



FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of the Flitwick Town Council meeting held on
Tuesday 15th October 2024 at the Rufus Centre at 7:45pm

Present:

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

Cllr I Adams – Central Bedfordshire Ward Member

Also present:

Stacie Lockey – Town Clerk & Chief Executive
Stephanie Stanley – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO
4 members of the public (2 virtual access)

5700. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received and accepted for Cllr Earles.

5701. 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.

5702. TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor thanked the Officers for their work in organising the Town Mayor's Charity Quiz Night, which was successful. £960 was raised for the Town Mayor's Charities, which would be split between Keech Hospice Care and the Town Mayor's Charity Community Fund. The Town Mayor thanked Cllr Thompson for being the Quizmaster.

The Town Mayor had attended the following civic events:

- Army Benevolent Fund Charity Lunch
- Coffee Morning for the Town Mayor's Charity at Flitwick Village Hall

- Celebration of Youth & Trafalgar Day at St Alban's Cathedral

The Deputy Town Mayor attended the Festival for Older People at the Rufus Centre.

The Town Mayor advised that James Gleave had resigned as a Councillor, which was a significant loss to the Council. Former Councillor Gleave had done fantastic work leading the Planning Improvement Working Group (PIWG), and Members thanked him for all his work.

5703. Leader Update

Cllr Snape updated Members on matters that were going on in the background:

i) Flooding

Flitwick received record levels of rain on 22nd September. A picture was emerging locally of a situation where Flitwick was left at risk due to many small actions, or inactions, by many different stakeholders which turned a bad situation into a much worse situation.

Gullies were supposed to be cleared every three years, and a list of high-risk locations was maintained more often—Flitwick did not have any roads marked as high-risk. There were major issues at various points of the river Flit, especially around Manor Park. Anglian Water's sewers were unable to cope, and the Leader was aware of two houses that were flooded with sewage coming from manholes.

FTC was grateful to Cllr Heather Townsend for stepping in to act as the incident manager for Flitwick. Her actions in the background helped many people to avoid damage to their properties, particularly her work with Cllr John Baker to have gullies cleared on the High Street and Ivel Way the next day, which prevented more flooding.

CBC's Executive Director of Place and Communities was keen to point out that Flitwick Town Council did not have a flood kit or an emergency plan. The Leader wanted to be clear: Flitwick Town Council had no statutory role in emergency planning; this was firmly on Central Bedfordshire Council, and its response was wholly inadequate.

This incident showed that Flitwick does not have an operating Community Emergency Response Team or any kind of plan to help residents at a local level. FTC's experience from this incident shows that local capabilities and equipment are needed, including road signs, pumps, aqua sacks, and sand bags.

FTC had already agreed that the Rufus Centre would be an Emergency Response Centre and to order a flood kit (CBC gives us £1,800 for the kit). Heather was asking CBC for help/guidance on the CERT.

ii) Section 106

Cllr Snape recently met with Cllr John Baker and the lead officer for Section 106 at CBC. We have clarified that funding is to be allocated in accordance with the signed funding agreements, not per CBC officer interpretations.

Cllr Snape learned that the public art money was not public art money. It was a block of money for the public realm and community safety. £72k was allocated to 'Flitwick LC' for a MUGA without discussion, and they already have one, and Ampthill Rugby Club has been allocated money.

CBC's view was that it had already consulted with elected representatives through the local plan and the infrastructure development plan. Cllr Snape had asked for copies of the IDP. His view was that these decisions on allocating S106 funding need to be assigned to the shadow joint committee for ratification, and he would be pushing this further.

Three other updates would be reported under exempt section of the meeting.

5704. REPORTS FROM WARD MEMBERS

Flooding

Cllr Adams advised that Cllr Townsend had done an excellent job leading the response to the recent floods for Flitwick. He mentioned that he had been away but would have contributed if he had been there. Cllr Adams and Cllr Townsend were working together to create a document explaining the impact the floods had on Flitwick, and they planned to visit residents to understand their experiences.

Across Central Beds, 63 members were affected by the floods, so this matter was an item for the Full Council's scrutiny. Cllr Adams reported that there were many issues, including the movement of water from West to East, identifying vulnerable gullies, and that attenuation ponds were not filling up, i.e., not working. Cllr Adams mentioned the impact of new developments on dealing with the flooding. Cllr Townsend and Cllr Adams would continue to push for a better response for Flitwick.

Highways

A section of Maulden Road was due to be resurfaced from November 4th to 8th. Cllr Adams referred to the speed concerns for this road and commented that unfortunately, the evidence obtained did not suggest a problem. However, there had been an incident recently near the nursery on Maulden Road, and since then, 500 signatures had been received regarding the speed limit being too high.

(Two members of the public joined the meeting online at this time, 20:20.)

