

FULL COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 18th SEPTEMBER 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 18th SEPTEMBER 2024 at 7.00 p.m.**

PRESENT

Councillor John Clark (Chairman)

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

OFFICERS

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)

Mrs. Sharna Stretch (Senior Administration Officer)

IN ATTENDANCE

Six members of the public.

60. NOTICE OF MEETING

The notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

61. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Peter Bergg, Sandra Haigh, Andy Hill and Simon Hocking.

62. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

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

63. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

64. GUEST SPEAKER – ALAN STRICKLAND MP

The Member of Parliament for Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor, Alan Strickland M.P. attended the meeting to introduce himself and provide an update on his plans and priorities in his new role and answer questions which had been submitted in advance by members.

He thanked everyone for the opportunity to attend the meeting and initially spoke about his background and family who were part of the pioneers of the new town of Newton Aycliffe.

He then outlined his priorities for the constituency including fighting for better jobs and giving young people more opportunities.

He advised that getting public services back their feet will be a challenge, including dentists, doctors, local bus services, mental health support and that the new Labour Government have inherited a difficult situation.

He added that as a public servant, regardless of voting, he is here to serve and that if members have a particular case, regardless of party, he is here to help the town, constituency and the country.

The Chairman thanked the M.P. for his talk and then opened up to questions from members of the council.

Councillor Ken Robson asked about his support of the removal of the winter fuel payment to pensioners, many of whom will be in attendance as councillors who supposedly represent communities many of whom are pensioners?

The M.P. replied that the government were committed to the triple lock for pensions, with the addition of the household support fund to help those pensioners not receiving pension credit. He added that members need to encourage pensioners in their area to apply for the pension credit.

Councillor Tony Armstrong asked why are there no pedestrian crossings at two academies with over 1,000 students or at seven primary schools in Newton Aycliffe, the second largest town in County Durham?

The M.P. stated that he has regular meetings with the Chief Executive at Durham County Council and that he would be happy to raise the issue and also at Government level.

Councillor Lindsey Aston asked how he plans to support the region's growing issues of access to NHS treatment, GP's and GDP's, and would he try to push for an Urgent Dental Access Centre within his constituency and if he can assist in preventing scheduled operations being cancelled late on the day?

The M.P. explained that the Integrated Care Board had pilot schemes, one in Darlington and the other in Carlisle, and if they work, these schemes will be rolled out further. He is waiting for details of the Dental Rescue Plan and is happy to share the information as he gets it. He agreed that hospital waiting times are unacceptable and that he will pick up any specific issues that Councillor Aston has if the details could be forwarded to him.

Councillor Michael Stead asked what his intentions are in easing social housing in the region?

The M.P. stated that as a councillor responsible for planning and regeneration at Tottenham after the riots, he knows a lot about the issues. If there are specific issues within the area, then he would be happy to discuss it, otherwise the developers themselves are often happy to discuss the reasons.

Councillor Sandra Kirby asked how he can help ease issues with social care?

The M.P. stated that it is a policy issue to integrate the NHS and social care, as it needs to be treated as one system. The second issue is a fair pay for workers and to raise the status of the profession, and third is more community support as this has been severely cut with the previous administration.

Councillor Jed Hillary asked about the failed levelling up bid, to create a transport hub/bus station for Aycliffe; cuts to bus services, meaning patients cannot easily access Sedgefield hospital for outpatient appointments; a lack of sixth form provision, meaning students travelling to Darlington, Bishop Auckland or further afield; and a generally poor retail offer, in the second largest conurbation in the County, and asked what the M.P. is proposing to do, to improve the infrastructure of our ever-growing town?

The M.P. highlighted that the North East Mayor; Kim McGuinness has already made progress regarding bringing bus franchises back into public control, but that the legal process does take time. He has also raised the issue with the Chief Executive at Durham County Council regarding Arriva services around Trimdon and in some cases they do relent to public pressure. The town centre shops regularly come up as an issue, and some town centres have found a way round this, by reducing the number of shops and adding more cafes. Any long-term change will take strong leadership. Regarding levelling up bid, the M.P. stated that he will keep pushing for this with Durham County Council and the government.

Councillor Arun Chandran asked if the M.P. can assist in the levelling up issue regarding empty shops and the multi storey car park in the town centre i.e. the government allowing Durham County Council or itself to punish the town centre owners for keeping shops empty, and make Newton Aycliffe Town Centre a priority.

