



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

Present:

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

Also present:

Cllr I Adams – Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) Ward Member
Jonathan Smith – Flitwick Scout Group
Darren Reeve – Flitwick Scout Group
Ray O'Neill - Avebury
Stacie Lockey – Town Clerk & Chief Executive (TC)
Stephanie Stanley – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO (DTC)
3 members of the public

5730. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies.

5731. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

- (a) Disclosable Pecuniary interests in any agenda item – Cllr Connell declared an interest in agenda item 12d – CB/24/02687/FULL Land North of 1 Princess Close – as a family member lived in the same road.
- (b) Non-Pecuniary interests in any agenda item – none.

5732. TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor attended the following civic engagements since the last meeting:

- Houghton Regis Town Council Carol Service
- Bedford Borough Council Carol Service
- FTC Forget Me Not Group Christmas Lunch

- Flitwick Community Fridge Christmas Social

Cllr Adams entered the meeting at 19:48.

The Town Mayor advised that he proposed amendments to the order of business for the meeting to bring forward discussions relating to the Princess Close planning application. Members agreed to this.

The Town Mayor commented that it was a shame the Christmas Lights Switch On event was cancelled due to adverse weather conditions. He thanked Officers and Members for their work in organising the event.

Members were informed that the Rag Wreath Workshop had been successful, and he thanked the organisers.

5733. Leader Update

Flooding

The Leader was grateful to Cllr Townsend for ensuring Flitwick residents' voices were heard at CBC about the needed improvements in the flooding response. He commented that CBC Chief Officers were trying to exclude the Ward Members from discussions. Cllr Adams was also thanked for his work on this issue.

Projects

The Leader mentioned that he had never seen a December Council meeting with so many business items. He thanked Members for their involvement in the current projects and the Officer Team, which the Town Clerk led. He commented that it had been an exceptional year and that 2025 was set to be even bigger with the anticipated completion of three large projects.

Star Council Awards Nomination

The Leader stated he was a bit embarrassed to raise this, but he thanked those involved in submitting a Councillor of the Year Award. He added that it was an honour to be shortlisted as a finalist and to be in the final five.

5734. REPORTS FROM WARD MEMBERS

Cllr Adams apologised for not providing a report in advance.

Flooding

Cllrs Adams and Townsend had met with the CBC Director of Place & Communities. He reported that there had been some activity at CBC on dealing with flooding in Flitwick in the future. Both Ward Members had pushed for an assessment of vulnerable gullies and the impact on vulnerable people, particularly residents of Ivel Way. The Ward Members wanted to understand the maintenance programme for flooding.

The Ward Members were keen to see an Action Plan on how people work together on the day should Flitwick experience floods like those in September so that there would be a more effective, proper response. Cllr Adams mentioned that Cllr Townsend was a volunteer and that she should not have been the Emergency Coordinator.

Land next to Senior Living Accommodation

Cllr Adams remained frustrated that CBC had not publicly disclosed details on the land adjacent to the senior living accommodation development on Steppingley Road. He understood the legal requirement to keep some information confidential; however, information relating to the favoured bidder for the land was not in the public domain. Cllr Adams had asked the CBC Executive Member to make this information available to the public, and he asked if the Town Council would do the same.

Ferndale Move

The date for the Ferndale move was 20th April, but there was no indication of what the current building would be used for. It had been confirmed that this would not be for temporary accommodation. No information would be released until the Ferndale residents had moved.

Maulden Road Speed Limit

The CBC Traffic Management meeting had taken place. Cllr Adams had requested that the speed limit be reduced to 40mph past the nursery on Maulden Road and that the 30mph limit be extended to the industrial estate due to the accidents on this road. Cllr Adams reported that Cllr Baker had been supportive of this.

CBC Budget

CBC was looking to bridge the £17m gap by redundancies, reshaping the organisation and other savings by bringing department areas together. No further details were known at this stage. Cllr Adams commented that there was a concern that these changes could make service cuts unpalatable. Ward Members were waiting to hear the details.

There were ongoing discussions about reducing the opening times for Household Waste Recycling Centres, including closing them two days a week and reducing their daily hours by 30 minutes.

Cllr Adams also reported the decisions relating to removing the local welfare provision. He mentioned it at the meeting, considering the Town Council's work on the cost-of-living crisis and the community fridge project.

School Tier System

Members were informed that Cllr Adams had been convinced that moving to a two-tier school system for Central Bedfordshire was the right thing to do, as the educational attainment was not high enough for Key Stage 2. He stated that the Flitwick area would be the last to switch to two tiers since the changes had been removed from the anticipated budget for 2027.

Questions

Cllr Earles asked if CBC were not stating the highest bidder for the land next to the Leisure Centre for fear of residents not being happy with the company selected. Cllr Adams did not think this was the case but stated that it was difficult to know what information to make public and what needed to remain confidential. Cllr Adams noted that the original plans included downsizer bungalows in the public domain. However, this time, the intentions were being kept confidential. He added that he thought CBC should keep the company names confidential but release other details. Members were informed that the highest bidder was not a supermarket company.

