



FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL

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

Present:

Cllr J Roberts (Chairman)
Cllr A Snape
Cllr M Platt
Cllr C Thompson
Cllr T Parsons
Cllr D Toinko
Cllr C Copelston
Cllr R Wilsmore
Cllr S Livens
Cllr I Blazeby
Cllr F Patterson
Cllr T Connell
Cllr T Harald

Also present:

Cllr I Adams – Central Beds Council (CBC) Ward Member
Stacie Lockey – Town Clerk & Chief Executive
Stephanie Stanley – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO
Susan Eldred – Community Services & Amenities Manager
Mathew Earles – Business & Facilities Manager
Sue Quinn – Community Services Officer (virtual)

5670. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received and accepted for Cllr Gleave (unwell) and Cllr Earles & Hodges (holiday).

5671. 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 – Cllr Livens declared an interest in agenda item 12A – Community Services Events & Activities Review (Lunch Club discussion).

5672. TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor had attended the following events:

- Sea Cadets Parade
- Respite at Home Event – Silver Anniversary (25th Birthday) Celebration
- The Bedfordshire Games – Supporting Opportunities for Teenagers and Adults with Learning Difficulties

5673. LEADER UPDATE

Cllr Snape reported the following:

- He had contacted Blake Stephenson, the new MP for Mid Bedfordshire, and congratulated him on winning the election. The MP was keen to meet the Council, and it was suggested that he attend the September meeting. Cllr Snape would meet with him beforehand to brief him on the council's business.
- The Police & Crime Commissioner had approached Cllr Snape as he wanted to engage with the Council. The Town Clerk would contact the PCC about a suitable meeting to attend.

Action: Town Clerk

- Joint Committee - There had been discussions with Ward Members, the Deputy Mayor, and the Deputy Leader about reintroducing Joint Committee meetings since this group had not met in 18 months, which was frustrating. This would now be progressed as there were a lot of collaboration points for FTC and CBC to focus on including the 3 Station Road refurbishment project and the wider town centre enhancement discussion, Section 106 contributions and having a better dialogue between the two Councils in general.
- Downsizer Land - Cllr Snape asked for an update from CBC on the 'downsizer' land (adjacent to the over-55s accommodation) in Steppingley Road, which had been discussed in August 2023.
- Street Cleaning Operative - work had been going on in the background between Ward Members, Cllr Snape, and CBC Officers, but the specification/task list and its locations were still unknown. Some of the tasks associated with this role were daily. Cllr Snape thanked Cllr Blazeby for his work on this.
- Flitwick Community Fridge - Cllr Snape wanted to acknowledge the Community Services Team's hard work in distributing washing powder to families in the town. An agreement had been made for the work to be done on the room in the Rufus Centre (behind the Stocksfield Room) to be reconfigured into a storeroom for the fridge project. The initiative was now supplying produce to Clophill and Toddington.
- Proud AF - The group acknowledged that posts on social media groups were met with transphobic comments constituting hate speech. This situation keeps happening, and Proud AF was discussing how to deal with it. There were two trans members, and seeing the impact these comments were having was detrimental. He asked for kindness and reassured Members that the posts made on social media by Proud AF were not political.
- Flitwick Village Hall Management Committee (VHMC)—Cllr Snape and Cllr Thompson met with the VHMC's Chair and Treasurer. The VHMC was open to collaborating with FTC on fundraising to rebuild the hall. Cllr Snape reminded Members that the Council were Guardian Trustees, and the solicitors still had some outstanding questions about what this entailed. It was suggested that both parties sign a Memorandum of Understanding to formalise the relationship and define how the VHMC and FTC would work together.

5674. REPORTS FROM WARD MEMBERS

Cllr Adams had asked about the 'downsizer land' at Steppingley Road as it was a CBC Executive decision that this would be widely marketed, but this had not happened. The

answer given to date had been that CBC 'were not ready yet', but Cllr Adams felt that the people of Flitwick had a right to know.

Cllr Blazeby asked about the delay with the senior living facility build contract. Cllr Adams reported that it was not likely to end until the beginning of next year.

The Town Mayor noticed the upcoming 'highways walkabout' meeting and wondered if Ward Members could highlight the issues in the Avenue. Cllr Adams stated that this road was on the list to visit, along with Hatfield Road, Windmill Road, and other locations. There was a consultation due in October for Kendall Drive around closing the road for school drop-off and pick-up times. Cllr Toinko asked if this could be considered for Kingsmoor Lower School but was informed by Cllr Adams that this location was more problematic since there were more roads surrounding the school and Kingsmoor Close was not big enough.

