

FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held at Flitwick Library on 9th April 2019

Present: 10 Flitwick Town Councillors,
Acting Town Clerk, Interim Town Clerk & Assistant Town Clerk
CBCllrs F Chapman, C Gomm & A Turner
PCC Katherine Holloway, PC Aaron Dagley & OPPC/Chris Handley
24 Residents

1. Welcome by the Town Mayor

The Town Mayor, Cllr Mackey, welcomed everyone and introduced PCC Katherine Holloway to give her report:

Katherine Holloway (KH) introduced herself and advised that she will leave documents with details of what she has responsibility for and what she does not. The only complaints she deals with are those relating to the Chief Constable. Her area has nearly 70,000 residents with good transport links including Luton Airport but this increases the issue of the transport of drugs, weapons and people.

The drug gangs use children (clean skins) which will pass under the police radar and cuckooing, where an address is taken over of a vulnerable person and one of these addresses have been closed this week in Flitwick.

KH has no leeway and the policing has to be within her budget. She is looking at every area to ensure economy and the best uses of staff and savings to come within budget.

KH stands shoulder to shoulder with the Chief Constable and they are fully aware of the issues which are the concern of residents including anti-social behaviour. They have introduced a Neighbourhood Intervention Team, which will be brought in to assist with a specific problem in an area. They are aware of the demand for more visible constables but there is also the need to have undercover constables.

KH wants to promote the signpostforbedfordshire.com website to support victims of crime which started on the 1st April last year, which is backed by a call centre and they have dealt with 34,000 actions in the first year. She is also setting up a second part to support ex-offenders to prevent further victims of crime and to support them so that they do not offend again. The ex-offenders are being offered help before they leave prison and afterwards to get them back into work and housing.

i. A resident asked if there would be a change with the introductions of a new Chief Constable. KH said that the previous Chief Constable had been working on his legacy and new Chief Constable will continue to be committed to community policing, from ground level and concentrating on those individuals who cause the issues. They will have commitment to represent the whole of the community and encouraging employment of staff who can speak languages as this makes us all safer. Also to take residents' concerns seriously including those in rural areas with issues including hare coursing and theft of agricultural machinery. She will be working with the new Chief Constable to support them and all the staff.

ii. A resident asked what is being done about the people walking around at night trying to open car doors. They have previously informed and provided the police with CCTV images but have not had any feedback. KH said she does not have the staff to give individual feedback and within 18 months there will be a digital based scheme to enable downloading of CCTV. KH suggested that the resident speak with the PC Dagley after the meeting. They have 'trap' vehicles with cameras inside to enable them to catch thieves but she continues to encourage everyone not to leave valuables in their vehicles.

iii. A resident asked how KH maintains motivation within the force when criminals get away with lenient sentences. KH replied that they have no say with regards to sentences but do have duty of care to the officers. She recognises the need to keep up morale and to make sure that every officer is being listened to.

KH encouraged everyone to follow the force on twitter to see what they are doing. Any further questions can be sent to the Town Council to be forwarded onto her for a response. Katherine Holloway left the meeting at this time.

Signed  Dated 16/4/19
Chairmen

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2. Apologies for absence received

Apologies were received from Cllrs Feerick, Sheehan and Quantrill

3. To confirm and adopt the minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on the 10th April 2018

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on the 10th April 2018 were adopted and agreed

4. To receive reports from the Chairmen of the following and questions from the meeting when the reports have been read

A. Annual Report (presented by the Town Mayor)

'May you live in interesting times'. This allegedly Chinese curse which wishes the recipient a life of uncertainty and disorder seems to be very unfortunately relevant in the situation our Country finds it's self in at this time. Whilst our Nation's interesting times seem to command the headlines, Flitwick has also experienced a year of change and upheaval.


As seems regular, the end of our term as Councillors brings challenges in the continuity we strive to provide to the town. Despite the potential impermanence that the electoral cycle generates, we are supremely fortunate to have a team of staff at Flitwick Town Council who are the envy of our neighbours.

Residents will, no doubt, be aware that our long serving and capable Town Clerk, Carol Carter, retired toward the end of last year. This has left a potentially large gap in our team. However, I am delighted to report that our team has risen to the challenge and continue to perform over and above the call of duty to ensure our Town is as efficiently and professionally run as ever. In Particular, I would like to thank Stephanie James who has taken on the role of Acting Town Clerk and Emma Harris who has become the permanent Responsible Financial Officer. Whilst all the team have played their part, I must stress that Stephanie and Emma have been particularly invaluable to our organisation. Their expertise and hard work has bought us valuable time to recruit the right person to fill the important role as our next permanent Town Clerk.

