

RECREATION COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 16TH OCTOBER 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the **RECREATION COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY, 16TH OCTOBER 2024** at 7:00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Michael Stead (Chairman) and:
Councillors: Eddy Adam, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Arun M Chandran, John Clark, Neil Collinson, George Gray, Ian Gray, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Sandra Kirby, Brian McAnaney, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mr Andrew Clark (Sports Complex Manager)
Mr Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Manager)
Ms Amanda Donald (Corporate and Policy Officer)
Mrs Judith Thexton (Head of Leisure and Events)
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, Joanne Jones, Neville Jones, Wendy Hillary, 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 were received.

43. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A member of the public drew attention to the issue of low uptake of lady memberships at the Golf Complex due to various reasons including the cost of equipment and the sport being a predominantly male sport.

44. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill, seconded by Councillor John Woodward and:

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee held on the 4th September 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

45. EVENTS SUB COMMITTEE MINUTES

Members received the minutes of the meeting of the Events Sub-Committee held on the 2nd October 2024.

Councillor John Clark queried the wording of the Minutes at Section 9 regarding the fireworks display and the recording of his opposition to a comment made by Councillor Arun M. Chandran regarding fireworks display wristband numbers. He did not feel the minute was a true representation of what was said.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran argued that evidence of the comments by a previous Labour Councillor was available and that the minute was accurate, querying the right of the member to request the minute is changed.

Councillor Tony Armstrong commented that he felt it the comment from Councillor Chandran had been unnecessarily aggressive, antagonistic and personal, referring to the Standing Orders requirement of civility and respect.

It was proposed by Councillor John Clark and seconded by Councillor Tony Armstrong that the wording be changed from:

“Councillor Arun Chandran made a political comment about the Labour Group’s involvement in the original decision regarding wrist band numbers”, to

“Councillor Arun M. Chandran made an inappropriate, disparaging comment about the Labour Group and in particular ex Councillor John Clare and their involvement in the original decision regarding wrist band numbers”

The Town Clerk advised that it is the right of Councillors who were in attendance at the meeting to ask for the minutes to be agreed, subject to specific items being corrected if deemed an inaccurate or incomplete record, subject to Members agreeing by a majority vote to accept the change of wording.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran called for a named vote.

Councillor Eddy Adam clarified that members who attended the meeting have a right to request an addendum to the minutes to reflect the words and tone used accurately.

Councillor Jed Hillary suggested that the only members who should vote were the seven members that were in attendance at that meeting.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran then retracted his request for named vote.

A vote was held on the proposed change to the minutes with the following results:

| | |
|------------|---|
| For | 6 |
| Against | 0 |
| Abstention | 1 |

Councillor Eddy Adam further highlighted that the Events Sub-Committee had agreed to reduce the maximum number of fireworks wristbands issued without question from 8 to 6, but this had not been recorded in the resolutions. He proposed that the minutes were agreed subject to the decision to reduce the number of wristbands issued without question from 8 to 6 being added to the recommendations. This was seconded by Councillor John Clark.

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The minutes and recommendations of the meeting of Events Sub Committee held on the 2nd October 2024, be agreed, confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendments:-
 - a) That the wording of the Minutes at Section 9 be changed from:

“Councillor Arun Chandran made a political comment about the Labour Group’s involvement in the original decision regarding wrist band numbers” to

“Councillor Arun M. Chandran made an inappropriate, disparaging comment about the Labour Group and in particular ex Councillor John Clare and their involvement in the original decision regarding wrist band numbers”.
 - b) That the decision to reduce the number of wristbands issued without question from 8 to 6 is added to the recommendations.

46. OAKLEAF GOLF COMPLEX REPORT

Members considered an update report relating to the Oak Leaf Golf Complex for the six weeks ending the 6th October 2024.

The Head of Leisure and Events summarised that both green fees and driving income are up from last year and membership numbers up by 48 on last year.

The Grounds Maintenance Services Co-ordinator referred members to the detailed breakdown of works carried out by the greenkeepers and the success of the driving range drainage improvement scheme.

The Town Clerk advised that the report included a summary of the results from the recent Golf Complex User Survey, including commentary from officers and proposed actions in relation to the key issues. The feedback was mostly positive with some issues highlighted regarding the maintenance of greens, bunkers, roughs and the height of the driving range fence.

It was highlighted that some feedback had been received relating the governance and management of the Golf Club and that the survey had therefore been added as an agenda item for the Golf Working Group meeting next Tuesday so that this could be discussed with the Golf Club.

