

FULL COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 29TH JANUARY 2025 – 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 29TH JANUARY 2025** 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, Sandra Kirby, Neville Jones, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Ken Robson, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mrs. Tracey Woodhead (Finance Manager)
Miss. Amanda Donald (Corporate and Policy Officer)
Mrs. Sharna Stretch (Senior Administration Officer)

IN ATTENDANCE

One member of the public.

105. NOTICE OF MEETING

The notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

106. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

107. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

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

108. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Eddy Adam and Jim Atkinson declared a non-pecuniary interest Agenda Item 13 regarding the flood mitigation scheme on Council land at Horndale as Durham County Councillors.

109. GUEST SPEAKERS – STOCKTON AND DARLINGTON RAILWAY

Niall Hammond, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway, Richie Starrs, the Stockton and Darlington Railway Project Team Manager from Darlington Borough Council and Niccy Halifax, the Stockton and Darlington Railway Festival Director from Stockton Borough Council, each gave a presentation outlining the forthcoming planned events for the 200th anniversary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

They discussed the history of the railway and the historic and cultural legacy that the Stockton and Darlington Railway has given the area.

Plans that already in progress include trails, guided walks, mobile phone apps, and collaborations with many museums along the route. The fringe elements of the event will run from March to November 2025 and the team wanted to encourage younger members of the public to come along and get involved.

Members and the public were advised to contact the team at: sdr@durham.gov.uk for further information or to get involved.

Councillors thanked the team for the presentation and a short question and answer session took place.

The team advised that there will be no 'cavalcade of steam' as in previous years as the regulations had changed regarding the staffing of this, adding that there will instead be an 'Anniversary Journey' with details in due course.

The Chairman thanked the team for taking the time to come along and announced a brief adjournment.

The Meeting was adjourned at 7.50pm and reconvened at 7.54pm.

110. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A member of the public asked a question requesting an explanation of the feasibility study for solar panels. The Town Clerk advised that he would address this question at the agenda item on the Climate Emergency Update.

111. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Phillip Hawkins and;

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 11th December 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

112. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor gave a list of appointments for the period from the 6th December 2024 to 22nd January 2025, also adding that he had met with the 'Missed a Beat' charity at Simpasture Park to publicise the installation of the defibrillator in partnership with the Town Council.

RESOLVED – as follows:

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

113. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(a) Recreation Committee

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee held on the 15th January 2025 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 Martin Ashcroft; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee held on the 15th January 2025 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 22nd January 2025 be received, and
- ii) that the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

114. SETTING THE 2025/26 COUNCIL PRECEPT

The Finance Manager submitted a report to seek approval from the Council for the setting of the Council's 2025/26 Precept, thereby allowing the submission of the Precept Request Form to Durham County Council and the setting of the Town Council proportion of the Council Tax.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) that the 2025/26 Council Precept of £2,075,350 be approved.
- ii) that the Precept Form be signed by the Chairman.
- iii) that the Precept Form be sent to Durham County Council following the Council Meeting.
- iv) that the information provided regarding the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of the Council's balances and reserves be noted.

115. CLIMATE EMERGENCY – PROGRESS UPDATE

The Town Clerk submitted a report to Members in relation to the progress made in making the Town Council carbon neutral within an ambitious timeframe.

He provided an update on various issues including the calculation of the Council's carbon footprint, the development of a Climate Emergency Policy and Carbon Reduction Action Plan.

He drew attention to the sports complex solar panel project and that fact that no external grant funds had yet been secured for the feasibility study and that an application for funding to the Community Energy Fund had been unsuccessful.

However, officers were working closely with the Low Carbon Team at Durham County Council and investigating the possibility of working with them and accessing support from Durham County Council Procurement Department to avoid the need for a full feasibility study.

Councillor Arun Chandran thanked officers for the report and proposed that it be received, adding that officers needed to include in future reports information relating to payback periods and electricity cost savings from the solar panel system. He further proposed that the preferred next steps in relation to the solar panels project be agreed on the basis of paragraph 3.21 in the report as follows:

“If officers are unsuccessful in identifying and securing any grant funding or contributions from external partners for a feasibility study, or alternative approaches to progressing the project, members may wish to consider asking officers to bring a report forward to a future Policy and Resources Committee to seek an additional capital budget approval to fund a full feasibility study and project management and procurement support”.

