



FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Flitwick Town Council meeting held on Tuesday 16th April 2024 at the Rufus Centre at 7:45pm

Present:

Cllr A Snape (Chairman)
Cllr C Thompson
Cllr J Gleave
Cllr S Livens
Cllr R Wilsmore
Cllr H Hodges
Cllr T Parsons
Cllr J Roberts
Cllr F Patterson
Cllr M Platt
Cllr D Toinko
Cllr T Connell
Cllr C Copleston

Also present:

Stacie Lockey – Town Clerk & Chief Executive
Stephanie Stanley – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO
Susan Eldred – Community Services & Amenities Manager
Mat Earles – Business & Facilities Manager (via virtual access)

5612 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and accepted for Cllrs Blazeby (family commitment) and Harald (holiday).

5613 Declarations of Interest

To receive Statutory Declarations of Interests from Members in relation to:

- (a) Disclosable Pecuniary interests in any agenda item – none.
- (b) Non-Pecuniary interests in any agenda item – none.

5614 Town Mayor's Announcements

The Town Mayor thanked everyone for their support over the past year and advised that this would be his final meeting as the Chairman.

The Town Mayor attended the Sandy and Houghton Regis Town Councils' Civic Service ceremonies in the past month.

Members were informed that agenda item 15c—Land at Steppingley Road—would not be discussed that evening as the report had not been received in time.

5615 Councillor Co-Option

The Chairman had previously circulated co-option notes for Clare Copleston who wished to stand as a Councillor. There were no questions from Members.

It was **resolved** to co-opt Clare Copleston into the Office of Councillor.

Cllr Copleston read and signed her Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

5616 Reports from Ward Members

Members regretted that Cllr Adams was not in attendance due to a family bereavement. There was no report provided by the Ward Members.

5617 PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No items.

5618 INVITED SPEAKER

No invited speaker.

5619 MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Cllr Livens asked for clarification on the next steps for reporting her and Cllr Wilsmore's discussions with a resident regarding the provision of benches in the East Ward of Flitwick. Cllr Thompson stated that Cllr Livens had agreed to contact Cllr Adams, Central Beds Council (CBC) Ward Member, to provide him with an update about the discussions with the resident and following this, it would be a matter to raise formally at a future meeting. The Town Clerk would discuss this with CBC Officers and report back with findings. It was agreed that this item should be included in the following Community Services agenda.

Action: Town Clerk

The Chairman asked about match funding for benches. The Town Clerk advised that this funding had been made available via the Rural Match Funding scheme. Efforts had been made to speak to the relevant CBC Officer regarding this, but the original Officer involved no longer worked at CBC, so the team were looking into it. The Town Clerk agreed to follow up on this.

Action: Town Clerk

Cllr Toinko explained that CBC was due to consider a motion on 18th April regarding carbon investments and the Beds Local Government Pension Scheme. He asked if the Council should follow suit and if there was a representative for FTC on the board. The Chairman advised that FTC did not have representation on the board and that seats were split between CBC, Luton Borough Council and Bedford Borough Council. The Chairman explained that it was a 'pulled pension' so he was unsure how much control Beds Pension Fund would have regardless.

Cllr Thompson asked for an update on sorting the distribution issues for Flitwick Papers. Members were informed that the Comms & Marketing Manager had sought quotes for alternative distribution companies and would be looking to change suppliers once the current contract ended.

5620 MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

a. For Members to approve the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on Tuesday 19th March 2024 at the Rufus Centre

It was **resolved** to adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on Tuesday 19th March 2024 at the Rufus Centre as a true record.

5621 MATTERS ARISING

- a.** Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on **Tuesday 19th March 2024** – no items.
- b.** Members to receive any updates from Officers – The Town Clerk reminded Members to submit suggested areas for the ‘No Mow May’ scheme to the Amenities Officer before the deadline of 18th April. Members could suggest both FTC and CBC areas. Cllr Toinko advised that he would send some suggested areas from the Environmental Working Group.

5622 OUTSIDE BODIES

No items.

5623 ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

a. Community/Commercial Events

The Town Clerk stated that this item was to enable Members to have an initial discussion about what should be classed as commercial and community events. Officers wanted clarity on rates and other internal charges for using the Rufus Centre space. Informal talks had been held at both Community Services and the Business Improvement & Development Board (BIDB). The Town Clerk wanted a steer from all Members on the direction for this matter because it was confusing operationally.

Members were informed that the Community Officer Team were currently reviewing their events/activities. This review was scheduled to be considered by Members at the July Community Services meeting. The review would contain Officer Recommendations about which events and activities should continue and which should be withdrawn from the programme.