The M.P. highlighted that there needs to be provision made in the business rates system and totally agreed there is a need for reform. If a business moves to the business park they are not paying the same level of rates and the new government wants to look at the whole system. The M.P. stated that he absolutely wants to make the town centre a priority, and highlighted that other town centres have made a difference and improved things.

Councillor Eddy Adam asked, the North East All Party Parliamentary Group has been holding sessions on how the North East can drive growth, investment, better transport connectivity, boost education and future skills, and tackle housing and health inequalities and will the M.P. be involved in the APPG and what plans does he have to extend this work to ensure positive outcomes for our left behind community?

The M.P. highlighted that there are lots of new young northern M.P.s who want to make difference for our communities and prove that they can deliver. The Labour M.P.'s have group meetings and there are specific groups to be set up for different causes. The North East Mayor will help too with government monies allocated to the Regional Mayors. It is important to influence that so that the Mayor's priorities are our priorities.

Councillor John Woodward asked what the government's future plans are regarding pensioners?

The M.P. reiterated that the new government is committed to the triple lock for pensions and the support to pensioners with a package of measures for those not on credit to tackle pensioner poverty. They also plan to insulate more homes, invest in the NHS and support services.

The Chairman thanked the M.P. for attending and stated that the Town Council looked forward to working with him in the future.

65. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no questions from the public.

66. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Jim Atkinson and;

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 24th July 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

67. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor provided a list of appointments for the period from the 18th July to 11th September 2024, referencing the opening of the Life in a New Town exhibition in the town centre as a highlight.

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the Mayor's announcements be received.

68. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(a) Recreation Committee

It was proposed by Councillor George Gray, and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee held on the 4th September 2024 be received; and
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

(b) Environment Committee

It was proposed by Councillor Ian Gray, and seconded by Councillor Michael Stead; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee held on the 4th September 2024 be received; and
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

(c) Policy and Resources Committee

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Jed Hillary; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on the 11th September 2024 be received; and
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

69. LEAVE OF ABSENCE

The Town Clerk submitted a request from Councillor Peter Bergg requesting a leave of absence, until further notice, for ill health reasons. It was highlighted that Councillor Bergg will not be claiming his members' allowance during the period of absence.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M. Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Jim Atkinson; and

RESOLVED – as follows;

- i) The Council approve a leave of absence until further notice.
- ii) It be noted that Councillor Bergg will not be claiming his Members' Allowance for the period of the absence.

70. AYCLIVE 2025 EVENT APPLICATION

Members considered an Event Application Form received from Ayclive Events requesting the use of the Council's Oak Leaf playing fields on Saturday 26th July 2025 for the Ayclive Music Festival, with the requested addition next year of a new 'DJ' style event on the evening of Friday 25th July 2025.

There followed a lengthy debate and a number of questions from councillors, particularly around the pros and cons of holding the new DJ event on the Friday evening.

It was proposed by Councillor Joanne Jones that the DJ event go ahead on a one-off basis, subject to the relevant assurances being sought and satisfactorily resolved by the officers in relation to the concerns highlighted in the report, and that the Council review the success or otherwise of the event ahead of any decisions in relation to future years.

This was seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam.

Councillor Jed Hillary asked if the big top marquee could be moved to limit the damage to the sports field. The Town Clerk agreed to discuss this with the organisers.

Councillor Lindsey Aston questioned whether the Council could provide the bar service to the organisers using the mobile bar available at the sports complex.

Councillor Tony Armstrong asked if the Friday night DJ event could be held on the Saturday night as part of the main event.

In relation to the main music festival event on the Saturday night, Councillor Carl Robinson proposed that the Sports Complex closes at 8pm on the evening as opposed to the 5pm recommended in the report. This was seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft.

It was further proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson that the remaining recommendations of the report be agreed. This was seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft.

RESOLVED – as follows;

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That approval be granted, in principle, to Ayclive Events to hold a music festival at the Oak Leaf Sports Complex field on 26th July 2025, subject to SAG approval being given for the event, the various documents, assurances and confirmations referred to in the report being provided, and a licence agreement being drawn up and signed.
- iii) That the proposed addition of a Friday night DJ style event on Friday 25th July 2025, be agreed, subject to the various assurances and paperwork being received and the event be added to the licence agreement, taking into account the concerns raised by officers outlined in the report.
- iv) That the Sports Complex be closed at 8pm on the Saturday evening and that attendees of the event are permitted to access the facility, subject to security staff being provided by the organiser to cover the Sports Complex doors on the Saturday, and additional bar staff on shift during the Saturday.
- v) That in subsequent years, approval 'in principle' for the event be provided, subject to an Event Application Form, safety management plan, licence, SAG approval and all other relevant assurances and documentation being in place.
- vi) That the request to loan and use the Council's fencing, crowd barriers and traffic cones subject to the licence conditions referenced in the report being implemented be agreed.
- vii) That the request for limited support from the Council's Tractor Driver to help put out and bring in the fencing and barriers, with any time to be recharged to the organisers in full; be agreed.

