

## **ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE TOWN MEETING**

**WEDNESDAY, 20<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2026**

Minutes of the proceedings of the **ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE TOWN MEETING** for the Parish of Great Aycliffe, held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 20<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2026** at **7.00 p.m.**

**PRESENT**                      **Councillor Michael Stead (Deputy Mayor)**  
and there were 20 Electors present.

The Chairman (Deputy Mayor) of the Council opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the Annual Assembly of the Town Meeting. The Deputy Mayor read out a statement of how the meeting would proceed and possible involvement by members of the electorate.

### **1. NOTICE OF MEETING**

The Notice convening the Meeting was taken as read.

### **2. MINUTES**

It was proposed by Phillip Hawkins, seconded by Andy Hill and

**RESOLVED** – that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Annual Assembly of the Town Meeting, held on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 2025, be confirmed as a correct record and record and signed by the Chairman.

### **3. PRESENTATION FROM TEAM SOLAN**

A representative from Team Solan – Connor Fawcett Cancer Trust, talked about their work and the support they give with counselling, food vouchers, practical help, emergency food, bills paid, travel costs, essentials covered, family support and crisis prevention.

The Chairman thanked them for the presentation.

### **4. CHAIRMAN / MAYOR'S ANNUAL REPORT**

The following copy of the Chairman / Mayor's Annual Report was given and was taken as read.

My name is Councillor Neil Collinson, and I am the newly appointed Mayor of the Town Council.

It is my honour to deliver this Annual Report on the work of the Town Council during the last twelve months and looking ahead at our plans for the forthcoming year.

During 2025/26 the Council has continued to provide many valued services, facilities and events to the residents of Great Aycliffe.

The Town Council will face significant challenges over the coming years as its deals with the financial impact of the withdrawal of the Local Council Tax

Reduction Scheme Grant by Durham County Council, and increasing budget pressures as a result of the ongoing economic difficulties which are causing particular strain on the Council's Revenue Budget.

The Council will always strive to support the community and protect and maintain important services and facilities, including our cemeteries, allotments, green open space and environmental areas, parks, play areas, pre-school, community events, football pitches, and the sports and golf complex.

However, the Council will continuously review the services it currently offers in line with community priorities and needs, consider how they are delivered, and seek more efficient ways of running services to ensure that they are providing the best value for money.

I will now provide an overview of the many services that the Town Council has planned and committed to provide to the community of Great Aycliffe during this coming year.

## **Environment**

The Town Council takes great pride in the green environment of the town and provides a number of services in support of this. This includes the provision of:-

### **Allotments**

The Town Council provides 220 allotment sites located at:

Clarence Chare  
Finchale Road  
St. Oswald's  
Aycliffe Village and  
Byerley Park

In addition to the allotments gardens, the Town Council also offers facilities for keeping pigeons and poultry, as well as beekeeping plots at specific allotments sites.

The Council also provides a home at Clarence Chare Allotments for the Great Aycliffe Garden Guild, who run a not-for-profit allotments shop and community room on site.

### **Cemeteries**

The Town Council provides, maintains and undertakes burial services at its two cemeteries at West Cemetery and Stephenson Way. We also provide a burial service for St. Andrews Church in Aycliffe Village.

## **Environment and Green Open Space**

The Town Council carry out the environmental management of a number of nature and conservation areas and other green open space in the Parish, including the Great Aycliffe Way, Woodham Burn, South Agnew Plantation, Cobbler's Hall Plantation, Simpasture Railway Walk, Aycliffe Nature Park, School Aycliffe Wetlands and Byerley Park Nature Area. The Town Council is also the custodian of Aycliffe Village Greens.

We deliver a comprehensive programme of environmental activities for schools and scouts and guides groups, work with community and voluntary groups such as Great Aycliffe Tidy Team, run environment events, and deliver an Environment Week, which involves visiting the primary schools in the town to give an interactive presentation on litter and then offering the opportunity for the children to take part in a litter pick in their local community.

We own the Eco Centre at Moore Lane Park, which is currently occupied by Green Arts who run green arts programmes, activities and events from the building.

The Town Council has also declared a Climate Emergency and is working towards reducing its carbon footprint and becoming carbon zero by 2050, putting in place an ambitious Carbon Reduction Plan.

Planned projects for this coming year include the installation of solar panels on land at the works depot, seeking funding for electric vehicle charging points at Council facilities and tree planting across the Parish, including a significant ongoing tree planting project on the Oak Leaf Golf Course.

