

RECREATION COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 27TH MAY 2026

Minutes of the meeting of the **RECREATION COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 27TH MAY 2026** at **7.00pm**.

PRESENT

Councillor Luke Ellis (Chairman) and:
Councillors Martin Ashcroft, Richard Burchell, Arun M. Chandran, Chris Clement, Neil Collinson, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Phil Hawkins, Andy Hill, Sharon Hutchinson, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Kyle Robinson, Michael Stead, Tracey Williams, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mr Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Manager)
Mrs Judith Thexton (Leisure and Events Manager)
Mr Lee Williams (Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator)
Mrs Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

IN ATTENDANCE

Four members of the public were in attendance.

7. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lindsey Aston, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Dorothy Bowman, Sandra Kirby, Jackie McFadden Lewis, Ken Robson and Brian Sowerby.

8. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No applications for dispensations had been received.

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Kyle Robinson declared an interest on Agenda Item 12 – Request for Junior Football Pitches at Simpasture Park, as the applicant and Chairman of Newton Aycliffe RnD Youth Football Club.

10. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions or comments were received.

11. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor John Moore and:

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee, held on the 8th April 2026, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

12. SANTA TOURS SUB COMMITTEE MINUTES

Members received the minutes and recommendations of the meeting of the Santa Tours Sub-Committee held on the 28th April 2026.

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

RESOLVED – That the minutes and recommendations of the meeting of the Santa Tours Sub Committee held on the 28th April 2026, be agreed, confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

13. 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 seven weeks ended the 17th May 2026.

Councillor Carl Robinson asked that additional information be included in any future reports in relation to the ongoing review of membership numbers against the number of available tee slots for green fees, noting that most courses have a significant number of tee slots available on an afternoon and suggested that it would be a mistake to place a limit on membership numbers to sell green fee slots which may not be taken up, instead requesting that officers consider and report options for increasing interest in afternoon tee times.

The Town Clerk confirmed that there are no current plans to reduce memberships and that any proposals would be subject to a full report for consideration by the committee.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson, that the report and recommendations be agreed.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

14. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX USAGE COMPARISONS

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

Councillor Martin Ashcroft gave thanks to the officer for the additional detail and graphs in the report.

Councillor Carl Robinson commented on the income graph, noting that it had been discussed at the last couple of meetings that income may have reached a plateau, and that this issue should be considered further at a future meeting.

The Head of Leisure and Events explained that the Sports Complex Manager continues to explore new opportunities to generate income and is seeking to increase usage of the sports hall, which has not seen the same level of uptake as previously, and is therefore exploring alternative avenues.

It was proposed by Councillor Michael Stead, and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson and:

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

15. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX NEW DEVELOPMENTS

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

The Head of Leisure and Events gave a verbal update, advising that the Cliffecon event had again been a success, bringing approximately 450 people into the facility and that the Sports Complex Manager is looking to introduce games nights and children's sports days every month. It was further advised that a review of the alcohol sales licence is underway to allow for off-sales and extended hours for events such as the World Cup.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft commented that 8.00pm football kick-offs prevent adults attending with children under 18 from viewing the latter part of the game and suggested that the Sports Complex Manager consider extending the permitted hours to 10.30pm for such events.

The Head of Leisure and Events provided details of an incident in which a couple camping on the camping field were subjected to anti-social and intimidating behaviour by a group of youths. Staff had provided assistance, and their response had been praised for going above and beyond in their response.

It was advised that the Sports Complex Manager is reviewing the caravan and camping site provision in light of anti-social behaviour issues and other risks, and would report back to the committee in due course.

Councillor Carl Robinson commended the staff for their actions, and the Sports Complex Manager for having the appropriate staff training in place, and asked that a letter of thanks be sent to the staff on behalf of the Committee.

Councillor Chris Clement highlighted that there are several local youth organisations on the town and asked if they had been approached to establish their interest in using the facility.

The Head of Leisure and Events advised that she was aware the Sports Complex Manager worked with various outside organisations and groups and would pass the comments on.

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

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) A letter of thanks be sent to staff involved in the incident on 28th May, thanking them for their assistance to the members of the public, on behalf of the Committee.

16. 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 advising that the upgrade of Aycliffe Village infant play area had commenced last week. Contractors were hoping to have the installation completed within the week but found some large concrete blocks underneath from previous installs so digging has been quite problematic. The work should be complete by Friday this week, then the independent inspection will need to be organised next week. Once the inspection has been signed off, the local primary school will be invited to help officially open the new play area, with the Mayor, as they were key in the consultation process.

Councillor Carl Robinson asked that he be advised of the opening event to attend as councillor for Aycliffe Village.

