

RECREATION COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 14TH OCTOBER 2026

Minutes of the meeting of the **RECREATION COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 14TH OCTOBER 2026** at 7.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor Luke Ellis (Chairman) and:

Councillors Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Arun M. Chandran, Chris Clement, Neil Collinson, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Phil Hawkins, Andy Hill, Sharon Hutchinson, Sandra Kirby, John Moore, Kyle Robinson, Michael Stead and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mr Andrew Clark (Sports Complex Manager)
Mr Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Manager)
Miss Amanda Donald (Corporate and Policy Officer)
Miss Helen Roberts (Finance Manager)
Mrs Judith Thexton (Head of Leisure and Events)
Mr Lee Williams (Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator)
Mrs Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

IN ATTENDANCE

Two members of the public were in attendance.

The Chairman asked if Members agreed to the meeting being audio recorded for minute taking purposes. This was agreed.

48. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tunde Akinsanya, Richard Burchell, Jackie McFadden Lewis, Carl Robinson, Brian Sowerby, Tracey Williams and Anne Woodward.

49. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No applications for dispensations had been received.

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Kyle Robinson declared an interest in Agenda Item 10, Item 3, due to his connection to RnD Youth Football Club.

51. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A member of the public asked if the purchase of the framework for the Santa Tours vehicle was agreed at this meeting, would it be ready for Christmas Eve.

The Head of Leisure and Events confirmed that it would be.

Another member of the public raised concerns with parking around Moore Lane when football matches are held, asking if the hedge separating the unused area next to the multi-use games area and the current car park, could be removed to allow for extra parking.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that the area was formerly used as netball courts and the same request had been considered and ruled out by the Council a few years ago but could be revisited. At the time, the concerns were that the car park would be very close to the MUGA and there was a risk of balls hitting cars. It would simply be a case of taking the hedge out and would increase parking significantly, however, he clarified that the parking issues are those of the Sports Club and not necessarily relating to Town Council facilities, but for the wider benefit of the community it is worth reinvestigating.

52. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill, and seconded by Councillor George Gray and:

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee, held on the 2nd September 2026, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

53. OAK LEAF GOLF COMPLEX REPORT

Members considered a report from the Head of Leisure and Events providing an update on income, memberships and works undertaken at the Oak Leaf Golf Complex for the six weeks ended the 4th October 2026.

It was highlighted that the golf income was up due to ongoing dry weather, and driving range income was down, with users having communicated concerns regarding the cost of living, which was resulting in fewer visits to the driving range.

It was proposed by Councillor Michael Stead, seconded by Councillor George Gray and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The Oak Leaf Golf Club request for six additional Wednesday evening block bookings from May to August be approved, with the Club returning its Tuesday morning booking in each corresponding week to offset the resulting loss of income.

54. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX USAGE COMPARISONS

Members considered a report from the Sports Complex Manager setting out the Sports Complex usage comparisons for the month of August.

The Sports Complex Manager highlighted that the sports hall and squash court refurbishment works, which took place in August, had resulted in a fall in usage, whilst the facilities were out of use. However, income generally had dropped more than expected and this will be monitored moving forward to determine if this is an ongoing trend linked to the cost of living.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, seconded by Councillor Luke Ellis and:

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

55. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX NEW DEVELOPMENTS

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

The Sports Complex Manager requested members approval for a proposed funded work placement / experience for a local young person, not in employment or education, for a period of six months.

With regard to bar opening hours, it was advised that during the summer there had been a noticeable drop in usage after 9.00pm and there may be an opportunity to save money and enable double staffing during busier times to give a better service. The Sports Complex Manager requested that members agree to a review of bar opening hours.

With regard to the premises licence, the Sports Complex Manager requested that the licence be amended, and that the changes are aligned with the review of bar opening hours.

Councillor Lindsey Aston thanked the Sports Complex Manager for the report and asked why the comedy nights were being held on a Thursday night rather than a weekend.