In addition to our permanent team we have also seen some changes in the Councillors this year. Following the resignation of Vicky Owens, we were pleased to welcome Cllr Dan Toinko. Latterly, we have also lost former Councillors Mark Waites, Keith Badham and Adam Larkins. Due to the proximity of the election it was not required that we fill these seats through election or co-option. I would like to take the opportunity to thanks all those former Councillors who have moved on. Their contribution was valued and appreciated.

Over the last year we have also kept busy with a large number of projects. No doubt my colleague Chairmen will report on the full activity of their respective committees. However, the headline activities of the last year are as follows:

1. The Council has been pleased to note progress in the Station Redevelopment. Whilst this never progresses quite as fast as we would like, we are confident that this project is moving forward.
2. The progress of the new Burial Ground and delivery of the Country Park has been somewhat disappointing. Changes to Environment Agency rules has meant that we have had to obtain further reports and will need to re-apply for planning permission towards the end of May. We are, however, confident that the Burial Ground will be ready to take over as the current facilities cease operation.
3. We were very disappointed to receive a planning application to place a large number of houses on the site off Trafalgar Drive / Canterbury Road. The Council were very pleased to see a packed Planning meeting where we objected to this speculative application. It is always a pleasure to see such a well-orchestrated public campaign to protect our Town from these types of applications.
4. The Council has also commented on the proposed Crematorium. This application was also not supported.

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5. As a background to the above application, the Council has also highlighted the continued concern that the infrastructure of our Town has clearly not kept up with the growth of Flitwick.
 - a. We have actively engaged with Bedfordshire Police to make known our issues around crime and community policing.
 - b. We hosted a public meeting with Flitwick Surgery, Bedfordshire CCG and Healthwatch to address residents very real concerns with health provision in Flitwick.
6. We continue to press for the accumulated Section 106 Developer contributions, levied to mitigate the effects of development, to be spent in Town.

As you can clearly see, in addition to these larger, ongoing projects, the Council continues to offer a significant number of life enhancing clubs, programmes and events. We are always pleased to see the effect of these in our community. It is clear that Flitwick continues to be a vibrant and welcoming place to live with a community spirit so lacking in many other places.

When noting these achievements, we must also note the finances of the Council. Flitwick continues to benefit from the operation of the Rufus Centre. Its impact on our budget is considerable. Not only is the Rufus Centre the home of Flitwick Town Council but it is a fantastic venue for both community use and commercial activity.

As a result of the developments adjacent to the Rufus Centre, we have seen some difficulty with noise from our normal operations. We have undertaken significant work to install physical noise dampening measures. Fortunately, in recognition of failures in the planning process, Central Bedfordshire Council have paid for these works. We have additionally implemented a robust noise attenuation procedure in order to remain good neighbours.

As a result of excellent corporate and commercial management we are pleased that our finances are in good health. My Precept report earlier this year highlighted the detail of our now adopted budget for 2019/20. We were pleased to keep our Precept rise to an absolute minimum which is below the rate of inflation.

All that remains is to thank residents, colleague Councillors and our staff for the support they have given me as Mayor during this year. It is always an enormous honour to serve my community and see it thrive in such a fantastic way.

No questions raised

B. Corporate Services Committee (presented by the Town Mayor)

Corporate Services Report 2018/19

As with so many other organisations, last years activity in the Corporate Services Committee saw considerable activity in ensuring the Council's GDPR policies and practices remain robust. We were pleased to note the results of audits by PNC, our GDPR consultants indicated excellent understanding and working practices within the Council.

Our team have attended an in-depth training on the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulations. Whilst the requirements of this subject are very demanding and complex indeed, I am confident that we are in a safe and secure state which presents a very low risk to the Council.

Members were also excited to hear about the ongoing work to create the Flit Valley Walk. The Acting Town Clerk has put in a considerable amount of work on the project. We are further pleased to see community engagement in the form of a group of volunteers working on stabling this welcome addition to our green space. I would encourage residents to walk the trail. There are some lovely views and a profusion wildlife along the route. It is anticipated for the walk to be officially launched this summer.

Signed Dated
Chairmen

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As both members and staff will tell you, the administration of the Council can be a difficult job. Keeping track of the decisions of the Council is difficult for any Council but for a Council as active as Flitwick this is a real challenge. Members have been considering changes to the way our decisions are logged. We are due to implement a new Action Log to keep the implementation of our decisions transparent and ensure that the follow through is improved. I would like to thank Cllr Blazeby for his work on this project.

As we are coming to the end of our term, the committee has considered a number of different ways to encourage residents to put themselves forward as Councillors. Representing your community is a very rewarding and life enhancing undertaking. We are keen to communicate this to our neighbours. In addition to this we have also discussed inductions for new Councillors to help those recently elected be as effective as possible.

