



FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Flitwick Town Council meeting held on Tuesday 17th September 2024 at the Rufus Centre at 7:45pm

Present:

Cllr J Roberts (Chairman)
Cllr A Snape
Cllr D Toinko
Cllr C Thompson
Cllr J Gleave
Cllr H Hodges
Cllr T Harald
Cllr P Earles
Cllr F Patterson
Cllr T Connell
Cllr R Wilsmore
Cllr S Livens
Cllr M Platt
Cllr I Blazeby
1 virtual guest

Stephanie Stanley – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO
Susan Eldred – Community Services & Amenities Manager

5685. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was **resolved** to accept apologies for absence from Cllr Parsons (work commitment) and Cllr Copleston (unwell).

5686. 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.

5687. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor advised Members that, with approval, he wished to move item 11d – Car Show – to the exempt section of the meeting. Cllr Blazeby asked why, and he was informed that this was for contractual reasons.

In the last two months, the Town Mayor had attended the following civic events:

Army Benevolent Fund Music Event
FTC's Graffiti Workshop for Young People
Defence Intelligence Training Annual Formal Group Reception
Flitwick Car Show – he thanked the organisers
Flitwick & Ampthill Sea Cadets Awards Ceremony

The Town Mayor welcomed Cllr Earles back to the Council.

5688. Leader Update

The Leader had attended a shadow Joint Committee meeting with the Town Mayor and the Deputy Leader. This was the first time the group had met in 18 months. The aim was to work with the Ward Councillors to build a more constructive relationship with Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) to create an informal forum for pushing projects and improvements forward. It was disappointing that Cllr Mackey had sent apologies for the meeting but pleasing that Cllrs Adams and Townsend attended. Unfortunately, no CBC Officers went to the meeting, but the Ward Members were going to speak to the Officers to ask for their support going forward. Current focuses were the town centre, solving parking issues (including enforcement), speeding, Section 106 (S106) applications and progressing with a Governance Review. Cllr Townsend had recruited several Speed Watch volunteers. The Joint Committee hoped to demand that CBC build a list of S106 infrastructure projects to address issues in Flitwick.

The Leader thanked the Officers for progressing with the roof works at 3 Station Road. The scaffolding was due to be erected on 19th September. It was important for everyone to understand why work was being completed on the roof in advance of the main construction work. It would be explained to the public that this was related to the grant funding from the Community Ownership Fund. Before moving forward with other works, there would be a delay until the planning permission had been received. There was a notification on the meeting agenda about the Town Clerk using the Scheme of Delegations for some UK Power Networks work. There was background work happening to try and reduce this unexpected expenditure, but an enhanced electricity capacity for the building was required, which had financial implications. Members did not want to borrow funds to complete the project, so expenditure for other projects would be limited.

The Leader met with MP Blake Stephenson to discuss the Council's work and priorities. They discussed CBC's lack of strategic approach and its impact on residents. The Leader spoke to the MP about the Council's work on poverty, especially about the Community Services Team's work on the Summer Programme and the Community Fridge. Flitwick was the third most deprived area in Central Beds and the most deprived location in the Mid Beds constituency. The MP would be attending a future Council meeting for which the date is to be confirmed.

5689. REPORTS FROM WARD MEMBERS

No reports.

5690. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No items.

5691. INVITED SPEAKER

No speaker.

5692. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

No items.

5693. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

- a. For Members to approve the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held, on **Tuesday 16th July**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.

Cllr Toinko proposed an amendment to minute number 5681f – Flags – to correct wording to state, ‘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 Thompson referred to minute number 5681e ii) – Flitwick Village Hall Management Committee (VHMC) Representative – and suggested including Cllr Snape’s name alongside hers, for the action to progress with the Memorandum of Understanding.

It was **resolved** to adopt the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on Tuesday 16th July 2024 at the Rufus Centre as an accurate record with two amendments: re-word item 5681f as mentioned by Cllr Toinko and insert Cllr Snape’s name to the action relating to the development of a Memorandum of Understanding for the Council and the VHMC.

