

## FULL COUNCIL

**WEDNESDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2024 – 7.00 p.m.**

Minutes of the proceedings of the **ORDINARY MEETING** of the **COUNCIL** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2024 at 7.00 p.m.**

### PRESENT

#### **Councillor John Clark (Chairman)**

Councillors Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Dorothy Bowman, Arun M. Chandran, Neil Collinson, George Gray, Ian Gray, Brian Haigh, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Wendy Hillary, Joanne Jones, Neville Jones, Sandra Kirby, Brian McAnaney, John Moore, Peter O Musa, Carl Robinson, Ken Robson, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

### OFFICERS

Mr. D. Austin (Town Clerk)  
Mrs. T. Woodhead (Finance Manager)  
Ms A. Donald (Corporate and Policy Officer)  
Mrs V. Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

### IN ATTENDANCE

Zoe Lewin	Major Projects Team, Durham County Council
Rachael Smith	Transport and Infrastructure, Durham County Council
Michelle Robinson	Planning Associate Director, Stantec

Seven members of the public were in attendance.

The Chairman introduced and welcomed new Councillor Peter O Musa.

### 26. NOTICE OF MEETING

The notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

### 27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Eddy Adam, Jim Atkinson, Peter Bergg, Sandra Haigh and Simon Hocking.

### 28. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

There had been no requests for dispensations under disclosable or non-disclosable interests.

### 29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

### **30. GUEST SPEAKER**

The representatives from Durham County Council and Stantec delivered a presentation to Members regarding public consultation on the draft masterplan for the Copelaw housing development which aims to deliver 1,400 new homes as part of a long-term residential development.

The presentation covered the full background to the development plans including site boundary, constraints, opportunities, residential proposals, services and facilities, green infrastructure, ecology considerations, drainage, highways issues, planning, and details of the consultation process and next steps.

The representatives then invited questions from Members.

Councillor Arun M Chandran asked if there would be Section 106 Agreement funding available for the development and whether this could be used to support other traffic measures within the town, due to the increase in traffic from the new development for example, increased traffic towards the town centre.

The representative advised that the Section 106 Agreement is part of the legal agreement and while no decisions had been made yet on its allocation, this may well include transport, schooling etc. The consultation results will be fed into this process before any decision is made.

Councillor Arun M Chandran stated that the Town Council would not be able to manage the maintenance for the proposed allotment site and play area, due to double taxation issues.

The representative advised that there will likely be a management company in place funded by the residents via service charges, but the details are not finalised yet.

Councillor Tony Armstrong asked what the proposed start date would be for the first houses being built.

The representative advised that realistically, the application wouldn't be determined for another 12 months. The land would then need to be marketed, and ground preparations made, so it would likely be around 2028 before the first house is built.

Councillor Tony Armstrong further queried that with increased traffic from up to 3,000 more cars, would the proposed new pedestrian crossing at the A167 / Central Avenue junction be east to west only or north to south also, as there would be many residents crossing the road to Woodham academy etc.

The representative advised that crossings will be installed for both directions and plans will be sent to the Town Council.

Councillor Jed Hillary raised concern around the consultation on health services and stressed the importance of ensuring adequate health provision is available to residents, as it is already difficult to get a GP or dentist appointment on the town.

The representative advised that through planning they can only provide the physical infrastructure but will be fully consulting with the NHS regarding health service provision.

Councillor Jed Hillary further queried the “play on the way” plans and advised that there are already many very high-quality play areas on the town and he would hope for an actual play area for the new site rather than activities along the pathways.

Councillor Jed Hillary also asked whether there are plans for a retail area for the town, similar to other local towns such as Bishop Auckland.

The representative confirmed that there are no plans for out-of-town retail currently.

Councillor Ken Robson advised that previously a pedestrian crossing on Central Avenue had been requested, but unfortunately didn't meet the national criteria. He asked whether the Section 106 Agreement monies could be used for a pedestrian crossing once development commences.

The representative advised that as the development progresses, in terms of increased traffic and foot traffic, a crossing would be considered further, but would need to be assessed against the criteria.

Councillor Carl Robinson asked that when planning for the new school building, if a drop off zone could be considered, as parking is an issue for school areas across the town and the reality is that the majority of children are dropped off in a car.

Councillor Michael Stead asked if a roundabout rather than a junction would help to keep the traffic flowing.

The representative advised that the signalised junction is termed as ‘intelligent’ so for example the lights know when traffic is busier and builds data including increased traffic due to local shift patterns etc.

### **31. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

A member of the public asked about the wildlife on the land and the plans to ensure any protected species will be protected.

The representative advised that the land is predominantly agricultural. A company called BSG have taken a number of surveys across the site for breeding birds, mammals etc. It is a requirement nationally to ensure any new development has an increased ecological benefit and the land is identified and maintained for at least 30 years to ensure its sustainable. The only protected species are bats. The survey results will all be available in consultations and concerns can be raised.

Two members of the public also made statements in support of their letters asking for the Town Council's support for a request to Durham County Council for a pedestrian crossing on Central Avenue.

