

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE
SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER
AND VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE ON
FRIDAY 21 MAY 2021 AT 11:00am**

In the Chair : The Mayor, Alderman Fielding (C)

Present : Alderman Baird (C), Boyle (R) Finlay (C), Hillis (C),
McKeown (C), S McKillop (C)

Councillors Anderson (C), Callan (C), Holmes (C) Hunter
(R), Knight-McQuillan (C), McAuley (C) Nicholl (R),
Peacock (R), Schenning (C)

Officers Present : D Jackson, Chief Executive (C)
P Donaghy, Democratic and Central Services Manager (R)
S Duggan, Civic Support & Committee & Member Services
Officer (R)

Guests : Mrs L Young Deputy Lieutenant (C)
Dr I Kerr, Royal Portrush Golf Club Captain (C)
Mrs P Fielding, Mayoress (C)
Royal Portrush Golf Club Guests (6 no.) (C)

Officers In Attendance : J Winfield, ICT Manager (C)
A Lennox, Mobile Operations Officer (C)

Press (3 No) (R)

Key (C) = Attended In The Chamber
(R) = Attended Remotely

The Mayor opened the Ceremony and addressed Council and Guests:

*“Good morning Dr Ian Kerr, Deputy Lieutenant, Aldermen, Councillors, Guests.
Welcome to this Special Meeting of Council.*

*I would like to invite Council’s Clerk and Chief Executive, Mr David Jackson, to
read the summons convening the meeting”.*

The Chief Executive responded:

“Notice was given to Members of the Council on 14th May 2021 of a special meeting of the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council to be held virtually and in The Council Chamber, Civic Headquarters on Friday 21st May at 11am for the purposes of conferring the Freedom of the Borough on Royal Portrush Golf Club”.

The Mayor recited the Council prayer.

The Chief Executive read the Resolution of the Council conferring the Freedom of the Borough on Royal Portrush Golf Club.

“Council resolved on 8th August 2019, proposed by Councillor Callan, seconded by Alderman Fielding, that this Council bestows the Freedom of the Borough upon Royal Portrush Golf Club, ‘in recognition of its successful hosting of the 148th Open this year’.

The Honorary Freedom of Boroughs Act 1885 was an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom that gave the councils of municipal boroughs the power to award the title of honorary freeman to "persons of distinction and any persons who have rendered eminent services to the borough".

Prior to the reform of town and city government in the 1800s, the rank of "freeman" existed in all boroughs. Freemen enjoyed exemption from tolls and other special privileges, and in most cases were the only persons eligible to vote at parliamentary elections. The 1885 Act stated that:

..the council of every borough may from time to time, at a meeting of the council specially called for the purpose with notice of the object, admit to be honorary freeman of the borough persons of distinction and any persons who have rendered eminent services to the borough...

The award is symbolic and sadly, grazing rights are not part of the modern freeman's privileges. The Freedom of the Borough is effectively the only way that a local authority can confer honours. It is primarily about “civic pride”.

In summary, the Freedom of the Borough is simply the highest accolade that Council can make to a group or individual, and acknowledges their work and contribution to the Borough”.

The Mayor responded:

“It gives me great pleasure on behalf of Council to present Dr Ian Kerr with the Freedom Certificate to mark the conferment of the Freedom of the Borough on Royal Portrush Golf Club. Congratulations to you on this thoroughly deserved honour”.

The Mayor presented the Freedom certificate to Dr I Kerr.

Dr I Kerr, the Mayor and the Chief Executive signed the Freedom Register.

The Mayor addressed Council and guests:

“I want to extend a very warm welcome to our delegation of guests from Royal Portrush Golf Club who are central to today’s proceedings.

Thank you for being a part of this special occasion here at Cloonavin.

While our event is on a smaller scale than normal, that does not detract from its significance.

We are here today in recognition of the club's successful hosting of The 148th Open. This momentous event in 2019 will live long in all our memories and today we are formally acknowledging the role played by Royal Portrush Golf Club in its resounding success.

The Freedom of the Borough is Council's highest civic accolade. It is reserved for the most eminent within our communities who have made an exceptional contribution.