- b. For Members to receive and consider resolutions and recommendations of the **Community Services Committee** meeting, held on **Tuesday 3rd September 2024**, this meeting was held at The Rufus Centre.

The resolutions of the Community Services Committee Meeting held on Tuesday 3rd September 2024 were noted.

- (i) It was **RECOMMENDED** by Community Services Committee to request a budget of £1,500 for the next three years for Proud Ampthill and Flitwick, to continue to support inclusivity.

It was **resolved** to incorporate a budget of £1,500 for the next three years for Proud Ampthill & Flitwick.

- c. For Members to receive and consider resolutions and recommendations of the **Business Improvement & Development Board (BIDB)** meeting, held on **Tuesday 30th July & Tuesday 10th September 2024**, this meeting was held at The Rufus Centre.

The resolutions for the BIDB from 30th July and 10th September 2024 held at the Rufus Centre were noted.

5694. MATTERS ARISING

- a. Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on **Tuesday 16th July 2024**.

Cllr Thompson mentioned the Ward Councillors Highways Walkabout activity had taken place. Not all of the sites recommended for inspection were visited, but it had been agreed to make the walkabouts a regular activity, and there would, therefore, be regular items on Community Services Committee agendas for Members to flag locations for future sessions. Cllr Blazeby asked if a log would be kept so that there was an active list and Cllr Thompson responded that this would be done.

- b. Members to receive any updates from Officers – no updates.

5695. OUTSIDE BODIES

No items.

5696. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

- a. **Burial Report**

The Town Clerk prepared this report to explain the burial ground options available.

Cllr Harald suggested contacting the funeral directors to determine whether reducing the turning circle space, which would allow for more grave plots, could cause issues for the hearse vehicles that used the site.

Cllr Thompson commented that it would be sensible to progress Option 4 should the funeral directors respond that reducing space at the turning circle was feasible.

Cllr Snape reminded Members that the burial ground situation had been discussed previously and that the Council's position on this was published on social media. He mentioned that once the current site was full, the Council had no plans to provide extra land for more burials. Cllr Snape explained that this was a problem impacting parishes across the country. A smaller proportion of people were electing to be buried nowadays. He commented that he did not believe the Council had the resources to fund the options presented. Cllr Snape stated that the Council was the burial authority, but there were no legal requirements or statutory duties for the Council to provide more land to develop a new burial ground. He believed the Council should adhere to its previous decision. Cllr Thompson agreed once she realised there had been no changes to legislation or otherwise since the original decision was made.

Cllr Harald asked if the Council might consider a new garden of remembrance as an alternative option.

Through discussion, Members were informed that approximately 10 grave spaces were left at the current site. Cllr Toinko asked how confident Officers were with this number as Members had been advised there were 10 plots left for some time. Cllr Snape explained that a report on this had been completed.

Cllr Blazeby commented that it would be fitting to review the options available as not investigating these, establishing costs, etc., would look like the Council had given up on trying to generate more grave space for its residents. He thought it would be beneficial to understand if the turning circle option was feasible and, if so, how much this would cost. He thought it prudent to ask CBC if they had any land to use. Cllr Blazeby said he favoured pursuing options 1 and 4 to round off discussions. Cllr Hodges also favoured this and set criteria for the land beforehand.

Cllr Patterson asked about different burial authorities and sharing space. He wondered if neighbouring parishes had similar issues and may also want to provide more space to Flitwick. Cllr Blazeby commented that a couple of neighbouring parishes had capacity, but their charges would be non-residential and, therefore, expensive.

Cllr Wilsmore mentioned the land option and commented that this would only be viable through a large landowner or CBC. He believed the turning circle would have been designed in a way that worked but asked if the hearses needed to access the burial ground or if they could park outside.

The Chairman concluded that there was insufficient information to decide on the options presented.

It was **resolved** that the Town Clerk further investigate options 1 and 4 as per the discussions and present the additional information to the Council for consideration.

b. Speeding

Cllr Townsend had expressed an interest in setting up a Speed Watch group and Members were asked if they wished to support this. Cllr Blazeby wanted to know what type of support was being requested.

