

## **ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**WEDNESDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2024**

Minutes of the meeting of the **ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 10<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2024 at 7.30pm**

### **PRESENT**

#### **Councillor Ian Gray (Chairman) and**

Councillors: Eddy Adam, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Dorothy Bowman, Arun M Chandran, John Clark, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Wendy Hillary, Joanne Jones, Sandra Kirby, Brian McAnaney, John Moore, Ken Robson, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

### **OFFICERS**

Mr Dan Austin (Town Clerk)

Mr Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Manager)

Mr Lee Williams (Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator)

Mrs Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

### **IN ATTENDANCE**

Councillor Peter Musa

One member of the public

A minute's silence was held for previously long-standing former Town Councillor Billy Blenkinsopp and former Mayor and Town Councillor Mary Dalton in honour of their recent passing.

### **16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Tony Armstrong, Peter Bergg, Neil Collinson, Sandra Haigh, Neville Jones and Carl Robinson.

### **17. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS**

No applications for dispensations had been received.

### **18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Joanne Jones declared an interest in Agenda Item 8 in relation to the Cemeteries Report as an official of Community Spirit.

### **19. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No questions from the public were received.

## 20. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson and

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee, held on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2024, be confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

## 21. ALLOTMENTS REPORT

Members considered a report from the Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator providing an update on issues relating to the allotments for the six weeks ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that report be received.

## 22. ENVIRONMENT REPORT

Members considered a report from the Works and Environment Manager to update Members with issues relating to the environment for the six weeks ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

The Works and Environment Manager drew attention to a request from a resident to move the bollards back onto Aycliffe Village Green in order to widen the access road, following damage to several local vehicles by delivery vehicles.

It was the opinion of the officers that the Town Council has a legal duty to protect the village green and that the request should therefore be refused.

Councillor Arun Chandran stated that he felt that the Council should be flexible in the application of the rules relating to the village greens and that the movement of the bollards should be considered.

A discussion was then held regarding the Council's legal responsibilities to protect the village green, and the general opinion was that a common-sense approach was needed to the situation. There is space for vehicles to pass if driving safely and moving the bollards would be setting a precedent of encroachment onto the village green.

It was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam and seconded by Councillor Jed Hillary that no action is taken to move the bollards, but that officers consider implementing signage discouraging the use of the access road by large vehicles.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran raised concerns regarding the mobile scaffolding proposed for works to bus shelter roofs, particularly in the Williamfield Way area and asked if scaffolding could be removed each night.

Councillor Jed Hillary proposed that costings to be collated for scaffolding towers which can be erected and taken down each day when work is done on bus shelters and other assets around the town.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that the Works Department has scaffolding towers, but they also require anti-fall barriers, for works on bus shelters, following Durham County Council's advice. It was advised that Herras fencing would be used for protection each night while bus shelter works are ongoing.

It was advised that there had been very few entries for the allotment/garden competition this year and this will be advertised again. Members were asked to raise awareness with local residents and encouraged any nominations to be sent in as soon as possible.

Councillor John Moore raised the issue of Giant Hogweed plants very close to the pathways in Woodham Burn.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that this has been an issue previously and as it is private land there were limits to how much the Town Council can do. The Council has a certain level of duty and care, but couldn't go onto private property without permission. Councillor John Moore advised he was aware of who owned the land and would speak to the Works and Environment Manager outside of the meeting.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that;

- i) The report be received.  
No action is taken to move the bollards on Aycliffe Village Green, but that officers consider implementing signage discouraging the use of the access road by large vehicles.

## **23. CEMETERIES REPORT**

Members considered a report from the Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator updating Members on items relating to the cemeteries for the seven weeks ended 20<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator advised of changes regarding water quality permits from the Environment Agency which shouldn't affect the Council currently, but it will be reported back to the Committee if this changes.

A discussion was held around the proposal from local charity; Community Spirit to fund the installation of 'Letters to Heaven' post boxes in the Council's two cemeteries.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator confirmed that a compost bin would be installed specifically for the letters to be composted along with a small amount of green matter to help it breakdown, such as old flowers collected from the graves. Sensitivity regarding the letters was discussed.

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill and

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that;

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The information provided regarding the new charging scheme for water quality permits and its possible impact on the proposed Woodland Burial Site be noted.
- iii) The offer from local charity; Community Spirit to fund the purchase of a 'Letters to Heaven' post box in each of the Council's cemeteries, and a large compost bin, be agreed, subject to the Council agreeing to install the boxes and manage the service (collect, shred and compost).

## 24. SCHOOL AYCLIFFE WETLANDS WALKWAYS

The Works and Environment Manager submitted a report for members consideration regarding the potential options open to the Council to repair or replace the pathways and board walk around the edge of School Aycliffe Wetlands, as requested at the October 2023 Environment Committee Meeting.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that he was initially concerned about high costs involved for the pathways and boardwalks but after consideration it was felt that a holistic approach could be taken, working with the land to identify a series of small improvements to produce a more durable, usable walkway, using existing budgets and works staff capacity.

It was further advised that future financial provision needed to be made to replace the dipping platform section of the walk.

Councillor Eddy Adam thanked the Works and Environment Manager for his report and supported his recommendations. He asked if the replacement of the dipping platform was included in the Council's Asset Management Plan.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that no provision was identified at the present time. The wooden structure will be removed only when required, but there is a need to plan ahead for this.

Councillor Jed Hillary proposed that if the dipping platform deteriorate in the meantime, contingency provision needs to be made for its replacement.

It was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam and seconded by Councillor Jed Hillary and:

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The Works and Environment Manager takes a holistic approach, working with the land present, to identify a series of small improvements to produce a more durable, usable walkway at School Aycliffe wetlands, using existing budgets and works staffing capacity.
- iii) A sum of £6,000 should be set-aside within the Medium-Term Financial Plan to replace the dipping platform section of the walk when it is required.
- iv) Should the boardwalks deteriorate in the meantime, arrangements will be made to put in place to request the approval of a contingency budget.

## 25. COUNCIL OFFICES VISITORS CAR PARK HEIGHT RESTRICTOR

The Works and Environment Manager submitted a report for members to consider the various options open to the Council regarding the access control arrangements for the Council Offices Visitors Car Park.

The preferred option was to purchase retractable bollards as a squeeze, retaining the existing boulders as a funnel into the car park and improving the signage.

The Works and Environment Manager gave a verbal update that reflectors had already been added to the boulders on entry.

Councillor Jed Hillary suggested that the low boulders are hazardous and need to be higher.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft advised the Council may need to be mindful of the site survey report for the unauthorised travellers encroachment and it may be best to hold off until that report comes back.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that verbal discussions had been held with the crime prevention officer and they had discussed the use of retractable bollards similar to those outside the depot.

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary proposed and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) That the officers recommendation to retain the boulders as a funnel into the car park, the purchase of four removable bollards as a retractable squeeze at the entrance to the car park, and improving the signage for the area, to include two width restriction signs at the entrance, be agreed.

**Chairman**