

COUNCIL

Thursday, 15 May 2025

PRESENT – The Mayor, Councillors Ali, Allen, Anderson, Baker, Bartch, Beckett, Coe, Cossins, Crudass, Crumby, Mrs Culley, Curry, Dillon, Dulston, Durham, Garner, Harker, Haszeldine, Henderson, Holroyd, Johnson, Kane, Laing, Lawley, Layton, Mahmud, Mammolotti, Marshall, McCollom, McEwan, McGill, K Nicholson, M Nicholson, Pease, Porter, Ray, Renton, Dr. Riley, Robinson, Roche, Snedker, Storr, Toms, Tostevin, Wallis and Walters

APOLOGIES – Councillors Keir, Lee and Mrs Scott

75 MINUTES - TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS COUNCIL HELD ON 27 MARCH 2025

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Council held on 27 March 2025.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Council held on 27 March 2025 be approved as a correct record.

76 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

77 SEALING.

Presented – The Register showing the documents which had been sealed since the last meeting of the council.

78 ANNOUNCEMENTS.

Death in Service of Alan McNeill – The Mayor announced the death of Council employee Alan McNeill, and made reference to Mr McNeill's years of service in the Housing Buildings Team in addition to Council efforts to ensure Mr McNeill's family receive appropriate advice and support.

Members stood and observed a short silence in respect of Mr McNeill.

79 QUESTIONS - TO ANSWER QUESTIONS (WHERE APPROPRIATE NOTICE HAS BEEN GIVEN FROM):-

(1) THE PUBLIC;

There were seven questions, received with notice, from Members of the Public. Three Members of the Public attended the meeting to ask their questions in person, and each received a response thereon.

The Mayor requested that a written response be provided to the 4 Members of the Public who did not attend to ask their question in person.

(2) MEMBERS TO CABINET/CHAIRS;

There were no questions to from Members, where notice had been given, for the Mayor, Members of the Cabinet, or the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees.

80 COUNCIL REPORTS.

(3) CONSTITUTION UPDATE

The Executive Director, Resources and Governance, submitted a report (previously circulated) which invited members to approve of an update to the Council's Constitution.

This report was introduced by the Assistant Director, Law and Governance, and outlined an intention to amend the Constitution in order to better facilitate the work of the Council's committees.

It was proposed to amend the constitution to reflect changes to senior management roles and address the appointments to a number of Proper Officer and Statutory Officer roles.

It was also recommended to amend Paragraph 1 (f) of the Council Procedure Rules to enable the appointment of Chairs and Vice-Chairs at the Annual Meeting of the council.

Councillor Harker moved this recommendation, as per Paragraph 4 of the report, before outlining the proposed procedure of Chairing to be elected at the Annual Meeting of the Council. This was seconded.

There were two submitted amendments to the Constitution update. The first was submitted by Councillor Dulston, which was seconded:

"I MOVE that Paragraph 4 (a) be amended to read 'the updates and changes to the Constitution as detailed in this report, with the exception of the proposed amendment outlined in Paragraph 27 of the submitted report (to amend paragraph 1 (f) of the Council Procedure Rules to enable the appointment of Chairs and Vice-Chairs at the Annual Meeting of the Council), be approved, and that paragraph 4 (b) remain as is. The Amendment would then read:

4 (a) The updates and changes to the Constitution as detailed in this report, with the exception of the proposed amendment outlined in Paragraph 27 of the submitted report (to amend Paragraph 1 (f) of the Council Procedure Rules to enable the appointment of Chairs and Vice-Chairs at the Annual Meeting of the Council), be approved;

(b) The Monitoring Officer is delegated to update the Constitution to reflect the changes identified."

A vote was taken on this Amendment, and the Amendment was rejected.

The second amendment was submitted by Councillor Snedker, which was seconded:

“Replace Paragraph 27 of Item 7a with:

It is therefore proposed to amend Paragraph 2 of the Council Procedure Rules to enable the appointment of Chairs and Vice-Chairs at the Annual Meeting of the Council.

2. At the Annual Meeting, the Council will :-

- a. Appoint to those Committees established in accordance with the political balance rules; and
- b. Members of each Committee to appoint the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Adults Scrutiny Committee, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, The Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee, the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee, the Planning Applications Committee, the Audit Committee, the Council Decision Making and Scrutiny process Working Group, and the Climate Change Committee
- c. Appoint to those Committees and outside bodies (which are Council appointments).”

A vote was taken on this Amendment and the Amendment was rejected.

At the request of five Members, a Named Vote was taken of those Members present at the meeting on the Substantive Motion, and there appeared:

For the Motion: Councillors Ali, Allen, Anderson, Baker, Beckett, Coe, Cossins, Crumbie, Curry, Dillon, Garner, Harker, Haszeldine, Johnson, Kane, Layton, Mahmud, McCollom, McEwan, McGill, M Nicholson, Porter, Ray, Riley, Robinson, Roche, Storr, Wallis. (28).