Generally, Members supported any attempt to reduce speeding in Flitwick from a moral perspective and because speeding generated a big response as part of the Residents Survey. However, many Members had reservations about the effectiveness of a Speed Watch Scheme. Cllr Wilsmore advised that the equipment provided to volunteers was not calibrated. The volunteers could only do it during daylight hours and for limited times of the day. He added that volunteers could not visit the same site within 14 days, and the scheme was prescriptive on what could be done. The speeding device only showed up to 60mph, and the procedure meant that people would be sent a letter about not speeding, which progressed to a visit from a Policeman. However, no further action could be taken, and nobody could be prosecuted.

Members wanted to know how the Council was being asked to support this scheme, i.e., through finances, promotions, space to meet, etc. Cllr Snape asked if Cllr Townsend had asked for the Council to support the scheme, and the Deputy Town Clerk agreed to ask the Town Clerk, but she presumed so since it was on the agenda.

Cllr Wilsmore believed that road engineering was required instead of Speed Watch.

Cllr Patterson mentioned that CBC was looking at installing traffic counters and asked if this had been done. This was to be followed up. Cllr Harald stated that there were some counters on Temple Way.

Cllr Blazeby asked if the Speed Watch scheme would allow volunteers to record the number of vehicles going above the speed limit.

Cllr Thompson commented that careful consideration needed to be given when publishing agenda items so that Members were clear on what decisions were required. Officers noted this point.

It was **resolved** to ask the Town Clerk for more details from Ward Councillors on what support they sought from the Town Council.

c. Local Plan – Town Centre Plan

Cllr Snape commented that this was another unclear agenda item. He did not feel there was a decision to be made on this. He added that most Members had not seen the document before and that there were lots of discussion points. There were no questions on the plan.

d. Car Show 2025

As mentioned under the Town Mayor's Announcements, this item was moved to the exempt section due to the contractual nature of the discussion.

e. Projects Fund

- (i) To note the circulated Projects Fund Summary document – noted.
- (ii) To consider the project fund applications below:

BIDB - It was **recommended** to replace the existing CCTV system using Contractor A at a cost of £8,521 funded via the projects fund.

Cllr Snape supported this application and asked the Deputy Town Clerk to ask the Business & Facilities Manager to advise on what he planned to spend the Earmarked £40k on for Rufus Centre projects.

Cllr Blazeby advised Members that the current CCTV system was unfit for purpose, as its poor quality could never be used to prosecute. The proposal was to replace the cameras

with modern equipment to upgrade the quality of images. The CCTV would be positioned in better locations, and there was a plan for where the new cameras would be installed.

It was **resolved** to accept the £8,521 application from the Projects Fund to replace the existing CCTV system using Contractor A.

Community Services – it was **recommended** to allocate £4,611.25 from the Projects Fund and award quote two, to construct 25m x 1.8m of tarmac. This including, excavation to sub formation and consolidation, installing Tiber edges, placing / compacting 100mm of type 1 stone to formation level and laying 60mm of a 20mm binder and 20mm of a 6mm surface.

It was confirmed that the site was between Millennium Park's play area and the boundary fence. Cllr Thompson advised that this improvement would make the site more accessible. Members asked if 'Tiber' was a typo and had concerns about durability should the contractor propose timber edging. Cllr Snape suggested empowering the Town Clerk to authorise this spending after checking the material's robustness.

It was **resolved** to empower the Town Clerk to allocate £4,611.25 from the Projects Fund to install tarmac at Millennium Park in the muddy area between the play area and the fence once the contractor had discussed alternative, more robust materials to timber.

f. Overspend

Members were asked to approve an overspend of £7,132.39 on the insurance budget. The overspend was related to an increased premium associated with 3 Station Road being unoccupied and the rebuild costs for the Rufus Centre. The insurance market costs also increased.

Cllr Thompson asked about rebuild costs in the insurance policy. The Deputy Town Clerk explained that the insurance broker had advised the Council to revalue its premises every five years to ensure the sum insured was accurate. The upgrades made to the Rufus Centre since the previous valuation constituted an increased premium.