Cllr Snape asked the Town Clerk to forward Members the response from CBC regarding parking enforcement. Cllr Adams agreed to raise this issue at the walkabout session.

Action: Town Clerk

Cllr Blazeby asked if the walkabout could include Chapel Road since hedges had overgrown on top of the road signs. There was also an increasing amount of traffic going up the one-way system. Cllr Adams said that the walkabout meeting would include Chapel Road.

Cllr Parsons asked what CBC planned to do with the unused land beside the train station site. There used to be a bungalow there before it was demolished as part of the station regeneration scheme. Cllr Adams mentioned that this area had originally been earmarked for access to the station, but he agreed to ask CBC Officers for the latest information.

5675. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No items.

5676. INVITED SPEAKER

No invited speaker.

Cllr Adams left the meeting at 20:04.

5677. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

No questions.

5678. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

- a. For Members to approve the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held, on **Tuesday 18th June**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.

Cllr Toinko commented that Maahwish Mirza was not attending in her official capacity and should be recorded as a member of public.

It was **resolved** to adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on **Tuesday 18th June 2024** as an accurate record with one amendment: to edit the attendance listing as above.

- b. For Members to receive and consider resolutions and recommendations of the **Community Services Committee** meeting, held on **Tuesday 2nd July 2024**, this meeting was held at The Rufus Centre.

Members considered the recommendations under item 12a.

Members noted the resolutions of the Community Services Committee held on **Tuesday 2nd July 2024**.

- c. For Members to approve the minutes of the Extra Ordinary Town Council Meeting held, on **Tuesday 9th July 2024**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.

Cllr Connell commented that she had given apologies for this meeting.

It was **resolved** to adopt the minutes of the Extra Ordinary Town Council meeting held on **Tuesday 9th July 2024** as an accurate record with one amendment: record Cllr Connell's apologies.

5679. MATTERS ARISING

- a. There were no matters arising.
- b. There were no updates from Officers.

5680. OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no items.

5681. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

a. **Community/Civic Events**

(i) **Community Services Events & Activities Review**

Cllr Thompson stated that there had been discussions about reviewing the community events and activities offered by the Council. The Community Services & Amenities Manager (CSAM) had been asked to look at the portfolio holistically and incorporate social value as well as financial viability. There was an understanding that community services were not designed to make a profit. Cllr Thompson stated that Officers had robustly and thoroughly reviewed the services which had been discussed at the Community Services Committee meeting. A list of proposals was circulated for Members to discuss.

A further review of the Lunch Club was required, and the CSAM gave a verbal update. Officers had researched other local 'Lunch Clubs' and approached venues to see if they would be interested in taking this service on. Seven venues had been approached, and there had been 6 responses. One venue already delivered the service, and another venue offered a senior citizen lunch seven days a week. The other venues were not interested.

Cllr Thompson mentioned that the Council did not want to duplicate a service already offered elsewhere.

Cllr Snape asked if the Business & Facilities Manager (BFM) intended to take on the Tea Dances. The BFM explained that the team was exploring this option but that, in its current form, the Tea Dances were not financially viable. Officers would ask Tea Dance users if they wished to take this on themselves as 'their event'. Cllr Thompson re-enforced that the Community Services Committee did not want to continue the activity in their events programme.

It was **resolved** to accept the recommendations circulated as listed:

- Reduce the Friday Market visits to four a year in line with the Big Knit
- Stop delivering the Information Drop-in Sessions
- Reallocate the Job Club to a drop-in session at the Rufus Centre on specific days/times
- Stop delivering the Tea Dances as a community event but offer it to the Rufus Centre team as a commercial event
- Remove the Painting Circle from the programme and offer the group the opportunity to run it themselves as a drop-in session.
- Remove the Over 60s Christmas Lunch from the events calendar immediately.

Lunch Club

Members discussed Lunch Club in detail and asked if the venues contacted as part of the research activity had provided the costs of the meals. The CSAM stated that one venue had quoted £5.99 for the meal, but she was unsure about the cost of the Ampthill activity.

Cllr Snape asked about how the Lunch Club cancellation would be communicated. The Town Clerk mentioned that the number of attendees had drastically dropped. Today, there were only 15 people, whereas two months ago, 50 people were attending. It was agreed that the August Lunch Club would go ahead, and Officers would announce at this one that the service was stopping as of September.

Cllr Livens commented that the menu was too ambitious for the clientele.