Against the Motion: The Mayor, Councillors Bartch, Crudass, Mrs. Culley, Dulston, Durham, Henderson, Holroyd, Laing, Lawley, Mammolotti, Marshall, K Nicholson, Pease, Snedker.

Abstentions: Councillors Renton and Toms.

RESOLVED - (a) The updates and changes to the Constitution as detailed in this report, unless otherwise stated, be approved.

(b) The Monitoring Officer is delegated to update the Constitution to reflect the changes identified.

REASONS - The recommendations are supported to ensure that the Constitution is clear, accurate, up-to-date and fit for purpose.

81 CABINET REPORTS.

The Cabinet Members each gave a report (previously circulated) on the main areas of work undertaken under their relevant portfolio during the previous cycle of meetings. Cabinet Members answered questions on their portfolios.

82 SCRUTINY REPORTS - TO CONSIDER SCRUTINY OVERVIEW REPORTS:-

The Scrutiny Committee Chairs each submitted a report (previously circulated) on the main areas of work undertaken by their relevant Scrutiny Committee during the last cycle of

Committee meetings, and responded to any questions thereon.

83 NOTICE OF MOTION

(4) TO CONSIDER A MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR MCEWAN AND SECONDED BY COUNCILLOR MAMMOLOTTI

The following Motion was moved by Councillor McEwan, and seconded by Councillor Mammolotti:

Nature Restoration Motion

That this Council notes:

- i) The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. Since the Industrial Revolution, we have already lost half of all animals, plants and birds because of intensive agriculture, habitat depletion and climate change.
- ii) Pollination is one of the most important mechanisms in the maintenance and conservation of biodiversity, and in general, life on earth. Bees and other pollinating insects such as the hoverfly are vital in this process. Two thirds of the world's 3000 species of agricultural crops require agents for and are reliant on pollination.
- iii) 97% of wildflower meadows have been lost since the 1930s, reducing an important food source for pollinating insects. Estimates suggest it would cost UK farmers £1.8 billion a year to manually pollinate their crops.
- iv) The State of Nature 2023 report shows that since 1970, UK species populations have declined by about 19% on average, and nearly 1 in 6 species are now threatened with extinction.
- v) A report published by UN agencies on Climate Change and Biodiversity, states that the destruction of forests and other ecosystems is undermining nature's ability to absorb and store greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, which is the single biggest driver of global warming. The report concluded that climate change and biodiversity loss should be tackled together.
- vi) Nature is vital for the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink. But nature is in free-fall.
- vii) The covid 19 pandemic highlighted the importance of the relationship between people and nature. Faced with isolation during this time, being outdoors in nature offered many benefits and served, and continues to serve, as a reminder of the profound consequences to our wellbeing that can result from continued degradation of nature. There are many studies identifying clear links between robust mental health and access to green spaces and nature.
- viii) However, reports provided by the world's governments, as well as other sources of evidence, reveal examples of progress, which, if greatly scaled up, could support the transformative changes necessary to achieve the 2050 vision of living in harmony with

nature.

ix) The government states that local authorities are perfectly placed to lead by example, working with local communities, landowners and other partners in the development of local plans and strategies which support biodiversity.

That this Council believes:

i) A thriving natural environment underpins a healthy, happy, prosperous society, and it is our duty and responsibility to support a Nature Restoration Plan to work together with the Climate Change Emergency already adopted, since they are inextricably linked.

ii) Just like climate change, the loss of species and degradation of our natural environment is an existential threat, and the action needed is both urgent and transformative.

iii) As well as improvements in the innate value people place in biodiversity, tackling its decline can deliver wider benefits to the environment, economy and society.

That this Council resolves:

i) To declare a Nature Restoration Plan which, together with the Climate Change Emergency, will underpin all the Council's considerations, proposals and decisions.

ii) To develop a Nature Restoration Action Plan, informed by consultation with officers, councillors, experts (specifically our Ecologist and Climate Change Officer), community and environmental groups and residents. The Plan should be subject to annual review by the Climate Change and Nature Restoration groups within the council to maintain its efficacy.

iii) To lead by example by including targeted and site-appropriate measures on council owned land and communal areas and commit to ongoing monitoring to inform further action.

iv) To effect borough-wide measures which will include, but not be limited to:

(a) Ensuring the delivery of biodiversity enhancements through our planning policy and development, embedding nature recovery in all strategies, plans, including the Local Plan, and all policy areas.

(b) Establishing a Darlington Biodiversity and Nature Recovery Charter and Recognition Scheme, calling on all organisations, businesses, schools, groups and individuals to contribute towards net gain.

(c) Designing all new council housing with opportunities for net gain e.g. swift boxes, hedgehog highways (where viable) etc.

(d) Identifying how the town's open spaces can create net increases, with community engagement in habitat development, such as flowering meadows for pollinating insects, bee banks and ponds, and wherever possible make better links between areas as recommended in the Lawton Review.