### **32. MINUTES**

It was proposed by Councillor George Gray, and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson and;

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Council held on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **33. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor thanked the Deputy Mayor for her support in recent weeks.

The Mayor suggested that the Council send a card and flowers to the Senior Administration Officer, following her recent bereavement.

The Mayor provided a list of appointments for the period from the 12<sup>th</sup> April to 5<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) that the announcements be received.

### **34. COMMITTEE MINUTES**

#### **(a) Recreation Committee**

Councillor Carl Robinson advised that with reference to Minute 6 a) that he wished to step down from the Golf Working Group due to his pecuniary interest as a Committee Member of the Oak Leaf Golf Club.

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

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee held on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024 (AGM) be received, subject to noting that Councillor Carl Robinson wishes to step down from the Golf Working Group; and
- ii) that the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

#### **(b) Environment Committee**

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

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee held on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024 (AGM) be received, and
- ii) that the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

#### **(c) Policy and Resources Committee**

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

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024 (AGM) be received, and
- ii) that the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

#### **(d) Environment Committee**

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

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee held on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2024 be received, and
- ii) that the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

**(e) Recreation Committee**

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

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee held on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2024 be received, and
- ii) that the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

**(f) Policy and Resources Committee**

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

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on the 5<sup>th</sup> June 2024 be received, and
- ii) that the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

**35. PEDESTRIAN CROSSING ON CENTRAL AVENUE – REQUEST FOR SUPPORT**

Members considered correspondence from a number of local residents asking for the Town Council's support on a request to Durham County Council for a pedestrian crossing on Central Avenue.

Councillor Arun M. Chandran advised that Durham County Council Traffic Assets had previously written to the local M.P. in October 2023 when a similar enquiry was made by a constituent, highlighting the outcome of a traffic survey and the reasons for refusing the request for a pedestrian crossing.

He proposed that the Town Council to forward the comments from the residents to Durham County Council and write to them to ask:

1. That DCC publishes the survey results along with a summary of the reasons and justification for refusing the request for a pedestrian crossing.
2. DCC is asked under what circumstances the decision may be reviewed.
3. DCC is asked whether the request will be reviewed in light of the Copelaw housing development, and if so when.

Councillor Chandran further proposed that the Town Council would not pay for a further survey to be undertaken.

Councillor Tony Armstrong stated that he felt the previous Durham County Council response was vague and did not take into consideration the Copelaw development or make comparison with other crossings that had been installed elsewhere on the town and in neighbouring towns and villages. He felt Durham County Council should publish the survey results and reasoning for turning down the request.

Councillor Jed Hillary and Carl Robinson both spoke in support of the need for a pedestrian crossing and writing to Durham County Council in support of the resident's request.

A debate followed around how necessary and how safe a crossing is compared to the school crossing patrol staff currently employed during school term times.

Councillor Michael Stead advised that as the previous survey was completed in May 2022, to undertake it again would likely produce the same result. He suggested that the numbers of vehicles and pedestrians did not meet the required criteria.

Councillor Tony Armstrong suggested the Town Council should pay for the cost of a further survey and expressed his concerns that there is a risk to the public in crossing Central Avenue.

The Town Clerk advised that he would need to request the cost of a survey, but that there was no budget available for the Town Council to fund this, and that this would require a report back to the Council for consideration.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran and seconded by Councillor Wendy Hillary; and

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) the Town Clerk writes to Durham County Council and:
  - Forwards copies of the letters and emails received from residents.
  - Request that they publish the previous survey results along with a summary of the reasons and justification for refusing the request for a pedestrian crossing.
  - Advise under what circumstances the decision may be reviewed.
  - Advise whether the request will be reviewed in light of the Copelaw housing development, and if so when.
  - Confirm that this information may be shared with the general public.
- ii) the Town Council will not fund another survey to be carried out.

Councillor Tony Armstrong asked for it to be noted in the minutes that he did not agree with the decision that the Town Council would not fund a further survey, and had therefore abstained from the vote.

### **36. APPROVAL OF THE 2023/24 ANNUAL INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT**

The Finance Manager submitted the 2023/24 Annual Internal Audit Report for approval.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill; and

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) that the report be received and;
- ii) that the annual Internal Audit Report for the 2023/24 financial year be approved.

### **37. APPROVAL OF THE 2023/24 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT**

The Finance Manager submitted the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement for approval.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill; and

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) that the report be received and;
- ii) that the annual Governance Statement for the 2023/24 financial year be approved and signed off by the Town Clerk and Chairman of the Council.

### **38. APPROVAL OF THE 2023/24 ACCOUNTING STATEMENTS**

The Finance Manager submitted the 2023/24 Annual Accounting Statements for approval.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill and;

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) that the report be received;
- ii) the 2023/24 Accounting Statements set out in Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return are approved;
- iii) the supporting financial documents to be submitted to the external auditors with the Annual Governance and Accountability Return be approved;
- iv) the Annual Governance and Accountability Return and supporting documents are sent to the external auditor;
- v) the unaudited Annual Governance and Accountability Return is published on the Council website on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> June;
- vi) the thirty-day public inspection period in relation to the statement of accounts commences on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June, running until Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> July;
- vii) notice of the publication of the accounts and the public inspection rights and period will be advertised on the Council website on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> June;
- viii) following the completion of the external audit by Mazars LLP, and receipt of the signed audit opinion and certificate, the Annual Governance and Accountability Return is published in accordance with the statutory framework.