The general communication strategy of the Council is always under review. We are keen to keep our websites and other communication media as up to date and relevant as possible. Residents will continue to see an evolution of both the Rufus Centre and Council websites over the next year.

I continue to be confident that the Council's Corporate Governance is strong. Whether it be our Business Continuity Plan, Standing Orders, Policies and Procedures or Health and Safety, the Corporate Services Committee is committed to ongoing review and improvement. I can safely say that we remain stable, secure and in good order.

i. A resident asked where the Flit Valley Walk would be. The Acting Town Clerk advised that there would be a map and leaflet available for the launch in the summer.

C. Community Services Committee (presented by Cllr J. Dann)

I only recently took over as Chair and credit is due to the previous Chair, former Councillor Keith Badham. I would like to also thank the other members of the Committee, including the current Vice Chair, Mick Sheehan, who has made a valuable contribution to several important projects.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the hardworking staff that service the Committee and are vital to the many services and projects which fall under the remit of this committee.

Your Community Services Committee and its associated panels look after those aspects of Flitwick which make our lives more colourful and enjoyable, from the allotments and some of the planting of flowers in communal areas, to the Christmas lights, the play areas, the green spaces like Manor Park, and the big community events like our Carnival, the Car Show, and the many community events held at the Rufus Centre, including the lunch club, Films@Flitwick, and the dance events.

None of these would happen were it not for the dedication of the staff and also of many volunteers.

You may have noticed that we are asking for volunteers to help us make a success of the Carnival on 8th June. If you can help, there are plenty of jobs to do throughout the day.

At the Town Meeting, you will be able to look at our plans for the refurbishment of the playground on the Millennium Park- do make sure you take a look.

In the coming year, you will also notice new planters in areas of our town. With these, and with any aspects of community life, we are always pleased to receive your comments and suggestions, so do keep in touch, look at our FaceBook page, the Flitwick papers and our other communications.

i. A resident asked where they can view the plans for the Market Towns regeneration. They were advised that these were available on the CBC website.

ii. A resident asked if the Market Towns regeneration will ever be completed. They were advised that it was due to start in June this year and the delay had been with issues CBC had had with the contractor.

Signed Dated
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- ii. A resident raised an issue regarding rubbish build up in the Millennium Park especially after a summer weekend and if a previous suggestion of chicken wire on the fence to prevent rubbish blowing across the road was going to be put in place. They were advised that there is litter picking by staff every day except Sundays and signs have gone up about not driving on the grass and that music is not allowed. The Town Council are currently investigating the installation of CCTV cameras in the area.

D. Planning Committee (presented by Cllr J. Dann on behalf of Cllr Sheehan)

The Planning committee is made up from 5 Councillors and is chaired by Mick Sheehan. We are an advisory body to Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) and provide comments to planning applications.

In the period up to 01/04/2019 Flitwick Town Council (FTC) received over 105 applications for consideration.

Some of which have been controversial and have brought some great discussion and feedback from you, our local residents. These have included the proposed CBC crematorium, The Trafalgar Drive Development to name but a few in which, saw over 70 residents attending.

The Committee meets every 3 weeks and we actively encourage members of the public to attend to help better reflect the wider view of the residents to a particular development or planning proposal.

Throughout 2018/2019 the committee have continued to push forward with CBC to get further clarity regarding the Market Town (including the Barclays Bank frontage) and Railway Station Regeneration schemes.

The market towns related highways scheme will look to be delivered early summer 2019.

It is exciting to note that these schemes will see the creation of Piazza area outside of Barclay Bank and pedestrianization of Kings Road.

As a Committee we share the concern of the town's residents with regard to the lack of infrastructure such as, schools, recreational facilities, medical provision, parking and traffic.

The committee work closely with our CBC Ward councillors and members of CBC Council to ensure that we are getting the best understanding of submitted planning applications.

No questions raised

E. Business Services Committee (presented by Cllr Blazeby)

As it's the first time I have had the opportunity to Chair this particular Committee, I would like to thank my fellow Councillors and Committee members over the course of the year : Councillors Lutley, Roberts, Thompson, Toinko and Williams, as well as bit-part player Councillor Badham and of course Mayor Mackey.

They generally all turned up to our regular monthly meetings in good humour and I hope we managed to look afresh at the committees remit and its associated activities. I'd also like to thank the Council staff who marshalled our machinations into readable minutes and sensible and legal decisions.

For those unfamiliar with the structures and processes of the Town Council, the Business Services Committee is primarily involved with managing the business activity of the Rufus Centre, as well as overseeing the financial activity management of the Councils assets.