It was **resolved** to approve the £ 7,132.39 overspend on the insurance budget (code 4029/101).

g. Risk Management Scheme

It was **resolved** to adopt the revised Risk Management Scheme circulated.

h. Flitwick Local Action Group (FLAG)

Members discussed the FLAG letter circulated, and Cllr Gleave provided some background information, explaining that the group was pushing for a partial review of CBC's Local Plan. Cllr Gleave mentioned that the letter included true information from a planning perspective and that supporting it had minimal risk. He added that the Council could supplement this with another letter asking CBC to review greenbelt sites.

Cllr Snape mentioned that he had spoken with Cllr Gleave about this proposal and that he could see the pros and cons of signing it. He wanted Members to think about the optics of signing a letter of this kind; however, it was recognised that the Council had objected to the Steppingley Road planning application on two occasions. The Council's view on this application remained unchanged, and Cllr Snape agreed that the letter's sentiment regarding the planning technicalities was correct. Cllr Snape did not feel it was appropriate

for the Council to sign the letter because it added the Council's name to a campaign group. He continued that the Council did not agree with all of what FLAG said and therefore suggested the Council write its letter highlighting that CBC should review its Local Plan and suggest greenbelt areas, believing that the lack of infrastructure was the point to emphasise. Cllr Snape stated that residents were not against development but that Flitwick needed a better infrastructure to cope. A list of schemes that should be forwarded to the developer was required at CBC.

Cllr Blazeby commented that a letter about this was discussed at the Joint Committee meeting, and had Cllr Adams written the letter; Members would have agreed to sign it.

Cllr Gleave informed Members that Steppingley Parish Council had signed the FLAG letter and Maulden Parish Council were considering it.

Cllr Blazeby commented that the parameters of required housing were changing.

Cllr Toinko referred to the FLAG letter and said it was not specific enough about deadlines for its demands, e.g., 'at pace'. He believed the Council could ensure its letter was more specific about demands. Cllr Toinko did not want the Council to sign the FLAG letter.

Cllr Gleave proposed that the Council sign the FLAG letter; however, this decision was not carried.

It was **resolved** that the Council write to CBC, similar to the FLAG letter, urging a rapid review of the Local Plan, including a comprehensive review of greenbelt sites.

5697. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

a. Finance – Balance Sheet

The balance sheet was noted.

b. 3 Station Road

i) To note the updated programme of works

This was noted.

ii) Members to receive an update on the project

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that a significant amount of work had been undertaken since the previous Council meeting, including:

- The successful certificate of lawful development
- Consultant surveys were complete
- The roof tender process had been implemented, and a contractor had been appointed by delegated authority
- There was an unexpected problem regarding the electricity capacity of the building, and UKPN submitted a quote for this work. Officers were working on ways to reduce the cost.
- The marketing of the site for potential tenants would commence in the New Year

iii) Members to note the following decisions made under delegated authority

- Installing a new cable to increase the electricity capacity at a cost of £200,000
- Appointment of roof contractor at a cost of £106,020

Members noted the decisions.

c. Planning Improvement Working Group – Survey

Members noted the planning survey responses. Cllr Blazeby referred to the ‘better communication with residents on planning matters’ and commented that he felt the Council had not delivered on one aspect of its consideration of applications. It had been agreed when the Planning Improvement Working Group was set up that Officers would publish weekly updates for residents to view officer decisions on planning applications. Cllr Blazeby wanted to know why this part of the plan had not been delivered as it was fundamental in terms of what was proposed for the way applications were considered. Officers agreed to ensure the weekly updates were implemented.

Cllr Toinko commented that it would be interesting to know the percentage of respondents who were tenants and those that were homeowners as this could have impacted the response.

5698. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No items.

5699. 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.

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.

a. Key Priorities

Noted.

5696d. Car Show 2025

It was **resolved** to continue to provide the Millennium Park and The Hub car park but no additional space for the Car Show in 2025. The Council agreed to give officers time to attend SAG Meetings and the event. Officers were to draw up a contract with the event organiser detailing expectations and highlighting matters that were done incorrectly previously.

Signed
(Chairman)