The BFM stated that the dropping numbers made Lunch Club more viable because it could be held in a smaller room.

Cllr Copelstone questioned if users of Lunch Club had been asked if they were accessing other Lunch Clubs. The CSAM mentioned that many attendees were users of the Rendezvous Café. Cllr Copelstone asked if users would be signposted to alternative services, and she was advised that this would happen.

Cllr Connell asked if the venue open seven days a week was local, and she was informed that it is in Flitwick.

Cllr Thompson stated that there was much discussion around the set-up times, attendance numbers, and whether it was fulfilling social value outcomes compared to other activities. Transport had not been provided for some time so users of Lunch Club were able to get to the Rufus Centre themselves, rather than providing a service for those who were more isolated, which was an original aim. Cllr Thompson added that in light of what the review had shown, Lunch Club was making a loss and the social return was lower. She mentioned that users of Lunch Club liked the event but it was viewed as a 'nicety' rather than a vital service.

It was **resolved** to stop Lunch Club from September 2024 onwards.

(ii) Community/Civic Events

The Town Mayor read aloud the discussion points listed on the agenda.

Cllr Snape commented that the civic events were covered in the agreed Civic Protocol and that the Town Mayor was entitled to use the Rufus Centre free of charge. The Civic Reception event was not covered, but Cllr Snape's view was that this event came under the remit of FTC with a room full of residents and volunteers, so the event should be done at cost. He added that everything else was an Officer's decision.

Cllr Thompson commented that it was important for everyone to think along the same lines, whether that is agreeing that things are charged at cost and agreeing on a maximum number of events to use this process or showing it on a profit-and-loss exercise based on the acceptance that some events made a loss.

Cllr Blazeby referred to the two initial discussion points from the agenda:

- *Catering cross charges for community and civic events (this is currently charged with a 65% mark up)*
- *Internal room hire charges – currently taken into account when the Community Team complete a profit and loss exercise for events/activities*

Cllr Blazeby was not sure why these were listed on the agenda as discussion points, mentioning that they related to equivalent profit and loss. He added that it was the Council's decision on what events to put on and how these were funded; otherwise, two different benchmarks were being used.

The Town Clerk stated that these were not proposals and had just been listed to guide the conversation. She mentioned that when the CSAM inputs are figured into a P&L, some events/activities look particularly costly, whereas when room hire is removed, and food is taken at cost price, it would balance out.

Cllr Thompson mentioned that everyone was comfortable with the room hire charges but catering was more of an issue. An example was given for the Proud AF Reception in February, where there was lots of conflicting information on what could be purchased.

Cllr Blazeby stated that the Council needed to decide whether to take the hit or if it is recorded on P&Ls. He mentioned the opportunity costs.

The BFM explained that the P&Ls were a benchmark as it was difficult to pin down all costs.

Some members commented that it might be proactive for officers to bring any contentious event suggestions or events that cause concern for a member's decision. The Town Clerk commented that the biggest concern/confusion came from Lunch Club, but this was not continuing. She added that for anything else unclear, Officers would itemise this on a meeting agenda for Members to consider. Cllr Snape wanted to enable Officers to make decisions.

Cllr Snape commented that a balance was needed as some community events were also commercially successful, for example, the first Drag Night, which had a profit of £2,600. He mentioned that for other events, there is no profit, but there are social value outcomes. He wanted flexibility and felt that the Business Board should look at charges.

The Chairman explained that these matters needed to be worked through but that specific issues should come back to the members for debate.

b. Scheme of Delegation Review – Finance & General Purposes & Community Services

(i) Members were asked to consider the proposed changes to the delegation scheme

Cllr Parsons explained that the Finance Scrutiny Working Group had a good impact, and it would be useful to make finance a Standing Committee of the Council. Cllr Snape supported this, highlighting that the Working Group had added a lot of value, but the Council needed to be cognisant of the overall financial position, especially with the large-scale projects, and manage matters carefully.

It was **resolved** that the changes circulated for the revised Scheme of Delegations be accepted and a Finance & General Purposes Committee be created.

(ii) Members were asked to consider the circulated Terms of Reference for the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

It was **resolved** to accept the circulated Terms of Reference for the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

The Community Services Officer joined the meeting at 20:33 (via Teams).

(iii) Members were asked to consider the circulated report relating to meeting schedules for the Finance & General Purposes Committee

It was **resolved** to progress with Option 4 presented in the report – to adopt a flexible approach to considering financial reports/the financial impact of major projects and schedule 4 Finance & General Purposes meetings for each Civic Year around the governance and annual requirements for the accounts.

c. Re-Appointment of Internal Auditor 2024-25

The RFO advised Members that appointing an internal auditor was an annual requirement and recommended continuing with Auditing Solutions Ltd.

