

RECREATION COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 8TH APRIL 2026

Minutes of the meeting of the **RECREATION COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 8TH APRIL 2026** at **7.00pm**.

PRESENT

Councillor Tony Beddard (Chairman) and:
Councillors Tunde Akinsanya, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Jaci Beddard, Dorothy Bowman, Arun M. Chandran, Neil Collinson, Luke Ellis, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Sandra Kirby, Kyle Robinson, 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)
Mr Chris Lawson (Golf Administrator)
Mrs Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

IN ATTENDANCE

Five members of the public were in attendance.

Councillor Tony Beddard introduced himself as Vice Chairman of the Committee and advised he would be chairing the meeting in the absence of the Chairman, welcoming the members of the public and reminding members to be respectful.

101. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Phil Hawkins, Andy Hill, Richard Hutchinson, Jackie McFadden Lewis, John Moore and Carl Robinson.

102. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No applications for dispensations had been received.

103. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

104. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions or comments were received.

105. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Tony Beddard noted that on the minute regarding the appointment of the Appeals Sub Committee, the proposal made by Councillor Arun M Chandran for six members included himself twice, as the Vice Chairman of the Recreation Committee, and in an individual capacity. He suggested that subject to Councillor Arun M Chandran's agreement that Councillor Andy Hill be the sixth member of the Sub Committee. This was agreed by Councillor Arun M Chandran.

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 25th February 2026, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to it being noted that Councillor Andy Hill be appointed as the sixth member of the Appeals Sub-Committee.

106. SANTA TOURS SUB COMMITTEE MINUTES

Members received the minutes and recommendations of the meeting of the Events Sub-Committee held on the 3rd March 2026.

Councillor Tony Beddard asked for clarification that the recommended actions will be addressed and reported to the next meeting on 28th April. The Town Clerk confirmed that a progress update would be provided on all recommendations.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft asked for clarification whether they were minutes or notes, as the minutes were titled as 'notes'. The Town Clerk clarified that these should say minutes.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and seconded by Councillor Neil Collinson and:

RESOLVED

- i) That the minutes and recommendations of the meeting of the Santa Tours Sub Committee held on the 3rd March 2026, be agreed, confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

107. 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 29th March 2026.

The Town Clerk reported that green fees were slightly down due to weather conditions but the driving range income was up by £1,400 on last year.

There was a total of 406 members at the end of the 2025/26 year, which was an increase of 140 on last year.

He drew attention to the positive feedback from members regarding the quality of the greens, following the purchase of the top dresser machine last year.

It was highlighted that the Oak Leaf Golf Club were running a charity competition in June and it was requested that 5-day members are permitted to play, as in previous years.

Following discussions at previous meetings regarding female members, it was reported that there were 12 female members at the end of last year, which was 4% of all adult and senior members. This is below the national average for female members, which is close to 14% nationally.

It was highlighted that engagement with female members has been discussed at length in previous meetings and there have been questions from some members recently regarding what could be offered to encourage more female members, such as an introductory 'Get Into Golf' course. He clarified that as a municipal course, a PGA Golf Professional is not employed by the Council, and the golf shop staff cannot provide coaching as part of their job descriptions. A golf initiative of any kind would therefore require the engagement of an external golf professional and would incur additional cost which has not been budgeted for.

It was highlighted that the Golf Club are actively reaching out to the female members with the aim of setting up a ladies section within the Club. This would be attractive to prospective female members and should be the initial focus for increasing female participation.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator drew attention to ongoing issues with damage to the greens.

Councillor Arun M Chandran asked the Golf Administrator for his thoughts and ideas for what can be done regarding participation of female members.

The Golf Administrator explained that the traditional route by private golf clubs is 'Get Into Golf' courses but that these sessions have limited success when you look at England Golf figures. However, an active ladies section does attract female members, which is what the Golf Club are currently looking into establishing. He suggested focussing on engaging with current female members and establishing a ladies section, with a view to possibly looking at funding a 'Get Into Golf' in the next financial year if deemed necessary.

Councillor Ken Robson asked what the maximum number of members is, without causing problems with availability of tee times.

The Golf Administrator explained that last year there were 406 members, of which 300 were adults and seniors which was close to reaching maximum capacity, suggesting 350 adult and senior members as an absolute maximum. The relationship between green fee income and membership income was explained and it was highlighted that if there are too many members, green fee income reduces, impacting upon net running cost of the facility and reducing accessibility.

The Town Clerk added that from a financial perspective, the Council has previously agreed via a service review of the facility to work towards an objective of running the Golf Complex at as low a cost to the taxpayer as possible, and the only way this would be achievable is via increased green fee income, which is why the relationship between membership numbers and green fees is so important.

Councillor Tony Armstrong commented that Woodham Golf Course are running 'Get Info Golf' sessions, and whilst running the sessions may result in increased costs, there would be a profit in the long term from increased memberships.

