

RECREATION COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 2ND SEPTEMBER 2026

Minutes of the meeting of the **RECREATION COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 2ND SEPTEMBER 2026** at 7.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor Luke Ellis (Chairman) and:
Councillors Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Dorothy Bowman, Richard Burchell, Arun M. Chandran, Chris Clement, Neil Collinson, George Gray, Phil Hawkins, Andy Hill, Sharon Hutchinson, Jackie McFadden Lewis, Carl Robinson, Kyle Robinson, Ken Robson, Brian Sowerby, Michael Stead, 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 Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

IN ATTENDANCE

Three members of the public were in attendance.

36. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tunde Akinsanya, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Brian Haigh, Richard Hutchinson, Sandra Kirby, John Moore and Tracey Williams.

37. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No applications for dispensations had been received.

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

39. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

40. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was proposed by Councillor Michael Stead, and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill and:

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

41. 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 eight weeks ended the 23rd August 2026.

Councillor Carl Robinson referred to the positive comments received from golf members, praising the condition of the golf course adding that as a member he endorsed the positive comments and asked for greenkeepers be commended for their work and for this to be recorded in the minutes.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson, seconded by Councillor Ken Robson and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

42. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX USAGE COMPARISONS

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

Councillor Carl Robinson asked for more insight on the relationship between monthly usage and income.

The Sports Complex Manager advised that income could vary linked to the level of alcohol purchases, even if usage is down.

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

43. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX NEW DEVELOPMENTS

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

The Sports Complex Manager verbally updated that several capital projects had been completed recently. The sports hall and squash floor projects are almost complete and a video has been posted to Facebook which he asked members to share. The sports hall is now being painted and due to be finished this Friday, ready to re-open on Monday 7th September. He asked members to keep in mind that no income has been taken from these sports facilities for the last month while this work has been ongoing.

Councillor Carl Robinson asked how successful the recent bingo night had been and what the expectation is for the upcoming comedy night.

The Sports Complex Manager advised the bingo night had been very successful with 31 people attending, so he plans to host more of these events in the main bar area, working around the football fixtures.

He further advised that 18 tickets had been sold for the comedy night, and sales are expected to increase during the last two weeks before the event, with the hope for an attendance of 50 people.

If successful, the plan would be to hold another event in the main bar to allow for greater numbers of up to 100.

He explained that he does not currently hold ticketed events in the main bar area as some regular users may complain, but feels that the function room could be used for the public on that evening.

Councillor Michael Stead commented how the bingo and comedy nights are excellent additions to the range of activities available at the sports complex and he feels they are heading in the right direction, thanking the Head of Leisure and Events and the Sports Complex Manager for their work.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran proposed that the Sports Complex Manager should be trusted to make decisions on these type of events and not have to bring a report to the Recreation Committee seeking permission.

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

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The closing time of 8.00pm for the two days of the Ayclife event continues moving forward and that Ayclife ticket holders continue to be allowed into the Sports Complex for future events, subject to certified door staff being provided by the organiser.
- iii) The Sports Complex Manager is given authority to make decisions on ticketed events such as bingo and comedy nights, without needing to bring a report to the Recreation Committee requesting permission.

44. 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 he had received communication from Newton Aycliffe Football Club asking for a reduction in the pitch fees as Moore Lane pitch hadn't been playable due to the drought conditions and they had therefore had to play at other venues at an additional cost to the club. He explained that whilst he sympathised that the pitch is bare, he would question whether the pitch was unsafe to play on as indicated by the club. He advised that Moore Lane pitches tend not to have waterlogging issues over the winter due to the subsoil structure, whereas other pitches can get heavily waterlogged and they then have to play at other venues. He recommended that the Council invest additional funds into overseeding the pitch, which, alongside the Football Association grant sourced by the club, should allow the pitch to be significantly improved. He stressed that the overseeding would need to take place imminently or the pitch could end up dangerous to use over the winter.

The Works and Environment Manager further advised that he had also been contacted by RnD Youth Football Club who have grown faster than anticipated and have asked for another pitch. Adding a further pitch at Simpasture Park feels inappropriate due to overcrowding and complaints from residents.

It had therefore been recommended that RnD Youth Football Club be offered the vacant pitch on the back field at the Oakleaf which could be offered at the junior rate.

Councillor Tony Beddard asked if there was a force majeure in the football pitch hire terms regarding issues such as inclement weather. The Works and Environment Manager advised that such a clause is not included.

The Works and Environment Manager provided a verbal update on the maintenance of West Park lakes. The significant drought over the summer had reduced water levels particularly in the bottom lake, which presented the opportunity to have them cleared out of silt and debris. There is a longstanding problem with the valve on the bottom lake which is seized up and not operational. If it is possible to get the valve repaired and working, works staff would be able to drain the lake and simulate the drought conditions, allowing operatives to more effectively scrape out the sediment. When the lake is cleared with the water still in, a lot of the wet sediment flows back in, whereas this way the sediment can be dropped onto the lake sides, still wet, but a lot more compact and in significantly higher amounts than previously. The Works and Environment Manager advised that he has spoken to contractors regarding the repair of the valve and has also been in discussions with the Environment Agency and Northumbrian Water for advice and support. He advised that there a lot of considerations and options in relation to the maintenance of the lakes and it was his intention to bring a full report to a future meeting.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran suggested that Agenda Item 11 regarding West Park Lakes be dealt with under this agenda item. This was agreed.

He explained that the issue of the clearing of the lakes had been brought to his attention through a complaint from a member of the public to the Northern Echo and gave some historical information about the lakes, from their original construction as boating lakes and transfer to the town council, to the present day, and explaining the various management and maintenance techniques applied over the years.