### **Grounds Maintenance**

The Town Council undertakes grounds maintenance e.g. the provision of flower beds, grass cutting and tree planting and maintenance, on all Council owned land and facilities.

### **Street Equipment**

The Town Council provides public seating, bus shelters, and litter and dog bins on Town Council owned land.

### **Recreation**

Leisure facilities and community events have formed a major part of the Council's service provision over the years. This includes the provision of:-

### **Parks and Play Areas**

The Town Council owns and operates eight very different parks, all with their own individual character. These are found around the town at:

Moore Lane Park  
St. Oswald's Park  
Town Park  
Horndale Park  
Simpasture Park  
West Park  
Byerley Park  
Woodham Park

We provide modern and well-maintained play equipment at all of these parks, as well as specific play areas at the following sites:-

Oakleaf Sports Complex  
School Aycliffe  
Aycliffe Village  
Scott Place  
Cobbler's Hall

The Town Council also provides five multi-use games areas at Moore Lane, Simpasture, Horndale, Woodham and Cobbler's Hall, as well as a skate park in the Town Park, a scoot track at Horndale Park and a BMX track at Woodham Park.

This year the Council will be investing in the refurbishment of Aycliffe Village infant play area.

### **Park Patrol Service**

The Park Patrol Service provides an out of hours service to monitor and safeguard the Council's parks and other facilities and the safety and welfare of their users.

### **Oak Leaf Sports Complex**

The Oak Leaf Sports Complex provides an indoor bowls green, a multi-use sports hall, four squash courts, a darts facility, a function room and bar and catering facilities. A games room has also recently been developed within the function room.

The sports complex is also home to an indoor bowls club, squash club, running club and archery club, and provides a number of coaching and activity sessions for both adults and children, including an activity programme for children during school holidays.

In recent years, a programme of events has been developed at the sports complex including dog shows, model railway exhibitions, Cliffe-Con and Fantazmagoria events, pantomimes, and seasonal craft markets.

### **Oak Leaf Golf Complex**

The Town Council also manages and operates the Oak Leaf Golf Complex, comprising an eighteen-hole golf course, 18-bay floodlit driving range, golf shop, and changing rooms.

### **Football Pitches**

The Town Council provides several football pitches, including junior football and six a side pitches at three sites:

Sports Complex  
Simpasture  
Moore Lane

### **Community Events**

The Town Council runs a programme of annual community events including:-

Senior Citizens' Excursions  
Fireworks Display  
Fun in the Parks  
Santa Tours and Santa Letters  
Christmas Lighting Display

The Senior Citizens' Trips for 2025 were once again very popular, with 993 local residents visiting destinations including York, Seahouses, Harrogate, Keswick, Hexham, Helmsley and Ripon and Knaresborough.

The trips are again taking place in 2026, with this year's venues York, Whitby, Keswick, Alnwick, Redcar, Tynemouth, Seaham and Dalton Park, and Northallerton and Thirsk. A total of 1,000 places were available and have all been taken up.

The Fun in the Parks for 2025 were extremely busy, with numbers of attendees exceeding expectations at all parks.

The Council also developed a new Fun in the Park style event last year for older children, called 'Elevate', offering fairground rides and attractions.

For 2026 we have another full programme of Fun in the Parks scheduled for the summer holidays and will again be running the Elevate event.

The Council also held two events last year to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of VE Day.

The Council again provided the use of our land at the Oak Leaf playing fields to community interest company to hold the Ayclife Music Festival at the end of July. The event was a great success and is taking place again this year, with support from the Town Council.

The Council also funds and helps facilitate the Big Brass Bash in the Town Park which also takes place in July.

The Council also provides funding, use of land and staffing support to events run by local organisations including the following events:-

Remembrance Day Parade  
Fun Fair at Moore Lane  
Cyclocross Event  
Aycliffe Bus Preservation Society Vintage Bus Event

Other services provided by the Town Council include:-

### **Pre-School Learning Centre**

The Town Council provides a Pre-School Learning Centre located in St. Oswald's Park which is currently registered for 40 places for 3 and 4-year-old children.

The Council also provides a setting for two-year olds called 'Tots in the Park', offering 12 places, morning and afternoon, 5 days per week. Both pre-schools are classified as 'Outstanding' by Ofsted.

### **Grants and Donations Fund**

The Town Council operates a grants and donations fund offering financial support to community organisations and local charities.

## **Community Recognition Scheme**

The Council operates a Community Recognition Award Scheme to provide a means of recognising and acknowledging the dedication, commitment and outstanding contribution that nominated individuals make to improve and promote the Parish of Great Aycliffe.

