

FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of the 411th Meeting of Flitwick Town Council held on 17th March 2020
at the Rufus Centre

Present: Cllr J Dann (Chairman)
Cllrs K Badham I Blazeby P Dodds M Halligan J Roberts
R Shaw A Snape D Toinko

Also present: CBCllr C Gomm

In attendance: Acting Town Clerk Rufus Centre Manager Amenities Officer

Apologies for absence received: Cllrs R Coleman P Earles A Lutley
G Mackey M Platt P Thompson
M Williams

To receive a presentation from representatives at Flitwick Cricket Club regarding expansion and redevelopment plans

This item was postponed for a future meeting.

To elect a Chairman

As both the Chairman and Vice Chairman had submitted apologies, Members were advised to elect a Chairman. It was proposed and seconded to nominate Cllr Dann to Chair the meeting. There being no further nominations, Cllr Dann was elected as Chairman (vote: all in favour).

The Chairman suggested discussion on the important and crucial agenda items prior to other matters (if time allowed) and this was agreed.

Open Forum - no items.

Reports from Central Bedfordshire Members

1. CBCllr Gomm advised that additional funding had been made available through the Access for All Scheme to provide step free access at Flitwick Station. CBC were awaiting timescales for the project to be delivered.
2. Cllr Blazeby asked if the delivery would be coordinated with the planned transport interchange. CBCllr Gomm commented that it was not yet known where the step free access would go, which was a decision for CBC Project Managers. CBCllr Gomm's view was that the interchange project was planned for the following year however step free access was not likely to start at the same time. Cllr Blazeby asked if the interchange project was likely to be delayed and CBCllr Gomm commented that he would request for this not to be the case.

4943 **To note any Declarations of Interest relating to items on the agenda**
There were no Declarations of Interest.

4944 **Town Mayor's Announcements**
There were no Town Mayor's Announcements.

4945 **To note the circulated Clerk's Report**
This item was deferred.

FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of the 411th Meeting of Flitwick Town Council held on 17th March 2020
at the Rufus Centre

- 4946 **To confirm and adopt the Minutes of the 410th meeting of Flitwick Town Council held on 18th February 2020**

This item was deferred.

- 4947 **To confirm and adopt the Minutes of the 335th meeting of the Planning Committee held on 20th February 2020**

This item was deferred.

- 4948 **To confirm and adopt the Minutes of the 57th meeting of the Community Services Committee held on 3rd March 2020**

It was proposed, seconded and agreed to **Resolve** that the Minutes of the 57th meeting of the Community Services Committee held on 3rd March 2020 having previously been circulated be taken as read, signed and adopted as a true record.

- 4949 **To confirm and adopt the Minutes of the 336th meeting of the Planning Committee held on 12th March 2020**

This item was deferred.

- 4950 **To confirm and adopt the Minutes of the 104th meeting of the Business Services Committee held on 12th March 2020**

It was proposed, seconded and agreed to **Resolve** that the Minutes of the 104th meeting of the Business Services Committee held on 12th March 2020 having previously been circulated be taken as read, signed and adopted as a true record.

- 4951 **To fill the current vacancy on the Community Services Committee**

This item was deferred.

- 4952 **To elect Town Council signatories**

Members were advised that more signatories were required. Members were informed that it was only in exceptional/emergency circumstances that individual cheques were required to be signed and that usually the Finance Office prepared several cheques to be signed at once. After a brief discussion, four Members agreed to be signatories.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed to **Resolve**
for the following Members to be elected as Town
Council signatories: Cllrs Toinko, Badham, Snape
and Blazeby.

- 4953 **To agree the updated Social Media Policy**

This item was deferred.

- 4954 **Coronavirus discussion**

- (i) Members were informed that there were many aspects to discuss in relation to Council operations following the sudden widespread nature of coronavirus. Staff had submitted questions however the policy provided by the Council's outsourced HR company had answered all of these and subsequently there was not a need for Members to discuss these.

FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of the 411th Meeting of Flitwick Town Council held on 17th March 2020
at the Rufus Centre

- (ii) Cllr Snape advised that he had been looking at business continuity and through discussions with relevant Officers, there were some Officers that could work from home whereas others (e.g. CSA's, Grounds Team) could not.
- (ii) Cllr Dann asked about sick notes from medical professionals and he was advised by the Rufus Centre Manager that these were not currently being issued since testing was not often taking place, with individuals being asked to self-isolate if required.
- (iii) Members asked what was in employment contracts with regards to unpaid leave. The Officers present did not have this information to hand but agreed to find out. Cllr Blazeby commented that this was a route that other businesses were utilising to avoid redundancies.
- (iv) Cllr Snape advised that the Business Continuity Plan was not up to date, and that the Council did not have the office equipment required to facilitate staff working from home. Senior, core staff would be prioritised and equipment, such as appropriate laptops, would be purchased. That day it had proven difficult to purchase laptops however discussions had been held with the Council's IT provider and it had been planned to install Microsoft Teams. Cllr Snape added that it could result in some Officers taking desktops home to be able to work. There would be a tactical plan in order to then facilitate other remaining staff to work from home if their jobs allowed.
- (v) The Acting Town Clerk suggested the cancellation of community events and regular activities until the end of May. Some Members felt that the Easter Egg Hunt could take place as it was outdoors and would provide some happiness in a challenging time, however others disagreed. It was decided that some events could be postponed rather than cancelled and Cllr Blazeby suggested ticket income could be used for the alternative dates instead of issuing refunds.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed to
Resolve to cancel all community events and
regular activities until the end of May with the
intention of reviewing the situation mid-May. The
Annual Town Meeting would be postponed.
(Vote: 8 in favour, 1 abstention)

- (vi) The Rufus Centre Manager advised that there was a wedding booking for the coming weekend (55 guests). Staff would take necessary precautions, such as wearing gloves and practice social distance. Cllr Dodds was against the function going ahead since the Government advice was to cancel social gatherings to protect the vulnerable people. It was agreed that guests over the age of 70 should be asked not to attend the wedding. Cllr Dann commented that he did not think the wedding that weekend should be cancelled. Cllr Badham asked what would happen if there was not enough staff to work and it was agreed that the wedding would be cancelled if there was insufficient staff for the event. The Rufus Centre Manager advised that at present, enough staff were intending to work.

FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL
**Minutes of the 411th Meeting of Flitwick Town Council held on 17th March 2020
at the Rufus Centre**

- (vii) Members were advised that there was another wedding booked for the end of May and the Rufus Centre Manager would be contacting the customer the following day to discuss the situation. Cllr Blazeby commented that Registrars may not be willing to facilitate marriages.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed to
Resolve to continue with the wedding planned for the upcoming weekend as long as there was sufficient and safe staffing but the bride and groom would be asked to suggest that vulnerable people should not attend.

(Vote: 7 in favour, 1 against, 1 abstention)

- (viii) The Rufus Centre Manager advised that the onset of the coronavirus had led to 42 cancellations and of those, 27 were non charity bookings. Members were informed that there did not seem to be a pattern for which bookings were remaining and which were being cancelled. Cllr Dodds stated that he believed all meetings should be cancelled and that customers should not lose deposits. The Rufus Centre Manager advised that customers were not losing deposits if the cancellations related to the coronavirus and that staff were being appropriately amenable. Bookings would be monitored daily based on Government guidelines.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed to
Resolve to cancel all commercial bookings for the Rufus Centre until the end of May.

(Vote not carried: 4 in favour, 5 against)

- (ix) Members discussed the likeliness of the coronavirus affecting more people in the coming months and how this would impact on Council and Committee meetings. The Acting Town Clerk advised that other local Councils had suspended Committee meetings for the time being and planned to only discuss essential business at Town Council meetings. The Members thought suspending Committee meetings was appropriate however many commented on the possible inability to get a quorum of 9 Members to be able to hold a Town Council meeting.
- (iix) Cllr Snape advised that current Standing Orders mentioned the requirement of no fewer than 9 Members being present for Town Council quorums. Members were informed that they could meet in fewer numbers to discuss emergency matters not under the title of the Town Council meetings, however Cllr Badham explained that a formal Resolution would be required within an agenda item to reduce the quorum officially. He added that it was not a statutory requirement for Town Council meetings to be held every month.
- (iiix) A discussion took place regarding the need to delegate powers to appropriate Senior Officers for the Council's operations and the Rufus Centre business to continue whilst Town Council meetings were not being held. Officers needed to make decisions that would usually be for Members. Members offered to be available by email and telephone should Officers require assistance with formulating decisions. The Rufus Centre Manager advised that he would be

FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL
**Minutes of the 411th Meeting of Flitwick Town Council held on 17th March 2020
at the Rufus Centre**

comfortable making decisions independently following any subsequent Government advice.