On behalf of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council and the entire Borough, I offer you all my sincere congratulations.

I would now like to present Dr Ian Kerr with this engraved crystal bowl. I hope it will be displayed with pride at the clubhouse as a reminder to your guests and visitors about what you have achieved today".

Dr Kerr responded:

"Deputy Lieutenant, Mayor Fielding, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great honour to accept this award on behalf of Royal Portrush Golf Club and thank you Mayor Fielding for your very kind words.

I hope you enjoyed reading the short history of Royal Portrush that was provided in the programme. Apart from the interesting series of dates and events a feature that jumps out is how many of those early meetings took place in the Northern Counties Hotel! I believe this demonstrates that from the formation of our Club we have seen ourselves as firmly embedded in the local community.

This ethos has been carried over the last 133 years and is reflected in our membership, who are drawn from all walks of life, living both locally and across the rest of N.Ireland, and indeed the world. This eclectic mix of people is one of the ingredients that makes Royal Portrush such an interesting and welcoming club to both Members and Visitors alike. Over the years the Club evolved, required more space and migrated out from the Town towards White Rocks. Thankfully, during this time our strong connections with the local community have remained, for example the RNL is the charity we champion and for which we run a number of fund raising events each year.

Royal Portrush is now one of the largest employers in the area, with staff numbers reaching 100 people during peak season plus a further 100 or more local caddies who gain regular employment from our visitors. The quality of our staff, led by our General Manger John Lawler, is another of the unique ingredients that go to make our Club such an enjoyable place for members and visitors.

We conservatively estimate our annual economic contribution into the local community, through staff employment and golfing tourists, is in excess of £15m-£20m each year. A survey commissioned by Tourism N.Ireland, and published in 2020, indicated that Royal Portrush was the preferred destination for the majority of golf tourists visiting N.Ireland. This is way ahead of the second highest ranked golf destination, being Royal County Down, which was the destination for less than one third of golfing visitors.

The Open Championship in 2019 took the economic impact of Royal Portrush to a new level. According to a study by the University of Sheffield, the Open Championship added a £106m boost to the N.Ireland economy, of which £26m was in this area.

The close co-operation between the Club and the local Council ensured the 2019 Open Championship was a great success and presented a positive image of the Causeway Coast. The wonderful images of our iconic 5th & 6th holes and the views stretching out along the Causeway Coast were beamed into over 600 million homes world-wide. Those images will attract visitors to this area for years to come.

In 2020 Golf Digest rated the Dunluce Course as the 8th greatest course in the world, and in 2021 we were honoured by having the Course rated the number 1 course in Ireland by The Irish Golfer Magazine. However, even with such accolades we are determined to not rest on our laurels, and instead we aspire to continually improve.

The Council of Royal Portrush are very aware that we are fortunate to be the custodians of the Club and its Links at a moment in time, and like those before us we wish to leave them in a better and stronger position for the next generation. To this end, we have ambitious plans for the Club which will also have a positive impact on the local community.

We have just completed and launched our Vision 2030 strategic plan which has an aspirational agenda including:

- Continual investment in our facilities to make Royal Portrush one of the greatest golf clubs in the world with a globally renowned 36 holes golf complex.*
- We aim to be the first Carbon Neutral golf club in Ireland, a process that includes the switching of our machinery to electric, generating our own solar power and maximising the recycling of our waste. We view the preservation of the Links and the environment as extremely important.*
- We also want to host future Open Championships and become a regular venue for that major sporting event.*

This drive and ambition comes not just from our Council but from the membership of our Club who, through a detailed survey and focus groups, provided the content for our 2030 Vision.

We believe if we can deliver on our plan we can help make the Causeway Coast, in golf tourism terms, 'the St Andrews of Ireland'.

So in closing I would like to thank The Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council, on behalf of all of the Members of Royal Portrush, for bestowing this great honour on our Club, which we gratefully accept.

Thank you very much”.

The Mayor brought Proceedings to completion and declared the meeting closed.

The meeting concluded at 11.17pm.

Mayor

Unconfirmed