The Sports Complex Manager explained this was due to weekend costs being higher for the acts. At the last event, the 40 tickets sold covered the cost of the acts and made a small profit, so the aim is to sell 50 tickets for the next event and eventually look to move it into the main bar area as discussed at the last meeting, in order to grow the event.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft thanked all staff involved in the sports hall and squash court flooring and redecoration works completed.

Councillor Tony Beddard asked if the increase in events and music required additional cover under PPL / PRS licences.

The Sports Complex Manager advised that this is a separate licence which he monitors to ensure the Council stays within the limitations and if he felt it needed to be increased this would be reported to the committee.

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

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The Open Day becomes an annual event in the Sports Complex calendar, taking place each September.
- iii) The proposed funded work placement / experience for a local NEET (not in employment or education) for a period of six months be approved.
- iv) The Sports Complex Manager undertakes a review of the current bar opening hours, considering seasonal usage levels, bar income and staffing costs, with any proposed changes and supporting statistical evidence presented to a future meeting for consideration.
- v) The Premises Licence be amended following consideration of a full schedule of the proposed changes, which will be presented in a separate report, aligned with the review of opening hours, including consideration of how the costs of the licence change would be funded.

56. 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 verbally updated on increasing anti-social behaviour issues in the parks as the dark nights are drawing in.

At Moore Lane Park, fires have been lit, causing minimal damage to the play equipment, but as fires can take hold, this is concerning. In addition, a large concrete block had been used in the junior play area, to damage one of the slide sections. The replacement of this section would cost £521.

He further advised he had received a telephone call from the Park Patrol Team prior to the meeting to advise that the fire brigade had been called to the Town Park due to youths setting fire to the MUGA panels.

A meeting with the police has been arranged to discuss the incidents.

It was highlighted that there are ongoing anti-social behaviour issues in the Town Park with large gatherings of youths causing anti-social behaviour.

Last year, the Town Park was closed early in response to similar issues and with dark nights arriving he suggested that members give authorisation to doing the same this year, subject to further monitoring the situation, thereby giving officers the authority to close the park where they felt it was necessary.

It was further advised that at the Town Park on Saturday evening, a section of the park was cordoned off by the police who were using that area of the park as a base to launch a drone to find a missing person.

Councillor Andy Hill recommended that the Town Park situation needed looking at as the Council cannot risk having staff being hurt or abused verbally.

He asked if it could be agreed that the Town Park be closed at a certain time but highlighted that the groups would likely then move to the town centre or Tesco. He asked if the CCTV camera picked up anything on Saturday night.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that the CCTV camera is operational but officers are still waiting for the hard drive to arrive to enable the police to record footage, which is needed as evidence for prosecutions.

Councillor Tony Beddard added that careful consideration must be given to the Town Park opening hours as it is a well-used accessibility route for mobility scooters crossing the road to Tesco safely and into the Town Centre.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that he appreciates that by closing the Town Park early it is potentially dispersing the problems elsewhere, but stressed that there is a need to protect Council staff and assets.

Councillor Chris Clement asked if the Council has a deployable CCTV camera in the Moore Lane area.

The Works and Environment Manager explained that there have been ongoing discussions, and Moore Lane has been previously highlighted to the police as a problem area with ongoing issues. Durham County Council own the street lighting columns and these need stress testing, and the request has never been advanced by the police and Durham County Council, despite officer requests.

Councillor Tony Armstrong asked if these issues continue, how it may affect the Council's insurance premiums.

The Works and Environment Manager clarified that no insurance claim had been made in relation to vandalised play equipment so far, but the issues were having a significant impact on the maintenance budget for parks and play areas across the town and inevitably there would be an overspend.

The Town Clerk added that the Council seeks to self-insure as much as possible and to fund repairs to vandalised equipment via maintenance budgets rather than via insurance claims wherever possible.