Over the last 12 months our aim was to make 'common-sense' decisions, in order to provide 'value-for-money' services and events for the people of Flitwick.

Signed  Dated 16/04/19.
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The following have also been done:

- Revised earmarked reserves
- Full maintenance report for the Rufus Centre
- Launch of the new Rufus Centre website
- New Rufus Centre Manager starting in May
- Rufus Centre solar panels were turned on in early September last year

No questions raised

6. To receive written reports from the Council's representatives on outside bodies

No questions raised following the issue of the written reports

7. To receive reports from Central Bedfordshire Councillors

We have again to report that the past year has been challenging financially with constraints affecting all CBC activities.

Extra spending is needed in the particular areas of adult & children's services where there has been, and will continue to be, growing demand in helping our most vulnerable residents.

For the financial year 2019/20 the CBC element of the rise in Council Tax rise has been kept down to just 1%. As a result of some £15m of savings made over the past year it does mean that CBC is still able to invest more in key areas.

This is markedly different to some of our neighbouring authorities who not only have substantially higher rises but also planned more cuts to their services.

The popularity of the new leisure centre has exceeded expectations and extra funding has been secured to extend & improve some facilities in keeping with customer demand.

A planning application has been made for a new crematorium to be located on land off Fordfield Road in neighbouring Steppingley parish which will provide much needed extra capability for Central Bedfordshire residents.

There is also a planning application for a mixed development of properties for the over 55s and mini Care-Village comprising both extra care and residential care on the old leisure centre site, which has been an eyesore for a long while now.

The privately built & run 75 bed residential care home by 101 Garage will also be opening shortly.

Unfortunately the Station Area regeneration scheme proposed by CBC & its partners Network Rail & Govia, has seen slow progress which is extremely disappointing. Work does continue, however, on finding a scheme financially acceptable to all parties involved that presents a sustainable future.

We are hopeful that the transport interchange element of the scheme will be progressed independently of this though and be bought forward to improve access.

We continue to have regular meetings with both Network Rail & Govia. The feelings and absolute frustrations of passengers following the disastrous new timetabling last May were made absolutely clear to their representatives.

There have been considerable improvements overall, except for the weekend frequency which itself should see schedule improvements from May this year.

The long-awaited and overdue new heated waiting room on platform 1 is finally planned for delivery this Spring and the very much needed step-free access has been given urgent priority by Network Rail.

We will continue to press them for the earliest possible start date.

The Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire has been submitted to Central Government and it is expected their Planning Inspector will commence his work in May.

i. A resident asked about the school crossing patrol and whether the suggestion of a pelican crossing had been looked into. This will be raised with the school safety officer.

ii. A resident questioned why two traffic signs which were clearly not working properly and questioned the location. The CBCllrs were aware of the issue.

Signed  Dated 16/4/19
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iii. A resident asked what the justification was for the speed humps when there was no evidence of speeding, air pollution and only one accident which was not related to speeding. CBCllrs had been informed by CBC highways that they were needed.

iv. A resident asked if the station regeneration scheme was actually going to happen. The CBCllrs acknowledged that it had been discussed for 30 years and it was going to happen. The car parking had to be retained but the majority of the land is now owned by CBC and this makes the delivery of the scheme easier to deliver.

v. A resident asked following the Town Council Planning meeting where the crematorium had been objected to, had the CBCllrs taken the objections back to CBC planning. CBCllrs confirmed that they had.

8. To note accounts of the Flitwick Combined Charities

The accounts were noted.

9. To deal with any other business

A resident wanted to express their thanks to the reception staff at Flitwick Town Council as they were always very helpful.

Update on Crime in Flitwick from PC Aaron Dagley

PC Dagley (AD) is based in Biggleswade but lives in Flitwick. He covers 14 towns and villages in the area. If anyone wants to visit the station, please call first to arrange a visit.

His role involves reassuring victims of crime, investigating all disputes and issuing warrants. He investigates crime and supports other crime investigations. He is in contact with local businesses, voluntary and charity groups and supports groups such as street watch and neighbourhood watch. He works with Town and Parish Councils.


AD will be doing more community surgeries including pop up surgeries in the summer including crime prevention events and giving advice.

There is a survey available for the public to have their say and what they want prioritised. They are looking for special constables which is very rewarding voluntary role.

AD is addressing those who do the most harm by issuing anti-social behaviour notices, getting the parents onside with the youth anti-social behaviour, supporting vulnerable people, stop and search where needed and working in partnership with the CBC.

No questions raised.

The meeting closed at 9.38pm

Signed  Dated 16/4/19
Chairmen