- (e) Providing a range of public engagement and awareness campaigns to give advice to residents, groups and businesses on how to protect and enhance habitats within their neighbourhood, and to work more closely with already established ecological and environmentally engaged groups.
- (f) Providing training and resources for councillors and council employees about the ecological emergency.
- (g) Integrating the targets, objectives and outcomes of this Motion, i.e. the Nature Restoration Action Plan, with those outlined in the Climate Change Plan, to ensure measures to tackle climate issues do not contravene the principles of enhancing biodiversity, and wherever possible the Council will invest in nature-based solutions to climate change, to confront the climate and nature emergencies together.

Advance notice of an amendment proposed to be moved to the Motion submitted by Councillor McEwan and seconded by Councillor Mammolotti:

Climate Change and Nature Restoration Motion

That this Council

a) notes:

- i) The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. Since the Industrial Revolution, we have already lost half of all animals, plants and birds because of intensive agriculture, habitat depletion and climate change.
- ii) Pollination is one of the most important mechanisms in the maintenance and conservation of biodiversity, and in general, life on earth. Bees and other pollinating insects such as the hoverfly are vital in this process. Two thirds of the world's 3000 species of agricultural crops require agents for and are reliant on pollination.
- iii) 97% of wildflower meadows have been lost since the 1930s, reducing an important food source for pollinating insects. Estimates suggest it would cost UK farmers £1.8 billion a year to manually pollinate their crops.
- iv) The State of Nature 2023 report shows that since 1970, UK species populations have declined by about 19% on average, and nearly 1 in 6 species are now threatened with extinction.
- v) A report published by UN agencies on Climate Change and Biodiversity, states that the destruction of forests and other ecosystems is undermining nature's ability to absorb and store greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, which is the single biggest driver of global warming. The report concluded that climate change and biodiversity loss should be tackled together.
- vi) Nature is vital for the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink. But nature is in free-fall.

vii) The covid 19 pandemic highlighted the importance of the relationship between people and nature. Faced with isolation during this time, being outdoors in nature offered many benefits and served, and continues to serve, as a reminder of the profound consequences to our wellbeing that can result from continued degradation of nature. There are many studies identifying clear links between robust mental health and access to green spaces and nature.

viii) However, reports provided by the world's governments, as well as other sources of evidence, reveal examples of progress, which, if greatly scaled up, could support the transformative changes necessary to achieve the 2050 vision of living in harmony with nature.

ix) The government states that local authorities are perfectly placed to lead by example, working with local communities, landowners and other partners in the development of local plans and strategies which support biodiversity.

b) believes:

i) A thriving natural environment underpins a healthy, happy, prosperous society, and it is our duty and responsibility to support a Nature Restoration Plan to work together with the Climate Change Emergency already adopted, since they are inextricably linked.

ii) Just like climate change, the loss of species and degradation of our natural environment is an existential threat, and the action needed is both urgent and transformative.

iii) As well as improvements in the innate value people place in biodiversity, tackling its decline can deliver wider benefits to the environment, economy, society and the wellbeing of future generations.

c) resolves:

i) To declare a Nature Restoration Emergency which together with the Climate Change Emergency, will be reflected in the Council's considerations, proposals and decisions.

ii) To set clear strategic goals for nature recovery by 2040, including the development of a Nature Restoration Action Plan, with an outline of resourcing implications within 12 months of this declaration, informed by consultation with relevant officers, councillors, businesses, community and environmental groups and residents. The Plan should be subject to annual review by the expanded Climate Change and Nature Restoration group (see viii) within the council to maintain its efficacy.

iii) Call on central government to develop the strategies and deliver the funding necessary to make this possible.

iv) Continue work to make Darlington Borough Council net zero by at least 2040, considering both production and consumption emissions, both directly and indirectly caused by the council (scope 1 and 2), as described by the Carbon Trust. For scope 3 emissions the Council will publish data (where available) to monitor emissions and inform procurement practice.

- v) Continue to ensure that Darlington Borough Council is adapting to climate change so that it can sustain vital services.
- vi) Continue to publish the emissions for the whole Borough and track this against a 2040 net-zero pathway.
- vii) To lead by example by including targeted and site-appropriate measures on council owned land and communal areas and commit to ongoing monitoring to inform further action on nature restoration.
- viii) Expand the remit of the Climate Change Working Group, integrating the targets, objectives and outcomes of this Motion, i.e. the Nature Restoration Action Plan, with those outlined in the Climate Change Plan, to confront the climate and nature emergencies together.

A vote was taken on the Amendment, which was carried.

The Amendment became the Substantive Motion, which was also carried after a further vote took place.

84 MEMBERSHIP CHANGES - TO CONSIDER ANY MEMBERSHIP CHANGES TO COMMITTEES, SUBSIDIARY BODIES AND OTHER BODIES.

There were no membership changes reported at the meeting.