Councillor Chris Clement added that if the Council was to claim each time, the insurance company would likely add a large excess to recover those costs.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft commented that the anti-social behaviour was extremely worrying for all concerned, including residents on the town. In addition to the officer recommendations in the report, he proposed that the slide panel replacement at Moore Lane be repaired via the play equipment maintenance budget, that officers be given delegated authority to use their discretion when deciding to close the Town Park early, and that officers contact Newton Aycliffe Police and Durham County Council again regarding moving a redeployable CCTV camera to Moore Lane Park. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Hill.

Councillor Tony Beddard asked what the police response and position was, and if they had provided any recommendations, given that this is a criminal and anti-social behaviour issue, and what protections were in place for the Park Patrol Service staff.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that this is a relatively new, but increasing problem. The last meeting with the police was held around a month ago, anticipating problems in the Town Centre which would affect the Town Park.

Regarding the protection of the Park Patrol staff, which is the main concern, they are trying to be diplomatic in dealing with individuals and the police are clear they need to call if assistance is required and have been much more responsive. The Park Patrol team are very experienced and know how to keep themselves safe and are using bodycams on a regular basis. He advised that officers will seek further advice on how the police suggest the issues be safely and effectively managed.

Councillor Michael Stead asked for an update on the handwashing facilities in St. Oswald's park toilets.

The Works and Environment Manager advised he was still looking at options to be secured on the walls that could not be broken off. He suggested purchasing a low cost but hardwearing unit that can be regularly fixed when vandalised, as a stop gap, whilst planning the long-term toilet renovations in the park.

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) The plastic slide side within the Town Park junior area, and plastic slide panel at Moore Lane Park, be replaced, and it be noted that this will be a considerable spend on the Parks Maintenance Revenue Budget and it is therefore likely that there will be an overspend on this year's budget.
- iii) Officers be given delegated authority to use their discretion when deciding whether to close the Town Park early due to anti-social behaviour issues.
- iv) Officers contact Newton Aycliffe Police and Durham County Council again regarding moving a redeployable CCTV camera to Moore Lane Park.

57. FOOTBALL PITCHES UPDATE

The Works and Environment Manager provided a report with an update for members following discussions with representatives of two football teams using council sports facilities; Moore Lane Sports Club and RnD Youth Football Club.

With regard to Moore Lane Sports Club, it was reported that the club have requested a full refund of their pitch hire fees due to the football pitch remaining unplayable or alternatively seek a grant from the Council to offset the additional costs of hiring alternative facilities.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that, following the decision at the previous meeting, Moore Lane pitch has been reseeded, and the seed was beginning to establish. The Sports Club arranged for its contractor to verti-drain the pitch, but the work was stopped because it was churning up the surface. Using the FA funding provided to the club, the contractor then applied fertiliser, which had boosted growth, so it was hoped the pitch would be playable within a few weeks.

The Works and Environment Manager acknowledged the Sports Club's disappointment, as it had paid to use the pitch but had not yet played there this season. However, the Council had already invested significantly in the pitch, and the problems are attributed to the unavoidable drought conditions during the summer. It was considered realistic for matches to resume from November.

Councillor Andy Hill raised concern that as this pitch was situated on top of an all-weather pitch, this would be an annual issue.

The Works and Environment Manager confirmed that grant funding was available to improve the pitch. This year, it would be used for seed, with more resilient varieties considered in future. However, even the best seed mix would struggle in weather like that experienced this year. Top dressing could improve the pitch over time, but the most effective option would be to replace it entirely, although this would come at a prohibitive cost.

Councillor Kyle Robinson, drawing on his experience of running club teams, raised concerns about offering the club a grant or donation due to the possibility of other teams making similar requests. He recommended working with the FA and offering the club a full refund for the season.

Councillor Lindsey Aston noted that approximately five months of the season remained and stated that, if the Council wanted people to use the facility, it needed to invest in it; therefore, the issue rested with the Council rather than the Club. She suggested that a partial refund would be appropriate.