Councillor Andy Hill asked about the uptake of bedding plants from the public.

The Works and Environment Manager confirmed uptake had been good. Two large bags were left outside the offices, with a post shared on social media and a guide on how to care for the plants, which have almost all gone.

Councillor Phil Hawkins asked how long the CCTV camera in the Town Park, had been out of action.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that the camera was installed about three years ago and initially operated without any problems. However, it became clear around 18 months ago that there were problems with the operation of the camera and transmitting of images back to the police station. and this was raised with the neighbourhood police team. This has not been progressed as quickly as officers would like due to personnel changes at the police station. However, progress has been made with the new inspector and sergeant, and officers are currently waiting for the CCTV camera supplier to come out to inspect and repair the camera as it has been confirmed it is still under warranty.

Councillor Phil Hawkins asked that members are kept up to date on progress.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson, and seconded by Councillor George Gray and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

17. SANTA TOURS CONSULTATION

Members considered a report from the Town Clerk and Head of Leisure and Events putting forward options for the format and method of the public consultation on the agreed format of the 2026 Santa Tours event.

The Town Clerk commented that officers are pleased and relieved that a firm decision has been made by the Santa Tours Sub-Committee, on the format of the event, providing a clear remit to begin planning the event.

Officers have undertaken further investigations into how best to consult with the public on the plans for the 2026 event, both in relation to the format of the consultation and the arrangements for publicising this.

Feedback had been sought from members of the Santa Tours Sub-Committee as requested, but no responses had been received.

Members were asked to consider the various consultation options highlighted in the report relating to both the format and method of consultation and consider the recommendation of the officers that the focus of the public consultation on the 2026 Santa Tours event should be on either:

- a) Undertaking a consultation on the preferred option, via an online e-survey and a paper survey being distributed to all households using the suggested draft survey attached at Appendix 1; *or*
- b) Communicating the outcome of the Council's review and decision reached as widely as possible via a leaflet drop to all households, press release and boosted social media posts, explaining the reasons the event needs to change, the options investigated, and the chosen option for 2026 and including a commitment to continue to review and enhance the event in years to come.

The Town Clerk advised that the report highlights the various options and associated costs advising that any additional costs over and above the Santa Tours Budget would need to be funded from the contingency budget.

Councillor Arun M Chandran commented that the Santa Tours Sub-Committee had made a final decision on the format of the 2026 event and that there was only one option on the table and therefore the best option would be for the Council to inform the public of the outcome of the Council decision, rather than consulting again on possible alternatives.

He noted that reopening the debate could result in officers spending additional time explaining the background to members of the public who had not previously been involved, particularly as the public had already been invited to share their views, join the Santa Tours Sub Committee, and attend the meetings.

He proposed that recommendation b) would be the most appropriate option with the addition that the Council specifically asks members of the public if they have any comments on the proposed format of the event or ideas for the future enhancement of the event. This was seconded by Councillor Tracey Williams.

A discussion was held about the options available and costs for undertaking a leaflet drop to all households in Great Aycliffe.

Councillor Michael Stead commented that the idea of a leaflet drop was to let the public know the details of the event nearer to Christmas, rather than as a form of consultation.

He proposed that a survey be undertaken to allow engagement with members of the public who may have missed previous information, and to demonstrate that the Council are consulting the community, ahead of a leaflet drop communicating the decision later in the year

Councillor Sharon Hutchinson commented that if a leaflet is to be sent to every household, the Council needed to make it clear that this is due to the Council understanding the depth of the public concerns around this event.

She highlighted that social media provides a large reach to the public and suggested focussing the consultation and survey online.

Councillor Arun M Chandran confirmed that he was happy to accept an amendment to his proposal to incorporate the comments from Councillor Michael Stead, on the proviso that it is clear the Council are not undertaking a consultation but advising the public of the decision reached and allowing the public to share their views on that decision. He stressed that the Council is not rushing this through but delivering a very clear outline and inviting the public to comment within a one-to-two-month period.

The Town Clerk clarified that the draft consultation document attached to the report would form the basis of the consultation, providing information on why the event needs to change, acknowledging the strength of public feeling, explaining the various options considered and the agreed format for 2026, providing links to reports and minutes from the meetings of the Santa Tours Sub-Committee, and seeking feedback from the public, with a commitment to report all comments to the Council.

Councillor Carl Robinson expressed his concern that the Council, having made a decision on the format of the event, appeared to be now taking a backwards step with another consultation which would take the timeline to around August before an agreement is reached. He stressed the need to convey that this is what the Council is planning to do this year, then can consult the public on changes after that.