Councillor Eddy Adam seconded the proposal and wished to thank the officers for the report and the Corporate Assistant's invaluable work in calculating the Council's carbon footprint, and requested information be included in any future report regarding the solar panels system and the alternative option of shared ownership of solar panels and the comparative costs and benefits.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Eddy Adam; and

RESOLVED – as follows;

- i) that the report be received;
- ii) that the sports complex solar panels project be progressed on the basis of further discussions with Durham County Council officers regarding support and that if officers are unsuccessful in identifying and securing any grant funding or contributions from external partners for a feasibility study, or alternative approaches to progressing the project, officers bring a report forward to a future Policy and Resources Committee to seek an additional capital budget approval to fund a full feasibility study and project management and procurement support;
- iii) that any further report includes further information in relation to the costs and benefits of a shared ownership / power purchase agreement with a solar installer.

116. STRENGTHENING THE STANDARDS AND CONDUCT FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND

The Town Clerk submitted a briefing note and supporting information regarding the launch of an important consultation by the Government in relation to the strengthening of the standards and conduct framework for local authorities.

The Town Clerk advised that he had made a personal response to a NALC / SLCC survey on the consultation, from the perspective of a council officer, to help inform their response.

The information had been provided with the intention that councillors can consider their thoughts and position on this important issue and consider responding to the consultation as an individual councillor.

It was proposed by Councillor Eddy Adam, and seconded by Councillor Jim Atkinson; and

RESOLVED – as follows;

- i) that the briefing note and consultation details be received;
- ii) that members are encouraged to respond to the consultation individually.

117. CONSENT FOR DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL FLOOD MITIGATION WORK ON COUNCIL LAND AT HORNDALE/BURNHILL WAY

The Town Clerk submitted a briefing note and supporting information regarding a request that had been received from the Drainage and Coastal Protection Team from Durham County Council regarding the installation of a flood mitigation scheme on the fields by Horndale Infant school and Burnhill Way, which are owned by the Town Council, seeking consent to undertake the works.

The Town Clerk added that after meeting Durham County Council officers on site, assurances had been provided to address officer concerns regarding the future maintenance of the planned bunds and the issue of standing water on the Council's land.

It had been agreed that the design and gradient of the bunds would be amended so that grass cutting could still be undertaken by the Town Council staff using a tractor or ride on mower as is the case now. It had been requested that these assurances be put in writing to the Council.

Councillor Michael Stead asked about the timescale for the works. The Town Clerk advised that work is expected to commence before April, and he would request a timescale for completion of the works.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft; and

RESOLVED – as follows;

- i) that the request be received;
- ii) that delegated authority be granted to officers to sign off the consent form providing that the relevant assurances are provided to the officer's satisfaction.

118. OUTSIDE BODIES

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

- a) **County Durham Association of Local Councils**
There had been no meeting.
- b) **Aycliffe Village Community Association**
Councillor Carl Robinson gave a verbal update.
- c) **Woodham Village Community Association**
Councillor Stead advised that he had not received notification of a 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, advising that there will be Open Day events on 1st February and 22nd March 2025.
- g) **Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway**
Councillor Jim Atkinson gave a verbal update.
- h) **Western Area Partnership**
Councillor Arun Chandran advised that there was nothing to be reported, and that minutes and reports are available. Councillor Ken Robson added that there will be a multi-agency pop up event to allay residents' concerns around anti-social behaviour.
- i) **Cornforth Partnership**
There had been no meeting.
- j) **Community Hub Development Group**
As this is a new outside body, the Town Clerk gave a brief overview of the Community Hub, advising that Lifeline Community Action are leading the project, which is seeking to redevelop the former Woolworths unit in the town centre into a one-stop-shop, which will be a central location for advice and charity groups with over 15 organisations that have expressed an interest. He advised that a representative from the Community Hub will be providing a presentation at the April Council Meeting.

CHAIRMAN