The Works and Environment Manager explained that Moore Lane's advantage was that it generally remained usable during winter, unlike other sites that became waterlogged. As the team needed to begin playing home fixtures within the next few weeks, it would have to pay to use another local pitch in the meantime.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft queried Councillor Kyle Robinson's declaration of interest on this agenda item.

The Town Clerk clarified that the declaration related to the next part of this agenda item.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran highlighted that the club had requested a full refund of the pitch fee with a view that further intensive improvements can then take place throughout the remainder of the season with the assistance of the FA grant, and the pitch being rested with the team playing elsewhere.

Councillor Arun Chandran proposed that as the club had not yet been able to play, a full refund be given, as a goodwill gesture in exceptional circumstances, on the condition that the pitch could not be used for the rest of the season. Councillor Neil Collinson seconded this proposal.

Councillor Michael Stead proposed an amendment that a refund is not issued but that the club's 2027/28 fees be waived.

The Works and Environment Manager explained that the team would need to fund another pitch elsewhere for the season, which it could not afford.

The Town Clerk further advised that this would create a cash-flow problem and that the club would therefore be likely to return with a further request.

Councillor Michael Stead withdrew his amendment.

Councillor Tony Armstrong asked whether any alternative pitch locations were available.

The Works and Environment Manager confirmed that all other locations were already in use.

The original proposal was put to the vote and agreed.

In relation to the second part of the report, the Works and Environment Manager explained that RnD Youth Football Club had initially been based at Simpasture pitches before moving to the back fields at the Oakleaf.

The club was growing significantly, which was positive for community football, and had submitted a formal request to the Council for the consideration of various infrastructure improvements at the site, including installation of a storage container, composting toilet, small portable shelter / office room, and spectator shelters.

Officers acknowledged the need for storage but had reservations about the need and suitability of the further structures and toilet. There was also concern about the rapid growth of the club and whether the site would be suitable for the long-term needs of the club.

Councillor Tony Beddard asked whether FA grants could support the proposal.

The Works and Environment Manager explained that FA grants had historically focused on pitch improvements. Similar improvements at Simpasture had been considered several years earlier but were not funded because the teams were pub teams rather than grassroots youth teams. Although this option had not yet been investigated, it could be explored.

The Chairman sought Members' permission for Councillor Kyle Robinson to comment and this was agreed.

Councillor Kyle Robinson advised that the FA could provide a 75% discount on a portable cabin. Funding was fully available, but the club could apply for only one grant each year.

Councillor Neil Collinson asked which facility was the club's priority, suggesting that, if storage was the main need, one unit might be sufficient.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that, having seen the current set-up, the priority was a storage container. This would not set a precedent, as other youth teams already had storage containers on Council land, provided a suitable location could be found.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran stressed that the proposal should not set a precedent for every pitch. Given the officers' concerns about the club's rapid growth and the possibility that it might outgrow the site, he could not support a spectator shelter or toilet. He proposed that officers liaise further with the club with a view to installing an appropriate storage facility, under a licence agreement, with the club responsible for its removal if it needed to be moved from the site. This was seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft.

Councillor Lindsey Aston noted that the report referred to planning permission and asked whether the proposals were non-permanent structures supplied by the club, with the Council providing only the use of its land.

The Works and Environment Manager explained that planning permission had been mentioned because the requirements needed to be investigated to ensure compliance with the law.

The Town Clerk drew a comparison with the Garden Guild, which had a short-term agreement with the Council and two portable cabins at Clarence Chare Allotments advising that planning permission had been required because of the size and type of the structures.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The request from Newton Aycliffe Sports Club FC for a full refund of their annual football pitch hire fees is approved, in light of the exceptional circumstances, and on the proviso that the pitch will not be played on this season, to allow time for the pitch improvements to establish.
- ii) Officers liaise further with RnD Youth Football Club with a view to installing an appropriate storage facility, at the Oak Leaf back field location, under a licence agreement, with the club responsible for its removal if it needed to be moved from the site.