Councillor Arun M Chandran clarified that the decision has already been made on a very contentious issue, and the Council now needed to advise the public what has been decided and invite them to comment. Any further constructive ideas or suggestions could be incorporated into the event year by year.

Councillor Michael Stead proposed creating an online survey on the basis of the draft attached with the report, prior to undertaking a leaflet drop closer to Christmas, advising the public of what has been decided.

Councillor Arun Chandran agreed to incorporate this amendment into his original proposal.

Councillor Phil Hawkins commented that the sub-committee's decision was agreed, so all that remained is to get the information out to the public. The Council will be criticised whatever it does, but needs to show that it is communicating with the public.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Tracey Williams and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) An online survey be undertaken, on the basis of the draft consultation document attached to the report, providing information on why the event needs to change, acknowledging the strength of public feeling, explaining the various options considered and the agreed format for 2026, providing links to reports and minutes from the meetings of the Santa Tours Sub-Committee, including a commitment to continue to review and enhance the event in years to come, and seeking feedback from the public, with a commitment to report all comments to the Council for consideration.
- iii) A leaflet drop to all households is undertaken nearer to Christmas communicating the agreed format of the 2026 Santa Tours event and providing links to the event locations and routes.
- iv) A leaflet design be brought to a future meeting for consideration.

18. REQUEST FOR JUNIOR FOOTBALL PITCHES AT SIMPASTURE PARK

Members considered a report from the Works and Environment Manager informing Members of a request from Newton Aycliffe RnD Youth FC to provide football pitch provision for youth teams within Simpasture Park.

The Works and Environment Manager highlighted the various considerations and options, highlighting the pros and cons of providing the pitches at Simpasture, and the alternative options that had been considered at Horndale and the back field at the Oak Leaf Sports Complex.

He confirmed that the adult teams at Simpasture do not have issues with junior teams having a pitch, but as an officer he flagged a few concerns particularly around car parking capacity at Simpasture Park.

Councillor Michael Stead asked how many parking spaces there are at Simpasture Park.

The Works and Environment Manager suggested less than 20 but added that it depends how well people park. Once the car park is full, people double park, park on the grass verges and around the surrounding streets. Expanding the car park was not an option but officers could arrange to have the car park line marked.

He advised that pitch usage for juniors could be agreed on a trial basis for the season to allow parking concerns to be monitored.

Councillor Andy Hill asked if there was no chance of expanding the car park if parking is an ongoing issue.

The Works and Environment Manager explained there would be a significant unbudgeted cost implication to expand the car park but suggested looking at grass matting for reinforcement to protect the grassed area and prevent it being churned up.

Councillor Arun M Chandran proposed agreeing to the recommendation to allow Simpasture pitches to be used by the junior teams as set out in the report and appendix (one 7 versus 7 pitch and two 3 versus 3 pitches), on a trial basis for one year, and no temporary structures being erected on the site, and that officers investigate grass matting options to assist with car parking provision. This was seconded by Councillor Michael Stead.

Councillor Chandran suggested that losing some green space at the pavilion to increase parking may be of use to residents as well, so officers could look at this option in the future.

The Town Clerk advised that if the request is agreed, officers would require delegated authority to negotiate an appropriate licence agreement and rental fee.

Councillor Arun Chandran agreed to incorporate this into his proposal.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The request from RnD Youth FC for the Council to provide football pitches for youth teams at Simpasture Park be approved, on the basis of the Council providing one 7 versus 7 pitch and two 3 versus 3 pitches, on a trial basis for one year, and no temporary structures being erected on the site
- iii) Officers are delegated authority to agree a licence for use of the land and an appropriate rental fee.
- iv) Officers investigate matting options to reduce damage to grass verges from parking.

19. SPORTS COMPLEX BAR CARPET REPLACEMENT

Members considered a report from the Sports Complex Manager requesting the use of monies to be carried forward in the Capital Programme Budget to replace the bar carpet at the Oak Leaf Sports Complex.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson and seconded by Councillor George Gray and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) That the replacement of the bar carpet be agreed.
- iii) Doberman's be appointed to undertake the work at a cost of £7,732, to be funded from the 2026/27 Capital Programme Budget provision for carpet replacement and cleaning (if the capital budget carry forward is agreed at Policy and Resources Committee next week).

20. EXEMPT BUSINESS

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

RESOLVED – that it was in the opinion of the Council that due to the confidential nature of the following items, it was advisable to exclude the press and public.

21. GENERAL APPEALS SUB COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

RESOLVED - That the minutes and recommendations of the meeting of the General Appeals Sub Committee held on the 21st April 2026 be agreed, confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

22. RE-ADMISSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

RESOLVED – That Members of the public and press be invited to rejoin the meeting.

Chairman