The Town Clerk stated that it was unfortunate that Cllr Blazeby, the Chairman of the BIDB, could not be present as he had some valid insight on this from a business perspective. Cllr Thompson, Chairman of the Community Services Committee, was asked to start the discussion from her perspective.

Cllr Thompson gave an overview of the following:

- How the Council had historically talked openly and proudly about the Rufus Centre being a space for the community's benefit, whether that be engagement or activity.
- There were inconsistencies with decision-making regarding events and activities and where they should be held. She wanted definitions established.
- Profitability was not the central aim for community events and activities – it was about community value.
- Recent changes in profit and loss for events – e.g. full charge for catering costs, means expenditure relating to community activities was higher, and there were limitations on service delivery with this.
- The Officers' review would examine costs, staff time and community value.
- The Community Services Committee wanted to understand the Council's steer from the business point of view. If profit was the main focus, this would affect community event decisions, e.g. where the event is held.
- She asked if there could be several events of a specific nature that were permitted to make a loss and stated that there was a risk of stopping positive activities.

- She asked if the best way forward was for representatives from community and business to work through ideas.

The Chairman mentioned that he had been part of the BIDB (formerly Business Services Committee) for five consecutive years. He believed there had always been a healthy level of conflict between business and community. He mentioned the following points:

- The strategy highlighted the Rufus Centre as a centre for everyone.
- The Business & Facilities Manager (BFM) was asked to generate the biggest surplus possible and that there were Council projects for which this money was needed.
- Some events were highly profitable, e.g. the Drag Night. Cllr Thompson commented that perhaps for events like this, it was a commercial activity which could be tagged with a community ambition.
- The opportunity cost was key when community events were held at the Rufus Centre, and the loss of revenue was attributed to whether a commercial booking had the space.
- BIDB wanted to increase the occupancy of the Rufus Centre and that community groups should use the space more.
- The conflict comes with utilising the Lockyer Suite for community activities; the best example is Lunch Club. Lunch Club uses this flagship space for a day a month. Rooms were booked for morning and afternoon slots. It was quieter in the school holidays. This needed a balanced and flexible view for Officers to work to.

An extended discussion was held about questions on if the profit and loss analysis of events could ignore room hire charges (internally) and if this was to come from event budgets or not.

The Community Services & Amenities Manager (CSAM) mentioned that the current profit and loss analysis for Lunch Club shows a significant loss, but if the room hire charge was not included, it would not be so significant.

Cllr Roberts asked if Officers knew about any 'double booking' data for community events (e.g., Lunch Club). The Chairman stated that this could be asked for. The Town Clerk commented that Officers would not have this data retrospectively but could gather it going forward.

Action: Town Clerk/BFM

Members discussed the possibility of having clarity for no community bookings on a Saturday evening.

The Town Clerk reminded Members that room hire charges, staff and catering costs, and activities such as Lunch Club had an impact on the café. The Chairman commented that some community events, e.g., Movie Days, positively impacted the café.

Cllr Parsons suggested agreeing on a number for community events and using internal profit and loss analysis as a guide. He also mentioned agreeing on a cross-charge for room hire, which could be reviewed, and looking at profit and loss for these annually.

Cllr Toinko stated that, based on data and trends, 'red' and 'green' sessions could be allocated each year.

The Chairman stated that there were still many questions about this matter but that staff needed to be empowered. He commented that the performance-related bonus of the BFM was also to be considered in relation to this. He added that the BIDB and the BFM needed to work on 'red' and 'green' weeks.

The CSAM suggested that the BFM undertake a similar review task for the business.

The Chairman commented that when the strategy is revisited in July/August/September of this year, community use of the Rufus Centre would remain an aim of the Council and that principle needed to be kept.

b. Standing Orders

It was **resolved** to adopt the Standing Orders as presented.

c. Nature Park

The Town Clerk notified Members that the total cost presented had increased to £23,672.50, which had changed since the report was circulated.

Cllr Thompson explained that planning permission was required if the Council wanted to formalise the Nature Park. This is related to the path creation, formal signage, etc. Grants were available to pay for various infrastructure items, but there were no grants for planning permission. She supported the Officer's recommendation. Additional funding would be required for the car park, and all the tree work was covered already.

The Town Clerk advised that the preferred location of the car park was originally at the bottom end of the site but the planning authority had confirmed this would not be possible and that Option B was viable. Option B was more expensive and it could mean that a junction would need to be installed based on informal advice received to date. Members were reminded that the current scheme was very different from what was considered part of the original planning application.