- (xiv) Cllr Dodds stated that he was appalled that the Council would continue to take money for commercial events, rather than looking at health impacts on of individuals attending the events, staff and residents. The Chairman responded by stating that this decision had not been made based on finances, no staff would be made to work, and it was about leaving the decision to attend in the hands of individuals. Cllr Blazeby advised that it had been very clear that the decision had not been commercially motivated and that safe staffing and flexibility for customers was essential. Cllr Toinko commented that the Rufus Centre may be needed as a venue space to assist with community spirit initiatives and staff would always be looked after. He added that tenants would not be asked to leave the premises either under the current Government advice. Cllr Dodds responded by stating that the Village Hall had stopped operating and he believed the Rufus Centre should.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed to
Resolve for:

1. Jon Barkat to have delegated powers to make all decisions relating to the running of the Rufus Centre which ordinarily would be Council decisions. No new bookings would be taken for the next month. If the Rufus Centre Manager was not available, decisions would be made by Stephanie Stanley. These delegated powers would be in place until the effects of the coronavirus pandemic had ceased.

(Vote: 8 in favour, 1 abstention)

2. Stephanie Stanley to have full delegated powers to make all decisions relating to the running of Council services and operations which ordinarily would be Council decisions until such a time that the new Town Clerk had been in post for 6 months. These delegated powers would be in place until the effects of the coronavirus pandemic had ceased.

(Vote: 8 in favour, 1 abstention)

- (xv) The Acting Town Clerk, Rufus Centre Manager and RFO & HR Officer would send Members weekly email updates on any decisions made. Cllr Dodds requested the Acting Town Clerk not to make decisions independently on potential developments in the area and major project decisions. The Acting Town Clerk advised that she had worked for the Town Council for a long time and was aware of what type of decisions would need consultation with the Members. She added that if there was a difference in opinion between Members during any consultations and a final decision was required, she would be happy to make these decisions if forced to. It was agreed that for now, a lot of projects would be on hold anyway.

FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL
**Minutes of the 411th Meeting of Flitwick Town Council held on 17th March 2020
at the Rufus Centre**

- (xvi) Members were advised that a communications plan was needed to inform residents about the decisions. After a discussion, it was agreed to promote the fact that events would hopefully be postponed rather than cancelled and to emphasise the importance of staff and residents' safety. Cllr Dann suggested the creation of a simple leaflet for the Council to produce and circulate in order to promote the Town Council as a point of contact for those who did not know where to turn. Staff could then signpost people in the direction of accredited organisations (e.g. Helping Hands and the Good Neighbour Scheme), who would be DBS checked. It was agreed for the Acting Town Clerk to manage the Council's involvement in helping voluntary organisations to assist the community during the crisis.
- (xvii) The Amenities Officer advised that two burials were due to take place that week. Guidance would be sought from relevant organisations and enquiries on burials would be dealt with on a case by case basis in liaison with the Acting Town Clerk.
- (xviii) The Amenities Officer informed Members that that 4YP had suspended their youth sessions until after the Easter break. 4YP had communicated that they hoped to conduct detached sessions starting the following week as there could be a rise in anti-social behaviour.
- (xix) Cllr Blazeby supported delaying the Annual Town Meeting and talked about the current legal requirement to hold the meeting prior to June. Members were informed that NALC had been lobbying parliament in order to ask the Government to be flexible with this law due to the coronavirus outbreak.
- (xx) Cllr Badham questioned what would happen for the Annual Meeting of the Council in May where Members were due to be elected in senior roles, e.g. the Town Mayor. He advised that a meeting would be required and he believed this to be covered in legislation. The Acting Town Clerk would investigate this and report back to Members with the information.
- (xxi) The Chairman asked CBCllr Gomm to approach CBC's Emergency Planning Team to ask them to engage with the Acting Town Clerk regarding the response to the coronavirus outbreak.

4955 Questions

There were no questions.

Confidential Section

In accordance with Section 1 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings Act 1960) the public and press to be excluded for item 16 & 17 in view of the confidential nature of the information to be discussed relating to financial and contractual negotiations and questions.

4956 Projects Update

This item was deferred.

4957 Personnel Panel

FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL
**Minutes of the 411th Meeting of Flitwick Town Council held on 17th March 2020
at the Rufus Centre**

i) To note the recommendation from the Personnel Panel for the appointment of Town Clerk

Members noted the recommendation from the Personnel Panel and were advised that Rob McGregor would be appointed as the new Town Clerk.

ii) To note the Personnel Panel Report

This item was deferred.

4958 Questions

There were no questions.

The meeting closed at 9.18pm.

Signed
(Chairman)