### **39. MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINT DECISION NOTICE**

A report was submitted from the Town Clerk following a Code of Conduct complaint made against a Member of the Council, reporting the outcome following the investigation by the Durham County Council Solicitor as required by Council Standing Order 32 – Code of Conduct Complaints.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson and;

**RESOLVED** – that the report be received.

### **40. COUNCIL INSURANCE POLICY RENEWAL**

A report was submitted by the Finance Manager for Members' consideration and approval of a proposed extension to the Council's main Commercial Combined Insurance Policy.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson, seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and;

**RESOLVED** – that the two-year extension to the current three-year rate stability agreement on the Council's main Commercial Combined Insurance Policy be approved.

**41. SAFETY OF LITHIUM BATTERIES ON E-BIKES AND SCOOTERS – REQUEST FOR SUPPORT**

Members considered a request for the Council's support on a national campaign to improve the safety of lithium batteries and their disposal.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson, and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and;

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) that the Town Council write a letter of support for the campaign.

**42. AYCLIFFE AND DISTRICT BUS PRESERVATION SOCIETY – REQUEST FOR SUPPORT**

Members considered a letter from the Aycliffe and District Bus Preservation Society requesting a letter of support from the Town Council for their bid for a portion of the Heritage Lottery funding that is earmarked for Newton Aycliffe and Shildon.

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

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) that the Town Council write a letter of support for the bid.

**43. GREAT AYCLIFFE AND MIDDRIDGE LOCAL COUNCILS COMMITTEE AND LARGER LOCAL COUNCILS FORUM**

Members received notice that Councillor Arun M Chandran wishes to step down from the Great Aycliffe and Middridge Local Councils Committee and Larger Local Councils Forum, and to consider the election of replacement representatives for the positions.

Councillor Arun M Chandran proposed that Councillor Jed Hillary replaces him as representative on the Great Aycliffe and Middridge Local Councils Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Michael Stead.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson that Councillor Martin Ashcroft is elected to the vacancy on the Larger Local Councils Forum.

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) that Councillor Jed Hillary replaces Councillor Arun M Chandran as representative on the Great Aycliffe and Middridge Local Council Committee; and
- ii) that Councillor Martin Ashcroft replaces Councillor Arun M Chandran as representative on the Larger Local Councils Forum.

*Councillors Joanne Jones and Neville Jones left the meeting at this point.*

**44. OUTSIDE BODIES**

Members received reports from representatives on the following Outside Bodies:

**a) County Durham Association of Local Councils**

No meetings held. Annual General Meeting to take place in October.



**b) Aycliffe Village Community Association**

Councillor Carl Robinson advised that the association is in a positive position and organising events towards the end of the year.

**c) Woodham Village Community Association**

Councillor Lindsey Aston advised that she and Councillor Michael Stead have not been invited to any meetings and that the Annual General Meeting would have been due in May. The Town Clerk advised that officers have tried to contact the association a few times and can do so again. Councillor Arun M Chandran requested the Council makes an enquiry with the Charity Commission regarding what their constitution says about the number of meetings that should be taking place.

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) that the Town Clerk makes contact again with Woodham Village Community Association to request that the Council is informed of any meetings;
- ii) that the Town Clerk enquire with the Charity Commission regarding the Woodham Village Community Association constitution requirements.

**d) Great Aycliffe and Middridge Local Councils' Committee**

No meetings have been held.

**e) Larger Local Councils' Forum**

Councillor Jed Hillary advised that a meeting had taken place on 16<sup>th</sup> May. A number of issues had been discussed including re-use of cemetery spaces and a case study on local council fraud.

**f) Aycliffe and District Bus Preservation Society**

Councillor Ian Gray gave an update advising that there had been a meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> June. The Tyne Tees historical rally had gone ahead, travelling from Stockton to South Shields, Middridge fete is being planned, the society has been invited to Northallerton carnival and an event at the Council Offices is being held on 17<sup>th</sup> August.

**g) Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway**

Councillor Jim Atkinson had submitted an email update for members. The group has submitted a thank you to Great Aycliffe Town Council for their donation towards their fundraising campaign. A request had been submitted for a letter of support from the Council towards their funding bid to the Community Ownership Fund. Due notice of this request had not been provided and so it was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft that Standing Orders be waived in order for the Council to agree to forward a letter of support.

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) that the Town Council write a letter of support for the bid to the Community Ownership Fund.

**h) Western Area Partnership**

Councillor Ken Robson advised there has been no meeting but a walkabout is planned for next week.

**i) Cornforth Partnership**

There have been no meetings.

**CHAIRMAN**