Cllr Gleave asked if there had been any indication that CBC would object to the plans. The Town Clerk advised that this was not the case; all Officers, including the archaeological team, were on board at CBC.

It was **resolved** to progress with Option 1 presented in the circulated report – to apply for planning permission and all subsequent documents to formalise the Nature Park at a cost of £23,672.50. This expenditure would be taken from the Projects Fund.

d. Flitwick Town Mayors Charity

i) Members were asked to authorise the transfer of funds for the Town Mayor's Charities (Civic Year 2024-25) to the Flitwick Town Mayor's Charity CIO.

The Chairman advised that the final steps were being taken to set up the bank account, which had been a long process. Once the account was sorted, he wanted to have secured permission from the Council to transfer funds raised to date.

It was **resolved** for the RFO to transfer the funds raised for the Town Mayor's Charities (Civic Year 2024-25) to the Flitwick Town Mayor's Charity CIO once the bank account was set up.

Action: RFO

ii) Members were asked to consider making an annual grant to the charity of £102 to cover the £8.50 monthly account fee. This would be funded from the sundries budget 4059/101.

The Chairman explained that the charity did not qualify for a free community bank account.

It was **resolved** to grant £102 annually from the Council's sundries budget (4059/101) to cover the Flitwick Town Mayor's Charity CIO bank charges.

e. Burial Ground Wall

Members commented on the comprehensive and informative report circulated and asked for this feedback to be given to the Amenities Officer.

Action: Town Clerk

Cllr Wilsmore was unsure whether the wall mentioned in the report was the most in need of repair at the site. He mentioned that the missing coping stones were caused by the neighbouring resident's shed. He also commented that he had witnessed this resident attempting to put a large cage structure over the wall into their garden.

The Town Clerk stated that the wall that required the work was the one on the left as you enter the site and that coping stones were missing for the length of the wall structure. She added that three separate builders had commented that this work was necessary and that the Council needed to listen to the expertise given. Cllr Patterson commented that one of the descriptions presented vividly mentioned that the wall was in need of repair.

Cllr Toinko also questioned the wall's location. At this time, the Town Clerk agreed to contact the Amenities Officer to establish whether the wall on the left of the site was the structure that required the work. The Chairman suggested reconvening this conversation later once this information had been confirmed.

f. Civic Protocol

Amendments had been made to the draft Civic Protocol document to include information on the Civic Service.

It was **resolved** that the Civic Protocol document be accepted as circulated.

5624 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

a. Projects Fund

The Projects Fund Summary was noted.

5625 PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No items.

5626 EXEMPT ITEMS

The following resolution will be **moved** that is advisable in the public interest that the public and press are excluded whilst the following exempt item issue is discussed.

a. Confidential Reports – noted.

b. Scheme of Delegations Decision

Members noted that the specialist partner had been appointed for the 3 Station Road refurbishment project. The partner would complete the design and planning elements of the project. Their role would include managing the project's delivery to completion.

This decision was made using delegated authority under the Scheme of Delegations.

c. Land at Steppingley Road – noted.

Pursuant to section 1(2) of the public bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 Council **resolve** to exclude the public and press by reason of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted.

It was **resolved** to re-enter the public section of the meeting.

5624a cont.

Projects Fund

Cllr Livens asked about the £8,000 match associated with the Hinksley Road play equipment project listed in the summary document circulated. Officers advised that this match funding had been allocated for a grant application with CBC, but the application had been unsuccessful. Therefore, the funds were being put back into the Projects Fund.

The RFO explained that there was another round for the Community Grants Scheme with CBC, so there was a potential opportunity to re-apply; however, the CSAM explained that she intended to apply via this scheme for a different project.

Cllr Thompson advised that a review was being undertaken for the town's play equipment.

The Chairman explained the Projects Fund Summary for the benefit of the new Members. Cllr Thompson gave the example that the newly approved Nature Park Planning Permission expenditure would appear on next month's document as a new project.

There were no finance papers at the meeting because it was year end and the accounts had not been closed.

Item 5623e cont.

Burial Ground Wall

The Town Clerk had now received confirmation that the wall being discussed for the works was the structure to the left adjacent to the roadway in the burial ground.

Cllr Hodges stated that the wall was the Council's property and would only become more of an issue if it were left.

The Chairman asked Officers to contact any residents whose 'property' was overlapping the wall (e.g., sheds, etc.) as this could be making the damage worse.

Action: Amenities Officer

It was **resolved** to proceed with the Officer's recommendation presented using Builder Quote 2 for £16,126.58.

Action: Amenities Officer

The meeting closed at 20:47pm.