

ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE TOWN MEETING

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, 26TH MAY 2021** at **7.15 p.m.**

PRESENT Councillor Mrs. S. Haigh (Chairman / Mayor)
and there were 22 Electors present.

The Chairman (Mayor) of the Council opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the Annual Assembly of the Town Meeting. The 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 S. Haigh, seconded by K. Robson and

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Annual Assembly of the Town Meeting, held on the 22nd May 2019, be confirmed as a correct record and record and signed by the Chairman.

3. CHAIRMAN / MAYOR'S ANNUAL REPORT

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

CHAIRMAN / MAYOR'S ANNUAL REPORT

Good evening and welcome to this Annual Assembly of the Town Meeting for the Parish of Great Aycliffe.

My name is Sandra Haigh and I am the newly appointed Mayor of the Town Council. This is my annual report on the work of the Town Council during the last twelve months.

It goes without saying that 2020/21 has been a challenging and unprecedented year for the Town Council and the community that we serve.

The onset of the Coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 changed our lives in ways we could never have imagined little more than a year ago, and has made issues like social distancing, face masks, hand sanitiser, support bubbles and quarantine a normal part of our day to day lives.

The Town Council has strived to support the community throughout the pandemic, keeping the vast majority of our services, including cemeteries, allotments, pre-school, parks and golf course running as close to normal as possible under the restrictions.

Unfortunately, the government restrictions meant that the Council needed to cancel a number of our much-loved community events last year including the Senior Citizens' Trips, Fun in the Parks and Fireworks Display, although not even Coronavirus could stop Santa undertaking his annual tour of the Parish!

The Council also set up a Covid-19 Small Grants Fund last year offering local community organisations and charities the opportunity to access funds to help them deal with the financial losses suffered as a result of the pandemic.

This fund helped support organisations including food banks, scout groups, residents' associations, the women's institute, the Rotary Club, the Youth Centre, the Beekeepers' Association and a number of local charities.

The Council is also planning on setting up a COVID-19 Recovery Fund during the coming 2021/22 financial year using some of the money saved as a result of the cancellation of the community events.

This fund will seek to pass these savings back to local taxpayers via one-off investments during the 2021/22 financial year, to help compensate for the services that have not taken place this year. Potential uses of this Covid-19 Recovery Fund include:-

- Setting up a Community Grants Fund to provide financial assistance to local organisations to help them recover from the pandemic;
- Investing more money in events taking place in 2021/22 or subsequent years to make up for the cancellation of the 2020 events;
- Investing in environmental improvements such as tree and bulb planting and creation of new wildflower meadows.

The coming year will no doubt continue to be challenging as the country recovers from the pandemic.

The Town Council will also face challenges over the coming years as it deals with likely funding cuts and budget pressures, and the Council will need to review what services it currently offers and how they are delivered to ensure that the services, events, and facilities being offered align with community needs and priorities.

I will now talk about the many services that the Town Council has planned and budgeted to provide to the community of Great Aycliffe during this coming 2021/22 year subject, of course, to the lifting of Coronavirus related restrictions.

Environment

The Town Council:

- Provides over 200 allotment sites located at:
 - Clarence Chare
 - Finchale Road
 - St. Oswald's
 - Aycliffe Village and
 - Byerley Park
- Provides pigeons, poultry and beekeeping plots at specific allotments sites.
- Provides and maintains two cemeteries at West Cemetery and Stephenson Way and a burial service for St. Andrews Church in Aycliffe Village.
- Provides grounds maintenance e.g. the provision of flower beds, grass cutting and tree planting and maintenance, on all Council owned land and facilities.
- Runs the Environment Centre at Moore Lane and a programme of environment events.

- Carries out environmental management of a number of nature and conservation areas including the Great Aycliffe Way and other green open space across the Parish.
- Provides public seating, bus shelters, litter, and dog bins on Town Council owned land.
- Delivers a comprehensive programme of activities for schools, community groups and public events during school holidays.
- Delivers 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.
- Assists and facilitates community groups such as local scout, guides, and Friends groups.
- Holds a licence agreement with Durham County Council to operate and maintain areas of land and woodland which form part of the Great Aycliffe Way.