Step Free Access at Flitwick Station

Blake Stephenson (MP Mid-Bedfordshire), Cllr Townsend and Cllr Adams had been asking questions about timescales for step-free access. Cllr Adams believed a plan would not be released until Spring 2025, which was disappointing. Previous contractors have been dropped because Network Rail did not get the response they wanted, and the land purchase next to the station has not yet been finalised. There has not been much progress. Cllr Adams had heard rumours that the funding Biggleswade had received for their step-free access was in doubt, so he feared that Flitwick might be in a similar position. Cllr Adams had requested that the MP keep pushing on this matter.

Senior Living Village & Adjacent Land Sale

Cllr Adams had requested a timescale for completing this project, but CBC officers did not provide a definitive answer. A comment about 'early 2025' had been made, but he believed the Officers were unsure. No further information was received regarding the sale of land next to this development, either. Cllr Adams reiterated his concerns about CBC needing to be transparent about its plans, and he had asked about public engagement concerning the sale of this land. He had asked for this information, but unfortunately, there had been no response.

Questions

Cllr Wilsmore asked if Cllr Adams knew why the senior living development had been delayed. Cllr Adams mentioned that he had asked why it had been delayed, but he did not have an answer.

Cllr Wilshire referred to the flooding update and stated that just because the attenuation ponds were not filling up did not mean they were not working. Cllr Adams asked to speak with Cllr Wilshire about this separately.

Cllr Thompson referred to the scrutiny meeting of CBC's Full Council and requested for Members to be informed when a date was set. Cllr Adams agreed to do this.

5705. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

The Chairman welcomed the residents in the public gallery.

Sheila Smith (resident) attended the meeting to speak to Members about her family's experience following the flooding. She was disappointed to hear that the Town Council could not assist her family members when they were affected by the recent floods. The Chairman clarified that CBC coordinated this response and was not the remit of the Town Council.

Ms Smith had contacted CBC by phone but had experienced problems because a computer instead of a person answered the calls. This had been frustrating because she needed emergency assistance.

Ms Smith requested an update about the proposed development at Steppingley Road and to understand why the Council had stopped the Lunch Club provision as she believed this was a lifeline for many residents.

The Chairman explained that the Council had undertaken a community events review and that the Lunch Club was one of the activities that did not meet social value outcomes. The Chairman empathised with Ms Smith that this decision was difficult and unpopular with Lunch Club users. The Chairman commented that Officers would write to Ms Smith with a full explanation.

Action: Community Services & Amenities Manager

Cllr Adams answered Ms Smith's question about the Steppingley Road planning application. The application was still with the CBC Officer; however, Cllr Adams anticipated further work regarding the traffic survey. He highlighted that the application would be considered by CBC's Development Management Committee.

Ms Smith noticed that work had begun at the former bank (3 Station Road) and questioned if the Council was progressing with having a Post Office. The Chairman advised that including a Post Office counter remained an aspiration for the project.

(Cllr Adams left the meeting at 20:20.)

5706. INVITED SPEAKER

There was no invited speaker.

5707. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Cllr Hodges advised that a resident had approached him about an issue relating to the flooding from his estate, and he asked how he could pass this information on. Cllr Snape suggested that this should be reported to Cllr Townsend.

Cllr Wilshire requested that Flitwick's response to the flooding be opened to other organisations and the Town Council. Cllr Snape mentioned that Cllr Townsend's aim was to have a Flood Summit for Flitwick, but there were challenges, e.g., the fact that

Steppingley Road's ownership was not registered. Cllr Wilsmore commented that it was important for experienced people to be involved who knew about technicalities, such as topography. Cllr Wilsmore was asked to raise this matter with Cllr Townsend.

Cllr Wilsmore asked if the Rufus Centre would be considered a Refuge Centre for future flood emergencies or a Control Centre. Cllr Snape clarified that it would be a Refuge Centre. Cllr Wilsmore stated that this was right and that the accessibility to catering facilities was another benefit.

Cllr Patterson asked if the plan would involve resident volunteers or other authorities. Cllr Snape said the aim was to create a Community Emergency Response Team. The primary method of communication was via a WhatsApp group. The WhatsApp group had become apparent approximately one month before the recent flooding, which had been useful, but it proved difficult to get anything done due to CBC's resources being overwhelmed. CBC's focus was on supporting vulnerable people. Cllr Snape mentioned that there needed to be a community response. He highlighted that the closure of Greenfield Road was challenging to achieve as CBC only had two crews of people to shut 60 roads.

Members discussed the recent road closure training carried out by FTC staff and asked if this meant that Officers could close roads if flooding happened in the future. Cllr Wilsmore commented that the training received covered road closures for events but not flooding. He asked for these matters to be thought through properly.

5708. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

- a. For Members to approve the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held, on **Tuesday 17th September**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.

Cllr Wilsmore corrected minute number 5695b – speeding – stating that the SpeedWatch equipment provided to volunteers was not calibrated.

It was **resolved** to adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on Tuesday 17th September at the Rufus Centre as an accurate record with one amendment: delete 'accurate' from minute reference 5695b and insert 'not calibrated'.