Councillor Eddy Adam highlighted that he had referred some questions and concerns to the Town Clerk regarding the survey feedback relating to the Golf Club and welcomed the opportunity to discuss the feedback with the Golf Club at the Golf Working Group Meeting.

Councillor Tony Armstrong congratulated the staff for the increase in membership numbers, particularly for younger people. He asked for officers thoughts on the survey responses asking Council officers to take on the running of the Golf Club.

The Town Clerk advised that this will be discussed at the Golf Working Group, but his view is that it is the role of the Council to work with the Golf Club to help make any improvements needed, rather than take over the running of the club. The ultimate aim is for the Council and Golf Club work together to ensure members concerns are addressed.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M. Chandran, seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam and:

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

47. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX USAGE COMPARISONS

A report was received from the Sports Complex Manager, updating members on statistical information in relation to the attendance and income at the Oak Leaf Sports Complex for the months of August and September, compared with the last five years.

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

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

48. OAKLEAF SPORTS COMPLEX NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Members considered a report from the Oak Leaf Sports Complex Manager with an update on new developments relating to the Oak Leaf Sports Complex.

The Sports Complex Manager gave a verbal update, informing members that the new CCTV was system now fully installed and working well with excellent picture quality. The bar area has had a makeover with the new entertainment system and additional screens installed. Sky have agreed to provide a second box, cable all the televisions with input and outputs so that the bar can show two football matches at once. A micro-draught Guinness machine is also being installed.

Councillor Michael Stead commented that he was astounded at the level of work that the Sports Complex Manager and his staff have been putting in and the increases in usage and income.

Councillor Eddy Adam agreed with this view and commented that huge strides forward have been made, which will hopefully continue. Regarding live music in the bar, he asked if additional space could be created to improve the opportunity for larger bands to perform. He further asked whether bands could be offered an incentive to come along for example a proportion of the bar income or a small payment.

The Sports Complex Manager advised that the bar area isn't purpose built for live music and any modifications may have a knock-on effect for other activities but that the area under the big screen or function room could be used for bands requiring more space. He commented on the need for an effective balance between sports and music. The comments regarding the possibility of financial incentives for bands were noted.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft asked what the sitting capacity was in the bar area.

The Head of Leisure and Events advised that the bar is licensed for up to 200 people standing upstairs (including the function room). The function room has a capacity of up to 100 people standing.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

49. PETITION TO INSTALL A BENCH IN WEST PARK

Members considered a public petition forwarded by Councillor George Gray, requesting that the bench seat previously removed from the Ashfield area of West Park be reinstated. A map showing the proposed location was enclosed.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that he had spoken to people in the bungalows closest to the bench position and written letters asking for feedback. One resident didn't have an issue with the request, one resident had highlighted that he would appreciate a seat to use when walking to and from the local shop, one household was empty, and there had been no response from the remaining two households.

Councillor George Gray explained that the petition had been undertaken following contact from a 90-year-old lady who had asked him about reinstating the seat. He spoke to people who live in the bungalows and someone had said that she had been trying to get the seat installed for 13 years.

Councillor Jed Hillary asked officers if he was correct in thinking the Council had previously removed this bench at the request of residents due to anti-social behaviour. It was confirmed that this was the case.

Councillor Andy Hill queried if the same problems would arise if the Council put the bench back there. He also highlighted that there was another bench within 500 yards of the proposed bench.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft highlighted that he lives very close to the proposed location and had not signed the petition, stating that he believes that the people signing the petition were unaware of the reasons the bench had previously been removed. He stated that the bench would be a magnet for young people to congregate.

Councillor Arun M Chandran highlighted that some signatures were from households which are not close to the proposed location of the bench.

Councillor Eddy Adam asked if a spare seat was available from stocks, which officers confirmed there is.

Councillor Michael Stead called a vote on the issue, and reminded Councillors to bring issues such as this from the public to Committee and to be mindful that we do have a petition from the public. He suggested the Council write to residents who have signed the petition, with the outcome and reasons.

Councillor George Gray requested a named vote.

Councillor Jed Hillary asked about GDPR issues and asked that in future for any petitions to explicitly ask for permission to write to those people.

It was clarified that there are no GDPR implications relating to public petitions and the Town Clerk confirmed he will only write to the 'households' of those who have completed petition rather than named people.