58. SANTA TOURS – PURCHASE OF FRAMEWORK FOR COUNCIL VEHICLE

Members considered a report from the Senior Management Team updating them on the cost of installing a removable framework and harness system on the Council's only works vehicle currently suitable for adaptation.

It was advised that the system was required to safely enable the non-stop touring element of the 2026 Santa Tours, and additional capital budget request of £5,000 would need to be submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

It was advised that a second unit would also need to be considered next year when the relevant works vehicle was replaced, which would allow further coverage of the town.

The non-stop touring route would be reported to the Santa Tours Sub-Committee in November.

It was further advised that work was also under way with the Council's website provider to put in place live tracking of the vehicle on Christmas Eve. A potential solution had been identified that updated within five seconds during testing, although it could involve additional costs, including sufficient website bandwidth to prevent crashes from increased traffic.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran requested clarification of the capital budget costs.

The Head of Leisure and Events clarified that £5,000 was required for the current vehicle, with a further £5,000 needed the following year when an additional works vehicle is due for replacement.

The Town Clerk advised that further frameworks could be included in future budgets as more vehicles were replaced.

Councillor Michael Stead asked whether the proposed leaflet drop to all households would be presented to the November Committee and whether the street tour would follow the previous year's route or be extended.

The Head of Leisure and Events advised that the route had not yet been confirmed because considerable planning was required. Work would begin once Members had approved the purchase of the framework and after the delivery of fireworks display event. The route was likely to be slightly extended and would require a driver, navigator and Santa, who would remain secured in place. In future, two Santas could provide wider coverage. The tour would operate continuously without stops, mirroring the approach used by Shildon Town Council.

Meet-and-greet events would remain available for those wishing to see Santa one-to-one.

The Town Clerk advised that a Santa Tours Sub-Committee meeting was being arranged for 11th November to consider all remaining matters, including the leaflet drop, with a design and costs to be presented at that meeting.

Councillor Tony Beddard congratulated the Head of Leisure and Events on the framework design and Santa tracker.

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 purchase of the suggested framework and harness system be approved.
- iii) An additional capital budget request of £5,000 be referred to the Policy and Resources Committee for approval.
- iv) A further £5,000 capital budget provision be made for a second framework to be purchased for the replacement Citroen Relay Tipper vehicle, in the 2027/28 Capital Budget.

59. PARKS EXCLUSION NOTICE

Members considered a report from the Corporate and Policy Officer requesting the endorsement of two Exclusion Notices following two separate recent incidents in the Town Park that warranted action under the Council's Exclusion Policy.

Members expressed serious concern about the large groups of youths in the park and praised the Park Patrol Service for handling a difficult situation.

Councillor Lindsey Aston expressed concern that the exclusion periods might be too lenient given the repeated incidents.

The Corporate and Policy Officer explained that a fair and proportionate approach was taken, considering the seriousness of each incident.

Every case was discussed with the Works and Environment Manager and Park Patrol, with longer exclusions imposed for repeat offences depending on their nature. The policy provided guidelines, and the maximum exclusion was likely to be one year.

Councillor Tony Beddard referred to previous discussions about the Park Patrol staff's safety and asked whether protective equipment, such as stab-resistant vests, was provided.

The Works and Environment Manager clarified that Park Patrol staff know most of the young people using the parks, including those likely to cause trouble. Stab-resistant vests had been discussed previously, but the team felt that wearing them could make staff appear to be enforcement officers and alter their relationship with the young people.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, seconded by Councillor Tony Armstrong and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

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

60. 2027/28 DRAFT RECREATION COMMITTEE REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS

The Finance Manager delivered a report requesting Members' consideration, comments, and approval of the draft 2027/28 Revenue and Capital Budgets for the Recreation Committee, summarising the main points of the report.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The draft 2027/28 Recreation Revenue and Capital Budgets be agreed.

Chairman