment was agreed and became the substantive motion.

A further vote was held on the substantive motion with the following results:

For: 14
Against: 6

The substantive motion was therefore agreed.

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The defibrillators, cabinets and trauma kits be purchased and installed at the Oak Leaf Sports Complex, Stephenson Way Cemetery and St Oswald's Park at a total cost of £6,310.
- iii) A replacement defibrillator is purchased for the Council Offices at a cost of an additional £1,200, allowing one of the older office defibrillators to be released to the Works Section to be used in remote locations and out of hours if required.
- iv) The remaining balance of £2,490 from the Community Support Fund is earmarked for any further defibrillator projects that are identified during 2026/27.

- v) The attached Standing Order Exemption Form, enabling officers to work with one company and not seek further quotes for the project is approved.
- vi) Officers make further investigations regarding the purchase of junior pads for defibrillators.
- vii) Officers look at options and costs for purchasing defibrillators from alternative providers for any future projects.

98. AYCLIFFE VILLAGE PLAY AREA UPGRADE

Members considered a report from the Works and Environment Manager regarding the proposed replacement of Aycliffe Village infant play area.

Councillor John Moore congratulated the Works and Environment Manager on the comprehensive report and information provided.

Councillor Tony Beddard advised that he had looked at the proposals with officers and was mindful that as an infant play area, for children with a higher degree of disabilities, it is easier to lift a child into the play equipment. He thanked the Works and Environment Manager for an excellent report and the various options of change in the proposals, adding that a lot of time and effort has been put in from officers.

He asked that it be recorded in the minutes that the statements made in paragraphs 5.6 that: *“Whilst every effort should be taken to ensure full inclusivity within the Council’s play areas, consideration needs to be given to ensure that those with able bodies are not significantly disadvantaged by installing potentially exclusive equipment for disabled users”*, could be read negatively, was specific to this particular location, and that this should not be seen to set a precedent for all future play area replacement projects.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor George Gray and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The preferred option of the Hags design be agreed for Aycliffe Village Infant Play Area at a cost of £47,500.

99. EXCLUSION NOTICE

Members considered a report from the Corporate and Policy Officer providing Members with information regarding a recent incident in the Sports Complex, which warranted action being taken under the Council’s Exclusion Policy.

In accordance with the ‘Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, in relation to the ‘Recording of Decisions Made by Officers of the Council’ the report has been prepared to provide Members with information to support and endorse the exclusion already implemented.

Members discussed the possibility of a longer or permanent exclusion in light of the fact that this was the second exclusion issued to this individual.

Councillor John Moore said that the protection of staff should be paramount and under no circumstances should they be subject to abuse. The Sports Complex has a pleasant, friendly atmosphere with a wide range of age groups and it is imperative that the Council sends a message that good behaviour is the norm.

The Corporate and Policy Officer explained that the first incident was some months ago and concerned two members of the public, resulting in a four-week ban. This recent second incident was aimed at staff, and officers felt merited a longer ban, proportionate to the incident and felt to ban for a year or permanently would not be proportionate at this stage.

Councillor Ken Robson argued that the Council has a duty of care to its employees and he would not be willing to tolerate someone treating Council employees this way and be given the opportunity to become violent.

The Town Clerk explained that following a full investigation, everyone involved felt that a six-month ban was appropriate but having said that, if there was a repeat of this kind of behaviour from the individual concerned, there would be a zero-tolerance approach taken.

Councillor Arun M Chandran advised that he trusts the judgement of the officers in having the best interest of staff in mind. He proposed to move the recommendations of the report. Councillor Tony Armstrong seconded this.

Councillor Tony Beddard commented that there have been various views expressed and other recommendations suggesting that this exclusion is too lenient and asking what can be done and if it can be reviewed.

The Town Clerk explained that the Council delegates decisions on Exclusion Notices to officers under the Council's Constitution and the requirements of the Exclusions Policy, and if a longer ban was issued, Members would be going against the officer recommendations and therefore Standing Orders.

He advised that the Council could review the Exclusions Policy and the thresholds within it if it wished to do so.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received;
- ii) The Sports Complex exclusion of six months be enforced.

100. APPEALS SUB COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

The Town Clerk asked members to appoint an Appeals Sub Committee to deal with a likely appeal to a complaint linked to Agenda Item 16 – Exclusion Notice.

He advised that officers are undertaking an investigation into the complaint and that an appeal was likely.

Under Article 3 of the Council's Constitution – Powers and Duties of Committees:-

“The General Appeals Sub-Committee shall comprise a number of members of the relevant Service Committee as required and when necessary”.

Councillor Ken Robson proposed Councillor Martin Ashcroft to act as Chairman of the Appeals Sub Committee. Councillor Andy Hill seconded this proposal.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft declined to take part in the Appeals Sub-Committee. Councillor Arun M Chandran proposed a total of six members be on the Appeals Sub Committee, to include the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Recreation Committee, as well as Councillors Tony Beddard, and Michael Stead.

Members unanimously agreed that the proposed Sub-Committee be approved.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) An Appeals Sub-Committee is formed to deal with a complaint relating to an Exclusion Notice, and has a total of 6 members, made up of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, Chairman and Vice Chairman of Recreation Committee and Councillors Tony Beddard, and Michael Stead.

Chairman