A named vote was held on the petition with the following results:

For: Councillor George Gray

Against: Councillors Eddy Adam, John Clark, Ian Gray, Jed Hillary, Lindsey Aston, Brian Mcananey, Anne Woodward, John Woodward, Arun M. Chandran, Neil Collinson, Martin Ashcroft, Andy Hill, Phillip Hawkins and Michael Stead.

Abstained: Councillors Sandra Kirby and Tony Armstrong.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The bench at West Park is not reinstated.
- iii) All households who signed the petition be written to by the Town Clerk outlining the decision and reasoning.

50. PARKS UPDATE

A report was received providing Members with an update from the Works and Environment Manager on issues relating to the parks.

Councillor George Gray said he was pleased the tree stump in West Park had been removed. He advised he had discussed with the officer making a nesting area for wildfowl where the stump had been removed and requested that the trees overhanging the lake near to the bridge be cut back to save the Council time clearing the lake of leaves.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that officers are planning on replanting the area where the stump has been removed with hawthorn/black thorn as a thicket for ground nesting birds, as there is not much cover around the lake. It was further advised that the trees in the bottom lake provide nesting and cover for wildfowl and that by cutting back the trees, the Council would be risking removing cover for the birds.

Councillor Tony Armstrong asked if Moore Lane Eco Centre is used exclusively by Green Arts.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that there is potential for using the building on evenings and weekends, as Green Arts currently only use the facility during the day.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.

51. REQUEST FOR DEFIBRILATORS AT SIMPASTURE PAVILION AND WEST CEMETERY

Members considered a report from the Works and Environment Manager highlighting a request from local charity 'Missed a Beat Foundation' to install defibrillators at Simpasture Pavilion and West Cemetery.

It was requested that Members agree in principle, that the Council facilitate the request and, authorise officers to undertake further discussions with the Missed a Beat Foundation to investigate the implications and costings on the basis of the Council providing the building locations and funding any infrastructure adaptations e.g. to the electrical supply, and installation, and the Missed a Beat Foundation supplying and funding the defibrillator and cabinet and committing to their ownership, insurance, and future maintenance.

It was advised that the initial quote for the West Cemetery cabling has been received at a cost of £150 and that the defibrillator can be installed by the Council's maintenance team. Simpasture is slightly more complicated due to an older board with less capacity so may be a higher cost.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran that the request and recommendations of the report be agreed subject to Missed a Beat Foundation funding the equipment and taking on ownership, insurance, and future maintenance.

Councillor Jed Hillary queried why other sites across the town didn't have a defibrillator such as Moore Lane sports pitches and Stephenson Way Cemetery and suggested that these sites be considered during any further discussions regarding defibrillators.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam that subject to the conditions in the report being met, officers are authorised to progress the request without a further report back to the Committee.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report is received.
- ii) It is agreed, in principle, to facilitate the request and officers are authorised to undertake further discussions with the Missed a Beat Foundation.
- iii) Officers are authorised to progress the request subject to the Council providing the building locations and funding any infrastructure adaptations e.g. to the electrical supply, and undertaking the installation, and the Missed a Beat Foundation supplying and funding the defibrillator and cabinet and committing to their ownership, insurance, and future maintenance.

52. 2025/26 DRAFT RECREATION REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS

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

Councillor Jed Hillary questioned the amount spent running the golf course both in terms of the net revenue cost and the capital budget and asked if all of the amounts identified in the capital budget needed to be spent.

The Finance Manager clarified that a number of items were provisional sums or had been deferred to future years including the changing rooms refurbishment and replacement of the golf buggies. It was explained that any capital spending over £5,500 would always be brought to committee for approval.

Councillor Arun M Chandran highlighted that the golf course used to generate a surplus and while this has not been the case for a number of years, costs do now appear to be reducing and income increasing.

The Finance Manager advised that a Golf Service Review has also recently been undertaken which had reviewed income and expenditure and financial performance.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The draft 2025/26 Recreation Revenue Budget be agreed.
- iii) The draft 2025/26 Recreation Capital Programme Budget and proposed classification of the projects be agreed.

53. PARKS EXCLUSION

Members considered a report from the Corporate and Policy Officer with information regarding recent incidents in St Oswald's Park, which warranted action being taken under the Council's Exclusion Policy.

In accordance with the Council's Constitution and the 'Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, in relation to the *'Recording of Decisions Made by Officers of the Council'* this report had been prepared to provide Members with information to support and endorse the exclusion already implemented.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That the 12-month Parks Exclusion Notice be endorsed.

Chairman