Cllr Snape asked for Cllr Adams' assistance with:

- Highways – there were several broken light columns in Flitwick (49).
- Holiday Activities & Food Programme (HAF) – The Town Council was frustrated with CBC's approach to providing holiday activities for Flitwick via the HAF programme. No activities were being delivered in Flitwick or Ampthill, and the Leader reiterated that he did not want residents to miss out. The Leader understood CBC's reasons for having a single contractor, but whether the scheme delivered good outcomes was questionable. Cllr Adams would be sent further information.

The Chairman advised that three members of the public had attended the meeting to hear the discussions for item 12d - a planning application for land in Princess Close. Cllr Adams wished to be present for this matter.

5735. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No items.

5736. INVITED SPEAKER

No speaker.

5737. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

No items.

5738. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

- a. For Members to approve the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held, on **Tuesday 19th November 2024**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.

It was **resolved** to approve the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on Tuesday 19th November 2024 at the Rufus Centre as an accurate record.

- b. For Members to receive and consider the resolutions and recommendations of the Finance & General Purposes (GP) Committee meeting, held on **Monday 18th November 2024**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre

Members noted the resolutions of the Finance & GP Committee meeting held on Monday 18th November 2024 at the Rufus Centre.

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

Members noted the resolutions of the Community Services Committee meeting held on Tuesday 3rd December 2024 at the Rufus Centre.

Cllr Thompson asked how the amendments to the budget that were discussed at the Community Services meeting would be dealt with as these had been presented as recommendations. The RFO stated that these amendments had been incorporated into the revised budget paperwork circulated so Members would consider this under item 12c.

- d. For Members to receive and consider the resolutions and recommendations of the Business Improvement & Development Board meeting, held on **Tuesday 10th December 2024**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.

Members noted the resolutions of the Business Improvement & Development Board meeting held on Tuesday 10th December 2024 at the Rufus Centre.

5739. MATTERS ARISING

- a. Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on **Tuesday 19th November 2024**.

Cllr Thompson referred to minute number 5726h—Flitwick Village Hall Management Committee (FVHMC) Representative—and asked for an update on whether Officers could attend the meetings if Cllr Thompson was unavailable due to work commitments. The Town Clerk stated that nothing was written down about Officers attending the FVHMC meetings. Cllr Thompson commented that she would need to send apologies for the January meeting.

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

5740. OUTSIDE BODIES

No items.

5741. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

a. Flitwick Scout Group Extension Plan

The Chairman thanked the Scout Group representatives for attending. He requested that the Scouts representatives speak first, and then questions from Members would come via the Chairman.

Darren Reeve (DR), Scout Representative, presented background statistical data about the group. He advised the following information:

- Plans included a new building within the leased land.
- Young people had planted boundary hedging as agreed.
- The current Scouts building needed refurbishment.
- The new building could be stand-alone, allowing the group to bring in more young people from the waiting list without disrupting activities.
- The current building could be used for a meeting room and storage.

Cllr Blazeby advised that he was confused about how the proposed 2022 plans for an extension had changed to become a new building. He also did not understand that the paperwork circulated detailed that the current building was in its 'end of life'; however, the verbal update stated that there were plans for refurbishment.

Jonathan Smith (JR), Scouts Representative, advised that the project had moved on since the 2022 discussions. He responded as follows:

- Previously, the group worked with free resources, and an architect had produced a possible extension plan.
- Once the group engaged with builders about the plans, the builders advised not to proceed with this due to the age of the current building, level issues on site, and the fact that it would be more cost-effective to have a new building.
- A large building company were providing free services, and they were prepared to take the Scouts through planning and coordinating suppliers.
- Builders had suggested taking the storage area off the back of the current building, which was not compliant, and having a smaller building for storage and a meeting room.
- This was a multi-year plan.

Cllr Blazeby did not feel that the Scouts had submitted enough written details about their new plans to incorporate a timeline, how it would be funded, the plans for the existing building, etc., other than verbal assurance. He reinforced that their building was on Council-owned land, and no ground rent was taken.

JS apologised if Members felt taken aback by the change of direction but explained that written details would be part of the planning process. He explained that the Council's agreement would be sought at each step but requested the Council's initial approval in principle for this outline plan.

Cllr Blazeby disputed that the Scouts had sent sufficient financial details to support the new building plans. JS explained that the Scouts' complete set of accounts had been provided, and quotations for a new roof and flooring could be circulated.

Cllr Snape commented that it would be productive for the Scouts and some Members to have an offline discussion. He advised that the Council was keen to ensure that the frontage of any development would be attractive and in keeping with the street scene. Cllr Snape believed that this was an opportunity to raise the quality of that corner of Station Road, but he was unsure, from the plans provided, what this would look like. Cllr Snape advised that the Council remained set on not fencing in amenity land for individual groups, and he wanted the offline discussion to look at this as well.

JS explained that the new plans would not mean that activity land was fenced because the building would be in the leased space. The Scouts were happy to provide more details about the proposal.

Cllr Toinko believed the new proposal was larger than the previous extension plans and questioned the grassed areas. JS advised that the Scouts needed access to one of the areas mentioned.