It was **resolved** to re-appoint Auditing Solutions as the internal auditors for 2024/25.

d. Social Value

The Town Clerk advised that the Community Services Officer (CSO) had a good knowledge of social value, which the Council had not previously quantified appropriately for its activities. The Senior Management Team and Chairmen of Committees received training from the CSO and found it useful. It was agreed to present a report for the Council to consider if Members wanted to adopt this process moving forward. There was a cost implication, and the CSO joined the meeting to answer any questions.

Cllr Blazeby advised that it was important to consider adopting a process that allowed the Council to measure social value.

Cllr Thompson stated that incorporating the social value model for each Council activity would take time as there were many elements to follow to do this properly. She added that it would be good to formalise social value for Council operations, but she wanted to manage Members' expectations that it would take a while for the Officers to get this set up.

The Town Clerk advised that the Council could include social value in its year-end accounts if the social value recommendations were adopted at the meeting.

Cllr Snape supported progressing with social value and incorporating a social return on investment into the Council's strategy. He believed this social value tool would help the Council achieve this. He felt that the Council needed to research the community a bit more and intended to pick this up with the Town Clerk after the holiday season. Cllr Snape added that there were some 'big ticket projects', for example, the Community Fridge, where the social value assessment was vast.

Cllr Parsons commented that this was a good initiative and requested training for other Members. The CSAM agreed that this would be possible.

Action: CSAM

Cllr Toinko believed this was a fantastic approach but questioned the £800 joining fee for Social Value UK. The CSO explained that joining Social Value UK would enable the Council to be accredited and validate the social value impact externally. She added that this was optional.

Cllr Toinko asked how much the Council had paid for the training sessions, and he was informed that they were free of charge as the CSO had delivered them as part of her role.

The CSO advised the following:

- Salford City Council were a leader in social value if Members wanted to research it
- The social value could be mapped
- If the Council had an accredited level of social value, this could be inserted into tenders

Cllr Blazeby suggested doing some background work before joining Social Value UK since Officers had a significant task to undertake before implementing the process. Cllr Thompson agreed and stated that while social value had always been important to the Council, this was not formalised, and the strategy must be created first. She felt the accreditation was the logical next step once the background work had been completed. Cllr Blazeby added that if other members wanted to do the training, they would be fully informed before deciding on the next steps.

It was **resolved** to adopt the 'social return on investment' process for all community events and activities.

Action: Community Services Team

e. Flitwick Village Hall Management Committee Representative

i) Following the resignation as the representative on the FVHMC from Cllr Blazeby, Members were asked to consider electing a new representative

The Chairman advised Members that Cllr Blazeby had resigned as the Flitwick Village Hall Management Committee Representative and thanked him for this work.

It was **resolved** to appoint Cllr Thompson as the Flitwick Village Hall Management Committee representative.

ii) To receive an update from the Leader and Cllr Thompson

The Leader of the Council commented that a Memorandum of Understanding with the VHMC was required. Legal advice was being sought on what Guardian Trusteeship meant; however, the Town Clerk advised that due to the Deed of Trust being so old, firm advice would be required from a barrister to understand the Council's role as Guardian Trustees fully.

Members were keen for Cllr Thompson and Cllr Snape to progress with the Memorandum of Understanding.

f. Flags

Cllr Snape introduced this item, mentioning that during June (Pride month), there had been some extreme comments made on social media. While social media should not lead the Council, Cllr Snape was keen to discuss that there had been several written complaints received by the Council from residents unhappy that the Union Jack flag had not been flown at the Rufus Centre for D-Day. He added that on two occasions, staff had been approached. Cllr Snape stated that there were three options:

1. Do nothing and continue with the Council's flag policy
2. Look at putting the Union Jack flag up – the Rufus Centre was a public building
3. Remove the flagpole

Cllr Snape stated that the Council did not need to make a resolution but was interested in Members' views on this matter considering the current political climate.

Cllr Patterson mentioned that he had read the online comments and would not defend obscene comments. He added that it would be wrong to ignore a national conversation that was far from being resolved and highlighted that it was highly controversial for many people. Cllr Patterson felt that there would always be disagreements, but after looking at the flag policy, he thought it was interesting that FTC flew the Pride flag for a month and the St George's flag for one day. From the options presented, Cllr Patterson would choose to fly the national flag all year round or for a longer period alongside flags for other national occasions, which is what happened elsewhere.