He advised that when the valves were working the lakes were cleared once a year and that water was always left in the deepest point at centre of the lakes to ensure that wildlife was protected.

He noted that the silt had been cleared and removed very effectively recently, leaving no bare patches and commended the works staff on this.

He advised that the lakes should be maintained as a public facility, and not solely for wildlife.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran proposed that, in addition to the agreement of the officer recommendations with regard to the football pitches, officers prepare a full report for a future meeting with options for the future management and maintenance of West Park Lakes, with a view to returning to the historic method of lake cleaning via the draining of both lakes, one at a time, and clearing them out via relevant machinery, once a year. He further proposed that officers seek to repair the valves to ensure they are fully operational, that the grills at the wear and sluice which currently have gaps in the middle and at the sides are extended, and that officers investigate the filling in of holes around the lakes to prevent rats from nesting.

He advised that £75,000 of capital funding was available in the 2027/28 financial year for this work.

The Works and Environment Manager explained that there are learning points and things can be done better going forward and he had an open mind to explore different options.

Councillor Carl Robinson commended Councillor Arun M. Chandran for his response to the online public complaints and added that members should stand by the decisions made by officers and the work carried out, which has resulted in the lakes being cleared and silt no longer being an issue around the lake sides, adding that officers are qualified in their field and should be supported.

Councillor Andy Hill wished to record his thanks to officers and staff for the recent Fun in the Parks and Senior Citizens Excursions events.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran advised that he would circulate photos and historical information to all members and proposed an addition to his initial proposal to allow officers to repair any broken flagstones when the lakes are cleared using the capital budget.

Councillor Ken Robson seconded Councillor Arun M. Chandran's proposal, adding that it would be a good opportunity to evaluate the base and undertake any repairs.

Councillor Michael Stead raised the issue of the provision of hand soap in St Oswald's Park public toilets. The toilets currently have hot running water but no soap, and given the health, safety and hygiene requirements surrounding suitable hand-washing facilities, the Council should ensure residents and visitors have access to an appropriate means of cleaning their hands.

He also raised the issue of the frequency of the inspection and cleaning regime for the Council's play areas. He highlighted that there does not currently appear to be a regular programme in place, and the Council needed to ensure that play equipment is regularly inspected, cleaned and maintained to an appropriate standard.

It was proposed by Councillor Michael Stead, and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill that officers investigate the installation of vandal proof soap dispensers at St Oswald's Park public toilets and that officers investigate and implement a more regular cleaning and inspection programme for the Council's play equipment.

The Works and Environment Manager agreed these were reasonable requests, confirming that jet washing of play equipment is generally carried out twice a year but agreed there was possibly a need to do this more often.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) A £500 overspend on the Football Pitches Maintenance Budget be approved, to allow the purchase of additional grass seed to speed up the recovery of Moore Lane football pitches to ensure their playability over the winter months.
- iii) Officers prepare a full report for a future meeting with options for the future management and maintenance of West Park Lakes, with a view to returning to the historic method of lake cleaning via the draining of both lakes, one

- at a time, and clearing them out via relevant machinery, once a year, and that the condition of the paving stones are inspected and any broken flagstones repaired.
- iv) Officers seek to repair the lake valves to ensure they are fully operational.
 - v) Officers investigate the extension of the grills at the wear and sluice which currently have gaps in the middle and at the sides.
 - vi) Officers investigate the filling in of holes around the lakes to prevent rats from nesting.
 - vii) That any improvement work on the lakes are undertaken using the £75,000 capital budget set aside in the 2027/28 financial year.
 - viii) Officers investigate the installation of vandal proof soap dispensers at St Oswald's Park public toilets.
 - ix) Officers investigate and implement a more regular cleaning and inspection programme for the Council's play equipment.

45. PARKS EXCLUSION NOTICE

Members considered a report from the Corporate and Policy Officer outlining a proposed Exclusion Notice for a local youth for a period of three months due to anti-social behaviour in the Town Park.

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

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The Town Park Exclusion Notice of three months be endorsed.

46. WEST PARK LAKES CLEANING

This item was discussed and agreed under Minute 44 – Parks Update.

47. SANTA TOURS SURVEY RESULTS

Members considered a report from the Senior Management Team presenting the results of the recent Santa Tours consultation.

The Town Clerk summarised the report, noting that although only 150 responses had been received which was fewer than hoped for, the results were closely divided, with approximately half of the responses supporting the proposed changes to the event.

It was advised that a large number of individual comments had been received and officers will be reviewing all of these and considering incorporating any feasible ideas and suggestions into the planning of future years' events.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M. Chandran and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson, and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) Officers progress the planning of the 2026 event as previously agreed, on the basis of maintaining and enhancing the fixed location, meet and greet format on Christmas Eve, with more and improved locations, and the care home visits, supplemented by a separate non-stop tour of accessible streets, with Santa safely harnessed to the back of the vehicle, using the one Council works vehicle which is currently adaptable to fit a framework and harness.
- iii) The plans of the 2026 event, including the proposed fixed locations and non-stop tour route be reported to the Santa Tours Sub-Committee for consideration.
- iv) A leaflet drop to all households be undertaken nearer to Christmas communicating the agreed format of the 2026 Santa Tours event and providing links to the event locations and routes and the leaflet design be brought to a future meeting for consideration.
- v) Any unbudgeted additional costs associated with running the 2026 event, over and above the monies in the Santa Tours Revenue Budget, be funded from the Revenue Budget Contingency Sum.
- vi) An additional capital budget request for the adaptation of the Council vehicle (fitting of framework / cage and harness system) be submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee for approval once final costings are known.

Chairman