71. CYCLOCROSS EVENT APPLICATION

Members discussed an application from Northeast Cyclocross League (NECCL) to hold an event on Saturday 9th November 2024 on the field adjacent to the railway line at the back of the Oak Leaf Sports Complex.

The request would normally have been considered by the Events Sub Committee or Recreation Committee. However, due to the timing of the request and the need for a decision to allow planning of the event to take place, the application was reported directly to Full Council.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Jim Atkinson; and

RESOLVED – as follows;

- i) That the report and Event Application Form be received.
- ii) That approval for the Cyclocross event to take place at the Sports Complex playing fields on Saturday 9th November 2024 be granted.
- iii) That the cost of the Works Section overtime is recharged to Events Budget be agreed.
- iv) That it is agreed, as this now is an established event, delegated authority is granted to officers to allow a maximum of two cyclocross events to take place per year, subject to budget, staff availability, SAG approval, and the correct paperwork and assurances being in place.

72. OUTSIDE BODIES

Members received verbal reports from representatives on the following Outside Bodies:

a) County Durham Association of Local Councils

Councillor Jed Hillary provided an update from the CDALC Executive Committee Meeting, advising that consideration of the Council's Motion regarding the make-up of the CDALC Committee, linked to the County Council review of the Area Action Partnerships, had been deferred. It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Jed Hillary that this issue now be left in abeyance pending further consideration by CDALC.

b) Aycliffe Village Community Association

Councillor Carl Robinson gave a verbal update.

c) Woodham Village Community Association

There had been no meeting.

d) Great Aycliffe and Middridge Local Councils' Committee

There had been no meeting.

e) Larger Local Councils' Forum

There had been no meeting.

f) Aycliffe and District Bus Preservation Society

Councillor Ian Gray gave a verbal update.

g) Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway

Councillor Jim Atkinson gave a verbal update.

h) Western Area Partnership

Councillor Ken Robson gave a verbal update.

i) Cornforth Partnership

There had been no meeting.

j) Community Hub Development Group

Councillor Nev Jones had not been able to attend the meeting.

73. EXEMPT BUSINESS

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

RESOLVED – that in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it was, in the opinion of the Council, advisable that the public and press be excluded from the meeting.

74. CIVIC REGALIA AND MAYOR'S CHAIN OF OFFICE

Members considered a report highlighting the options available in relation to the Mayor's Chain of Office, which has now reached its capacity in terms of the number of badges / links available to record the name and year of each individual Mayor, and requesting consideration of the issue of the insurance revaluation of the civic regalia.

There followed a lengthy debate and a number of questions from councillors, particularly around the pros and cons of replacing the chain and various options available.

It was proposed by Councillor Jed Hillary and seconded by Councillor Tony Armstrong that the current chain is retired, as set out in the report, and that the Deputy Mayor's chain be repurposed for use as the Mayor's Chain moving forward, thereby avoiding the need to purchase a new chain.

Councillor Eddy Adam proposed that if the chain is to be retired, then it should be displayed in a frame rather than on a bust.

Councillor Arun Chandran agreed that the Deputy Mayor's chain should be repurposed as the Mayor's Chain and proposed that the insignia badge from the current civic chain should be transferred to it. He further suggested that a valuation be carried out on the current chain of office with a view to selling the chain to regain the costs back.

Councillor Ken Robson spoke in favour of retaining the existing chain.

It was further proposed by Councillor Neil Collinson that the Council should consider retaining the current Mayor's Chain of Office but that no further links with the Mayors' names and year of office be added to the chain. This would allow the current chain to continue to be used in its present state. This was seconded by Councillor Joanne Jones.

Councillor Jed Hillary agreed to withdraw his original proposal.

A vote was carried out on the revised proposal and this was agreed by majority decision.

RESOLVED – as follows;

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That the current Mayor's Chain of Office continue to be used, but that no further links with the Mayors' name and year of office be added to the chain moving forward.
- iii) That a one-off revaluation of the civic regalia is undertaken, based on the quote set out in the report, at an unbudgeted cost of £1,450, to be funded from the Revenue Budget Contingency Sum.

75. RE-ADMISSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that the press and public be re-admitted to the meeting.

CHAIRMAN