He advised that England Golf have a package with free advertising materials to use for casual female members and asked if statistics were available for casual female usage of the facility and asked if the number of casual female users could be tracked

The Golf Administrator explained that gender information is not tracked by the till for pay as you play usage and whilst may be possible to introduce a manual system of recording this information, considering how busy staff are and with only one person in the shop, this would be very difficult, and would not be entirely accurate.

Councillor Arun M Chandran stated that he felt the issue of female member engagement was in hand and would be developed in the future by officers and the Golf Club. He raised concern that balancing the issue of membership numbers and availability of green fee bookings cannot be left to drift until fees and charges are agreed later in the year.

Councillor Arun Chandran proposed that management of this issue be delegated to the Golf Administrator, the Town Clerk and Finance Manager to handle as they see fit, and take actions on implementing membership limits as required, subject to reporting any actions back to the committee for ratification. This was seconded by Councillor Tracey Williams.

Councillor Tony Beddard requested this be put to a vote and the proposal was agreed by a majority vote.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson that the report and recommendations be agreed.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The 5-day members be allowed to play in the Golf Club Charity Competition.
- iii) Authority be delegated to the Town Clerk, Finance Manager and Golf Administrator to monitor and manage the relationship between membership numbers and availability of green fee bookings, and take actions on implementing membership limits, subject to reporting this to the Recreation Committee for ratification.

108. 2026/27 GOLF COMPLEX SERVICE PLAN

Members considered a report from the Head of Leisure and Events setting out the 2026/27 Golf Complex Service Plan for approval.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The 2026/27 Golf Complex Service Plan be approved.

109. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX USAGE COMPARISONS

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

It was advised that the format of some of the figures displayed within the report, had been updated following feedback at the previous meeting.

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

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

110. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX NEW DEVELOPMENTS

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

The Town Clerk gave a verbal update regarding the current staffing situation and the difficulties being experienced.

It was advised that a staffing structure review was due to have been completed ahead of the new financial year but this has been deferred due to the need to manage the ongoing issues relating to staff turnover, recruitment, maternity leave and retirements.

Once these issues have been resolved the staffing restructure will be completed and brought to the Council for consideration.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Luke Ellis and:

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The sports complex staffing review be delayed until the current staffing difficulties have been addressed.

111. 2026/27 OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX SERVICE PLAN

Members considered a report from the Sports Complex Manager setting out the 2026/27 Sports Complex Service Plan for approval.

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 2026/27 Sports Complex Service Plan be approved.

112. 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 outlined the ongoing issues with anti-social behaviour at the Town Park, advising he had met with the Neighbourhood Police Team who have increased patrols and made some arrests, so hopefully an improvement will be seen.

Councillor Tony Beddard advised that the Police will be attending the next Full Council Meeting to give an update on the anti-social behaviour situation and this would be the opportune time to ask questions.

Councillor Arun M Chandran added that the meeting needs to be well publicised with the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner attending.

He raised concern that the initial request to close the park early came from the police, commenting there is a need to balance the policing issues with public and staff safety.

The Works and Environment Manager agreed that staff and public safety are the priority but also that the parks and play areas are there for the youth of the town and the Council should not be influenced by the minority to close the park, which has been reiterated to the police.

Councillor Brian Sowerby asked the Works and Environment Manager and the Town Clerk about the Rapid Response Camera in the Town Park.

The Works and Environment Manager said that there have been multiple changes in the Neighbourhood Police Team that is responsible for it. The issue with the Town Park camera being out of use is repeatedly raised but no repairs have been carried out thus far.

Councillor Ken Robson added that he is unhappy with Durham County Council who are refusing to move the cameras from lamppost to lamppost. The ability to move the cameras was a key reason for initially purchasing them, and stress testing lampposts was included within the cost.

The Town Clerk reiterated that a turnover of police staffing has been the key issue and after making some good progress with the previous Inspector progress has stalled. The capital budget covers the cost of moving the cameras, but the co-operation of Durham County Council and the Police is vital.

Councillor Martin Stead asked if a meeting could be scheduled regarding the cameras to prepare some constructive questions.

It was proposed by Councillor Ken Robson, and seconded by Councillor Tony Armstrong and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

113. PARK EXCLUSION

Members considered a report from the Corporate and Policy Officer who outlined details of two exclusion notices.

Councillor Tony Beddard asked how exclusions are enforced.

The Corporate and Policy Officer explained a copy of the Exclusion Notice is sent to the local PCSO to be given to the parents/guardian. The Exclusion Notices are also provided to the park patrol service and the local police team.

Park Patrol staff seek to enforce the exclusions but sometimes need the assistance of the police. This arrangement has worked well in the past but is becoming increasingly difficult to enforce.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that the Council has no enforcement powers and so are reliant on the Police.

It was proposed by Councillor Ken Robson, and seconded by Councillor Neil Collinson and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The Town Park Exclusion Notices of six months and twelve months respectively be endorsed.

Chairman