- b. For Members to receive and consider resolutions and recommendations of the Community Services Committee meeting, held on **Tuesday 1st October 2024**, this meeting was held at The Rufus Centre.

The Community Services Committee resolutions from the meeting held on Tuesday 1st October 2024 were noted.

- c. For Members to receive and consider resolutions and recommendations of the HR Committee meeting, held on **Wednesday 9th October 2024**, this meeting was held at The Rufus Centre.

This item was discussed in the exempt section of the meeting.

5709. MATTERS ARISING

- a. Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on **Tuesday 17th September 2024**.

There were no items.

- b. Members to receive any updates from Officers.

The Town Clerk advised that CBC had responded to the letter about the local plan and that she would email their response to all Members.

5710. OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no items.

5711. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

a. Community Services Committee

The Chairman advised that, following James Gleave's resignation, there was a vacancy on the Community Services Committee. The Town Clerk advised that Cllr Earles had asked to be considered for this position.

It was **resolved** that Cllr Earles be elected to the Community Services Committee.

b. Central Bedfordshire Council – School Street Proposal – Kendal Drive

Members discussed the CBC proposal circulated and were unwilling to respond formally, for various reasons.

Cllr Toinko liked the principle of school streets; however, he felt that the document lacked any reference to enforcement and that responses should include responses from highways or schools.

Cllr Snape commented that CBC should fully consult with local businesses. He added that many parents parked at Tesco to walk their children to the schools and then nearby. However, this was not an agreed-upon scheme, but it was something that the schools had decided to relay to parents. Cllr Snape believed that CBC needed to consider this proposal's impact on the Tesco car park.

Cllr Wilsmore informed Members about a similar scheme being trialled for 18 months at Icknield School in Luton and thought that CBC should look at feedback from this experiment first. He advised that CBC had done two consultation activities on this proposal. The first session mostly spoke to school parents rather than residents, and the second had a particularly hostile reaction from residents attending. Cllr Wilsmore noted that CBC planned to write to residents but it was unclear which residents. He believed the proposal would move the problem.

c. Central Bedfordshire Council - Consultation on the Policy and Principles to inform the draft School Organisation Plan 2025-2030

Cllr Toinko did not want the Council to formally respond. He did not like the changes proposed which related to fewer, bigger schools. He anticipated parking problems and commented that the most pressing addition was to move to a two-tier school system, which he hoped did not happen. A two-tier system move would cause disruption to pupils' education and it would be very expensive.

The Council decided not to formally respond to this consultation.

d. External Audit for the Year Ended 31st March 2024

The Chairman thanked the finance team for their work on the accounts for 2023/24.

It was **resolved** to approve the audited approve the Audited AGAR, year-end 31st March 2023, the external auditor's certificate and report.

e. Internal Audit (1st Interim)

Members commented that it was positive to see no issues raised in the report circulated.

It was **resolved** that the Internal Audit (1st Interim) for the accounts 2024-25 be accepted.

f. Planning Improvement Working Group (PIWG)

Following the resignation of James Gleave, the Chairman advised that a new Chairman was required for the PIWG.

It was **resolved** that Cllr Hodges be elected as the Chairman of the PIWG until the end of the civic year.

5712. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

a. Finance Reports

- i) Balance Sheet – noted.
- ii) Central Projects Fund Summary – noted.

b. 3 Station Road

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that:

- Planners at Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) had requested further details on the impact of trees at the site and the consultant had been authorised to carry out this assessment
- CBC had previously suggested that the planning application be withdrawn, but LBC's (Luton Borough Council) Design Team had suggested the route of conducting the additional impact assessment on the trees instead. This caused a delay in the planning process, but a decision was expected soon.
- The contractors submitting bids for the main works had requested an extension to the submission deadline, and therefore, this had been moved back by one week to 30th October.
- Officers had investigated lowering the cost of electricity capacity work by liaising with an alternative company to see if they could provide a lower quotation than UK Power Networks (UKPN). Unfortunately, the quote received was not much different from UKPN's. Officers had received advice stating that using two companies could complicate the process and cause delays. UKPN also required payment upfront, which suited the Community Ownership Fund (COF) requirements for its spending deadline.
- The roof works had begun, but the wet weather had impacted progress.
- The roof works, and the utilities work (including the new electricity cable) would form part of the COF grant claim.
- Nothing had progressed in securing tenants for the building, as this would commence in the new year.

5713. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No items.

5714. 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 issues are 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. Confidential Reports** – noted.
- b. Leader Update Exempt** – noted.

The Town Clerk left the meeting at 21:00.

c. Minutes & Recommendations of Meetings

The resolutions of the HR Committee meeting held on Wednesday, 9th October 2024, were noted.

It was **resolved** for the Town Clerk’s salary to move from SCP 50 to SCP 51 from April 2025.

The meeting closed at 21:07.

Signed
(Chairman)