## **Civic Events**

The Town Council hold a number of civic events including Mayor's at Home and the Annual Charity Civic Dinner.

## **Newsletter**

The Council produces four newsletters each year to keep the public advised of current activities, services, and events. Most newsletters are now published electronically.

## **Investment in Community Assets**

The Council has continued to develop its Asset Management Plan in order to plan investment in Council and community assets such as buildings, vehicles, machinery, play equipment and street equipment.

The Council's Capital Programme makes budget provision each year for an ongoing programme of investment in these assets and significant investment has been made in recent years in community assets such as play equipment, bus shelters, cemeteries etc.

Last year, capital expenditure totalled £411,300 and included essential investment to council buildings, replacement vehicles and machinery, replacement photocopiers, drainage improvement works at Simpasture football pitches, replacement driving range and golf course machinery, replacement heating system at the Sports Complex, drainage improvement works at both cemeteries, replacement of the swing unit in the Town Park, significant tree planting works on the golf course, information technology improvements, play area safety surfacing, bus shelter repairs, footpath repairs and bridge repairs.

This year planned investment totals nearly £1 million and includes further essential investment to Council buildings including roofing works, heating systems, window and door replacement, and changing room refurbishment at the Sports Complex, works vehicles and machinery, replacement computer equipment and cyber security investments, Council Chamber audiovisual technology, purchase of a vertidrainer machine, festive lighting, refurbishment of Aycliffe Village infant play area, play area safety surfacing replacement and footpath repairs, tree works, and bus shelter and bridge repairs.

## **Council Finances**

Despite the challenges created by the ongoing economic difficulties over the last year, the Council ended the 2025/26 year in relatively strong financial health, having delivered a significant saving on its Revenue Budget, which offset the investment in capital assets and allowed the Council to maintain balances and reserves in the region of £2 million.

The majority of the savings last year were as a result of the planned top-up of capital reserves, an unused contingency sum, significantly increased investment income, substantial increases in golf complex memberships and income, increased sports complex income, increased income at St Oswald's Pre-School as a result of good attendance numbers and SEN funding. There have also been savings in running costs such as gas and electricity and savings from staff turnover and vacancies.

The positive financial position has also been helped by the prudent budget management of all service managers, overseen by the Council's Policy and Resources Committee, which has resulted in savings across most budget areas.

In doing so the Council has continued to deliver efficiency savings across all services and deliver value for money to local taxpayers.

This healthy financial situation, combined with the identification and delivery of various efficiency savings, was important looking ahead to next year, as notice was received from Durham County Council that it would be withdrawing, in its entirety, the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Grants payable to town and parish councils with effect from 2026/27.

This resulted in a loss of £145,250 for the Town Council.

However, as a consequence of the Council's strong financial position and efficiency savings being delivered, the Council was able to avoid making cuts to services, and set a 2026/27 Revenue and Capital Budget that will enable all current services, facilities, and events to be provided to the usual standards this year, continued capital investment in community assets, and the ongoing replenishment of Council reserves.

Unfortunately, this meant that despite planning to limit the Town Council Tax increase to less than 2% in 2026/27, unfortunately, in order to offset the grant cut, and other inflationary budget pressures on staff pay and running costs, the Council was left with no choice but to implement a higher increase than initially planned.

This resulted in a total increase in the Town Council Tax of 3.99%, which increased the Band A Town Council Tax by £8 this year, taking the yearly bill to £208 per year or £17 per month. This equates to 11p in every £1 of the total Council Tax bill.

The Council also achieved another unqualified external audit report in relation to its Annual Governance and Accountability Return last year. This was a very pleasing outcome and provides independent assurance that the Council's accounting statements present fairly its financial position, and that its financial management, governance, and internal audit arrangements are all sound.

Looking further ahead, the Council continues to face significant financial challenges, including pressure on staffing costs linked to increases in the National Living Wage, and increasing inflationary pressure linked to global conflict and economic difficulties.

The Council is also due to make significant capital investment next year and over the medium to longer term and this will result in a significant depletion in the Council's balances and reserves.

However, the Council has strong foundations in place due to its healthy financial position and will seek to manage the future challenges faced via the forthcoming update of its Medium-Term Financial Plan with a view to keeping any future increases in Council Tax to a minimum.

That concludes my Annual Report.

## **5. QUESTIONS**

There was no prior receipt of questions and the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Michael Stead asked the electors in attendance if they had any questions, that they would like addressed which was declined.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending.

**CHAIRMAN.**