JS mentioned the Scout liabilities that were included in the signed lease.

JS informed the Council about the group's commitment to social value and hardship policy, noting that 20% of the young people had additional needs.

It was agreed that Cllr Snape should meet with the Scouts representatives to re-present the proposals for a decision at the January meeting.

Action: Cllr Snape

JS/DR/Cllr Snape left the meeting at 20:38.

The Chairman proposed that the Council consider the response to the land north of 1 Princess Close.

b. CB/24/02687/FULL – Land North of 1, Princess Close, Flitwick

Cllr Hodges, Chairman of the Planning Improvement Working Group (PIWG), explained how the Council fulfilled its role as a consultee in the planning process. He mentioned that this plan had been referred to the Full Council for a decision due to its contentious nature.

Cllr Hodges shared his screen to show the site on Google Maps.

Cllr Snape re-entered the meeting at 20:45.

The PIWG had drafted an objection based on points that the planning guidance stated could be 'reasonable objections.' These included the permanent loss of amenity land, the loss of access to light for neighbouring properties, the negative impact it would have on residents' privacy, and the fact that the proposed dwelling would overlook other properties.

A resident who had attended the meeting lived in one of the properties next to the site. She explained to the Council that the windows on her property, as shown on the screen via Google Maps, were the only windows since the house had been designed that way, given that the other side faced Kings Road.

Cllr Earles asked if the proposed dwelling would have a garden, and she was informed that it would not.

Cllr Wilsmore explained that when a developer goes bankrupt, a liquidator's duty is to realise the assets, which is done by selling off pieces of land. Cllr Wilsmore stated that this application was very naïve and should never have been accepted by CBC planners.

Cllr Hodges asked what the Council did to make its views public once decisions were made. The Town Clerk advised that decisions on large applications were historically published as a press release, but otherwise, general decisions were published on the website.

It was **resolved** to submit the Council's objection to the planning application CB/24/02687/Full – Land North of 1 Princess Close, Flitwick, as per the PIWG recommendation circulated.

3 members of the public and Cllr Adams left the meeting at 20:51.

The Chairman proposed that the meeting move to the exempt section.

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

5742 Exempt Items

a. Confidential Reports

The Confidential Report from Tuesday 19th November Town Council meeting was noted.

b. Land at Steppingley Road

It was **resolved** to accept the preferred bidder's offer.

It was **resolved** to delegate authority to the Town Clerk to work with Members to finalise the press release, which would be issued on a date yet to be decided.

It was **resolved** to delegate authority to the Town Clerk to review the FAQs and publish them at an appropriate time.

c. Station Road

It was **resolved** to appoint the contractor for the main works at 3 Station Road.

It was **resolved** to delegate authority to the Town Clerk (in consultation with the Leader) for value engineering decisions relating to the refurbishment to keep in line with the programme.

The meeting re-entered the public section at 21:25.

5741 cont.

c. Draft Budget 2025-26

The RFO explained that this was the final opportunity for Members to scrutinise the draft budget for 2025-26. She advised that the presented document included all previous decisions from Committee meetings and that the Finance & GP Committee would have final scrutiny on 14th January before Members considered the proposed budget in January at Full Council.

Precept demonstrations had been circulated based on the revenue budget work prepared to date. This page showed multiple Precept indicators with Band D calculations, Capital Fund provisions and cost per month (and per annum) for Flitwick residents.

Members made no amendments to the budget circulated.

d. Planning Improvement Working Group – Membership

It was **resolved** to elect Alyson Porthouse-Reick, Andy Smith and Nigel Brook to the PIWG.

e. Community Services Committee Vacancy

It was **resolved** to elect Cllr Harald to the Community Services Committee.

f. HR Committee Vacancy

Cllr Harald advised that he was interested in being on the HR Committee but was a member of the Appeals Committee and could not be on both Committees.

It was **resolved** to elect Cllr Harald to the HR Committee and for him to resign from the Appeals Committee.

g. Central Bedfordshire Local Plan – Call for Sites

It was **resolved** to delegate responsibility for this item to the PIWG, with the Town Clerk making final decisions.

h. Virement

It was **resolved** to approve the virement suggested to move £4,000 from the Staff Courses & Training budget (4047/422) to Renovation Costs 24/25 (4131/106).

5743. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

a. Finance Reports

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

b. Chat to a Councillor Sessions

Cllr Blazeby commented that several Council projects were happening, such as the refurbishment of 3 Station Road and the Nature Park. Due to this, he felt that residents would appreciate some 'Chat to a Councillor' sessions. He asked if Members could volunteer their time on the dates listed on the agenda.

Cllr Blazeby could attend on 10th and 17th January at the Village Hall.

Cllr Snape suggested another date could be held at the Rufus Centre one evening, and Members may get the opportunity to have a stand at Tesco. This would attract different people to those who attended the market on Fridays.

Cllr Toinko suggested linking a session to when the SHARE group operated at the Rufus Centre. Another Member thought the library would be a suitable venue for the sessions.

Members agreed to advise the Town Clerk if they could attend any dates.

5744. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No items.

The meeting closed 21:42.

Signed (Chairman)