

## ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the **ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 16<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2024 at 8.40pm**

### PRESENT

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

Councillors: Eddy Adam, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Arun M Chandran, John Clark, Neil Collinson, George Gray, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Sandra Kirby, Brian McAnaney, 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 Tracey Woodhead (Finance Manager)

Mrs Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

### IN ATTENDANCE

One member of the public was in attendance.

#### **40. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Peter Bergg, Brian Haigh, Sandra Haigh, Wendy Hillary, Joanne Jones, Neville Jones, John Moore, Carl Robinson and Ken Robson.

#### **41. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS**

No applications for dispensations had been received.

#### **42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest had been received.

#### **43. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

A member of the public raised concern about rats around the town, particularly where bins are overflowing due to not being emptied.

Councillor Ian Gray highlighted that fly tipping and food being left out is contributing to the problem.

Councillor Lindsey Aston advised she had spoken to Durham County Council about the issue, particularly the bins along Woodham Way which despite a regular emptying schedule seem to be getting overly full and used for dog waste as well. Rats are climbing in and it is now becoming a more serious issue.

The Town Clerk had written to Durham County Council regarding the problem following the last meeting and the issue was covered in the Allotments Report.

#### 44. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill, seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston and:

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee, held on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2024, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### 45. PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam, seconded by Councillor Andy Hill and:

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes and recommendations of the meeting of the Planning Sub-Committee held on the 19<sup>th</sup> September 2024, be agreed, confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

#### 46. ALLOTMENTS REPORT

Members considered a report from the Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator, providing an update on issues relating to the allotments for the eight weeks ended 6<sup>th</sup> October 2024.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator advised that the Bee Keepers Association (BKA), since moving onto a second plot at St Oswald's, no longer have use for the original plot, and so works staff could now change the fronts and create two new apiary plots there.

Regarding the issues of rats on the Clarence Chare Allotment site, the Town Clerk had received a response from Durham County Council advising that a questionnaire would need to be distributed to tenants to record dates, times and numbers. Additional bait boxes have been installed and operatives were rotating the types of poison so that the rats don't build an immunity.

Councillor Eddy Adam queried why plots 104 and 111 at St Oswald's Allotments had both been vacant for a number of months and why it was taking time to clear the plots and offer them to the next tenant, raising concern that the Council may be losing income if the plots are not being re-let within a reasonable timeframe.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator explained that part of the issue is the length of the process of inspections, maintenance letters then terminations. The tenant has 30 days to rectify any issues, then it is escalated to termination which also takes 30 days. Plot 111 has just recently been cleared and offered. Plot 104 had 3 vans worth of rubbish cleared including a smashed greenhouse and there is still work to do. It was further advised that at an annual rent of £40 per year, the income lost is minimal to the council.

With regard to the request to create two apiary plots, Councillor Jed Hillary highlighted that a previous request from the BKA for fencing had been rejected, and that the Council should not be paying for fencing.

It was proposed by Councillor Hillary that the Council uses mesh or netting to separate the plots. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Hill.

**RESOLVED** – that it be recommended that

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The alterations to the previously held ABKA teaching plot to create two individual apiary plots be agreed subject to mesh/netting being used to separate the plots.

#### **47. ENVIRONMENT REPORT**

Members considered a report from the Works and Environment Manager to update Members with issues relating to the environment for the eight weeks ended 6<sup>th</sup> October 2024.

The Works and Environment Manager updated members verbally that School Aycliffe wetlands scrub clearance works had begun last week. However there had been substantial rainfall in the last week and the wetlands have risen and were at the worst level seen in the last 15 years. This has understandably slowed down the work. It is draining quite rapidly but highlights the nature of the wetlands.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that the St Clare's flower beds have been stripped out and operatives have applied extra soil and well-rotted manure, so that the beds will be ready for Remembrance Sunday.

With regard to the proposal at the previous meeting to move the flower beds to an alternative location in the longer term, the Works and Environment Manager advised that the Church Warden had been consulted and had not raised any concerns with this.

Councillor Jed Hillary proposed that officers are authorised to move the flower bed to a better location without the need to report back to the Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Andy Hill.

Councillor Andy Hill thanked operatives for work cutting back branches near the steps at the Blue Bridge.

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

- i) The report be received.
- ii) Officers are authorised to move the flower bed at St Clare's Church to a better location without the need to report back to the Committee.

#### **48. CEMETERIES REPORT**

Members considered a report from the Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator updating Members on items relating to the cemeteries for the eight weeks ended 6<sup>th</sup> October 2024.

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

- i) The report be received.

#### **49. 2025/26 DRAFT ENVIRONMENT REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS**

Members considered a report from the Finance Manager of the draft 2025/26 Revenue and Capital Budgets for the Environment Committee.

The Finance Manager provided an over view of the background to the budget setting process and key issues from the Medium-Term Financial Plan and provided a summary of the key issues relating the Environment Revenue and Capital Budgets.

Councillor Tony Armstrong asked about the £60,000 Capital Budget for the A167 street lights.

The Finance Manager explained that the council paid a ten-year commuted sum to Durham County Council in 2015 to secure the future of the A167 lighting as Durham County Council had been planning to remove the lighting.

This ten-year agreement is up for renewal next year and, depending upon the County Council's intentions for the lights, bearing in mind the forthcoming Copelaw housing development, the Town Council would need to decide whether or not to renew this agreement. This was why a provisional sum of £60,000 had been included in the draft 2025/26 Capital Budget.

It had been agreed at the recent Asset Management Sub-Committee Meeting that the Town Clerk would contact Durham County Council to establish their intentions regarding the lights and the likely costs of a further commuted sum, with a view to bringing a report to the Council for a decision on the issue.

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 draft 2025/26 Environment Revenue Budget be agreed.
- iii) The draft 2025/26 Environment Capital Programme Budget and proposed classification of the projects be agreed.

**Chairman**