Recreation

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

- Eight very different parks, all with their own 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
- Modern and well-maintained play equipment is provided at all of these parks, as well as at the following specific sites:-
 - Oakleaf Sports Complex
 - School Aycliffe
 - Aycliffe Village
 - Scott Place
 - Cobbler's Hall
- Five multi-use games areas at Moore Lane, Simpasture, Horndale, Woodham and Cobbler's Hall, as well as a skate park, scoot track and BMX track.
- The Park Patrol Service which provides an out of hours service to monitor and safeguard the Council's assets and its users.
- The Oakleaf Sports Complex, which provides an indoor bowls green, a multi-use sports hall, four squash courts, function room and bar and catering facilities. The sports complex is also home to an Indoor Bowls Club, Squash Club, Running Club and Archery Club, and provides a number of 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 Fantazmagoria (steam punk/sci/fi event), MMA events, Dog Shows and craft fairs.

- The Oakleaf Golf Complex, comprising an eighteen-hole golf course, golf shop, changing rooms, and driving range.
- Eight football pitches, including junior football and six a side pitches at three sites:
 - Sports Complex
 - Simpasture and
 - Moore Lane
- A series of annual leisure events (subject to Coronavirus restrictions) such as:
 - Senior Citizens' Excursions
 - Fireworks Display
 - Fun in the Parks
 - Santa Tours and Letters
- Support to events run by local organisations:
 - 10K Fun Run organised by Aycliffe Running Club
 - Live Music Festival organised by Aycliffe Radio
- A number of new events which have been developed in recent years including:
 - Skatefest Competition and Demonstrations
 - Party in the Park - Part of the Durham Brass Festival

Pre-School Learning Centre

The Council provides a Pre-School Learning Centre located in St. Oswald's Park which is currently registered for 40 places for 3-year olds. 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. A programme of training and support for staff has been undertaken to ensure that the best service to children is provided.

Capital Works

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 new community assets such as play equipment, multi-use games areas and skate parks.

An updated play area is planned for Woodham Park this year.

Newsletter

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

Council Finances

Despite the challenges created by the Coronavirus pandemic over the last year, the Council ended the 2020/21 year in strong financial health, having delivered a substantial saving on its Revenue Budget and increased its balances and reserves to more than £1.5 million.

Whilst some of the savings last year were as a direct consequence of the pandemic, including the unfortunate cancellation of many community events, the Council has also continued to deliver efficiency savings across all services.

This healthy financial situation meant that the Council was able to set a 2021/22 Revenue and Capital Budget that will enable all current services, facilities, and events to be provided to the usual high standards next year, the set-up of a COVID-19 Recovery Fund, and continued investment in community assets, whilst freezing the Town Council proportion of the Council Tax bill.

Whilst further financial challenges lie ahead, including likely cuts to the Council Tax Support Grant funding, significant pressure on staffing budgets linked to increases in the National Living Wage, and potentially significant capital investment commitments, and the ensuing depletion in the Council's balances and reserves that this will cause, the Council is well placed to maintain a strong financial position and will seek to manage these challenges via the forthcoming update of its Medium-Term Financial Plan.

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.

That concludes my Annual Report. Thank you for listening.

4. DEFIBRILLATOR PRESENTATION

A presentation by Councillor David Sutton – Lloyd was given describing the successful and on-going roll-out of defibrillator machines which have been installed throughout the Great Aycliffe Parish.

5. QUESTIONS

There was no prior receipt of questions and the Mayor, Councillor Mrs Sandra Haigh asked the electors in attendance if they had any questions, that they would like addressed.

Councillor J. Hillary asked the Town Clerk to update them on resolving the Durham County Council incursion of Aycliffe Village Green.

The Town Clerk had confirmed that his predecessor had investigated this issue in September 2019 and had contacted Durham County Council. The last update was in March 2020 where the request to accurately plot the path and to appoint surveyors to overlay the plan was given. The survey was not carried out and the request was followed up again in October 2020.

The Town Clerk assured the electors that he would raise the query again.

CHAIRMAN.