Cllr Harald asked if there was a requirement for the flagpole. The Town Clerk referred to the flag policy, which included a list, and within that, there were instances where flags were to be flown for Remembrance, the King's Coronation, etc. She mentioned that as a local authority, the Council were obliged to fly the Union Jack flag on these occasions as the Rufus Centre was a government building. The Town Clerk did not feel the third option was possible.

Cllr Thompson stated that she was disappointed to see this item on the agenda since the Council's flags policy was due to be renewed in May 2025. She did not feel that the policy should be amended because of a few online comments and noted that no formal advice had been given to change the agreed policy.

Cllr Blazeby asked why this item was on the Council agenda if the Community Services Chairman had not requested it. He agreed with Cllr Thompson and did not think it needed to be reviewed. Cllr Snape stated that he had asked for this to be a discussion point at the meeting as the Full Council previously adopted it. The Chairman accepted Cllr Snape's points and thought it would be useful to have the discussion, particularly since it was affecting Officers. Cllr Thompson stated that she predicted the comments would cease now that June (Pride month) had passed.

Cllr Wilsmore asked where it was written about flying flags from government buildings. The Town Clerk agreed to report back with information on this.

Action: Town Clerk

Cllr Toinko asked what legislation required the Council to fly the Union Jack flag. He suspected it was different at the Unitary Authority level but not a requirement for a town or parish Council. He stated that the Rufus Centre was not a Town Hall; it was not a government building but an office and event hire facility with a café, which the Council operated to generate a surplus. He mentioned the benefits of the Council for local organisations with buildings on FTC land, and these organisations commemorated the royal dates. He said the commemorative events happen in the town centre and not on the outskirts of town, where the Rufus Centre was. Cllr Toinko thought that the comments online were not about the flagpole but instead, it was about the Council's visible support for Pride. Cllr Toinko stated that if people were patriotic, then they could have a national flag, and that was fine, but he believed they would be insulted by their flag being misused as a banner to motivate hate speech and divide people. Cllr Toinko went on to say that he wanted to keep the staff safe, and he reminded Members of the Officer time it takes to put up and take down flags at dawn and dusk. He believed the Council should remove the flagpole and put the Pride flag up in the café or display a banner instead.

Cllr Wilsmore largely agreed with Cllr Toinko and believed people were being 'pushed along' to fly flags to show support. He mentioned the impact of the weather on flying flags and stated that D-Day was not an official celebration. Cllr Wilsmore commented that the comments come from a position of ignorance and the 'ashamed' comment made in one complaint was absurd.

Cllr Parsons asked Members to consider the community's backlash if the flagpole was removed immediately and suggested reviewing the policy in May to better address this. He asked Officers to remain committed to flying the necessary flags between now and May.

The Town Clerk advised that she did not state that the flags needed to be flown to follow legislation and mentioned that there was an obligation to fly certain flags if there was a flagpole. It was agreed for the Town Clerk to investigate the requirements further.

Action: Town Clerk

g. Projects Fund

i) Members noted the project fund summary document.

Community Services Committee

(i) Road Closure Training

Cllr Thompson gave some background to the item. The training would enable Council staff to manage road closures, which Central Bedfordshire Council was no longer providing. The fund would also be used to purchase necessary signage.

Cllr Blazeby suggested contacting other local Councils to see if they would be interested in attending the training, which would help to fund the overall cost.

Action: CSAM

It was **resolved** that £1,453.13 from the Central Projects Fund be allocated for Road Closure Training.

(ii) UKSPF Community Grant Match Funding

Members considered the recommendation from the Community Services Committee to match fund the UKSPF Community Grant proposal for an extension to the skatepark.

Cllr Thompson stated that the match funding required was slightly more than what was originally discussed at Community Services meeting. The actual amount being requested from the Central Projects Fund was £9,600.

It was **resolved** that £9,600 from the Central Projects Fund be allocated as match funding for the UKSPF Community Grant application for the extension of Flitwick Skatepark.

5682. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

a. Finance Reports

Members noted the finance reports.

b. 3 Station Road

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the planning application was due to be submitted by the end of the week and an onsite meeting would take place on Wednesday to discuss marketing the site.

c. Councillor Attendance Record

Cllr Wilsmore commented that he was not listed on the record. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that there must have been an administrative error, as his name was on the document when it was checked. The document would be amended before publishing.

Action: Admin Team

5683. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No items.

5684. EXEMPT ITEMS

No items.

The meeting closed at 21:18.