

Flitwick Town Council Strategy 2021 -2025

Date Adopted:

1. Introduction

This document sets out the broad vision and ethos of Flitwick Town Council. This vision sits within both the wider and the local context. It outlines where we want to get to and how we should get there.

It aims to provide the framework within which the community, other councils, the voluntary sector, and businesses can engage with Flitwick Town Council over the next four years. It aims to provide continuity across election periods to ensure a stable, supported, and deliverable plan.

This strategy provides the outline from which we will develop more detailed annual delivery plans and budgets, allowing us to measure progress and be accountable, while being flexible enough to seize new opportunities as they arise.

Our strategy will be a living document that will be reviewed annually and developed through the four years it covers and will evolve depending on the circumstances around us.

Section 2: Explains our 'Vision' for Flitwick and the Town Councils' 'Mission' on how we will go about achieving it.

Section 3: Sets out our philosophy as a Council and how we will bring this to life in the way that we work.

Section 4: Describes the context in which we live, both the wider picture and our more local environment.

Section 5: Identifies the main themes for our work in the next four years: the heart of our strategy and describes our plans in more detail.

Section 6: Covers how we will monitor progress towards our vision and how we will review this strategy.

FLITWICK MATTERS

2.1 Our Vision

Our Town will be vibrant and welcoming, with an inclusive and engaged community, working together to provide an improved, sustainable, and life-enhancing environment.

2.2 Our Mission

We will engage residents, organisations, and businesses to understand their needs and wishes.

We will champion equality, enhance local democracy, and encourage community involvement & cooperation.

We will manage our resources openly, effectively, and sustainably.

We will advocate and campaign for the Town, where appropriate, working with other bodies and organisations to influence beneficial development and investment in amenities and services in our local area.

3. What we will do and how we will work

There are practical limits on what we can achieve as a Town Council, with our own legal powers or resources. However, where we are able, we will act decisively to deliver services and activities to the best of our ability. Where there is greater benefit in engaging in partnership with other groups and organisations to deliver change, we will take that route. Where we cannot directly make things happen, we will use 'our voice' to try and influence those organisations in the driving seat.

We see the role of the Town Council is to support and enhance the energy and commitment of its citizens. We will enable others to be successful. We will support and champion causes that improve the Town's resilience and protect against those that erode it.

We will encourage everyone to get involved. Participation and engagement will be central to our thinking, and we will work hard to expand and improve how we do this. We will look for new ways to listen to Flitwick's Residents and Businesses and bring forward those voices that are not always heard. We will be transparent, open, and accessible, with good communication at the heart of everything that we do.

We will aim to be bold, responding to identified needs and making decisions on the basis of what we believe is best for Flitwick. We will be nimble, taking opportunities as they emerge. To do this, we will ensure our staff are empowered and that both staff and Councillors have the range of skills and experience they need to succeed.

We will run our commercial events, hospitality, and serviced office business at the Rufus Centre on a for-profit basis, aiming to generate an annual financial surplus and to provide high-quality facilities for our community. We will use all profit generated to invest in services and projects across the Town and where possible, to reduce the burden on the taxpayer.

We will practice what we preach. The Town Council will create an ethical policy to enhance our current approach. We aspire to provide our staff with a great place to work and to be a local employer of choice. We will do this by creating a culture of professionalism and respect, embracing diversity, offering development and training opportunities and recognising achievement and contribution. We will continue to pay at least the Living Wage and continue developing opportunities to employ apprentices at the Council. We will continue to support local businesses through our procurement processes wherever possible. We will work hard to minimise our own environmental impact and to support local businesses and residents to do the same.

Lastly, we are committed to ensuring that our processes, as a group of Councillors, exemplify this commitment to engagement and participation, embracing diversity and allowing debate and challenge. We want neither to stifle discussion nor bury dissent. We will work together effectively, be fair and participative and allow space for enthusiasm, learning and initiative.

4.1 The wider context

We live in changeable and unpredictable times, characterised by divisions in society exemplified by debates concerning Brexit, Climate Crisis, and the response to the current pandemic. For all our town spirit, Flitwick is intimately connected to and influenced by wider national developments that inevitably affect the wellbeing and confidence of Flitwick's residents and businesses.

The impact of cuts to public services, health, social care, education, and emergency services will continue to dominate the next few years in the aftermath of the pandemic. Cuts in services have affected all aspects of society and especially the more vulnerable people in our community. Continued cuts to Central Bedfordshire Council budgets mean that it will be challenging for them to implement much, if anything, beyond the legal minimum.

The National Government has set legally binding targets for net-zero emissions by 2050. Parliament and all tiers of local government, including Central Bedfordshire Council, have declared a Climate Emergency. We aim to follow this lead and create our own range of local climate change actions. We believe it is our duty to make whatever difference we can locally; doing nothing is not an option.

4.2 The local picture

The last ten years have seen a significant increase in new housing in the Town, which continues to put pressure on the existing infrastructure. More areas for housing are identified in the Central Bedfordshire local plan, which will increase the pressure on town roads (for both travel and parking), on education, health and social care provision, leisure and sports provision and on demand for employment.

We will look at the benefits or otherwise of creating and adopting a Neighbourhood Plan and whether it would help secure better urban design, energy-efficient homes, sustainable housing opportunities, protection of open spaces and employment sites, and encourage town centre regeneration.

Our local environment dramatically affects our experience of the Town, from issues around air quality and litter through to the enjoyment of our many green spaces. The Town needs to feel and be a safe place to live, work and enjoy, so we will look at initiatives to improve aspects of different people's perceptions.

Flitwick's location and transport links mean that the Town is home to large numbers of residents who commute to work, with many relying on cars for their day-to-day travel. Flitwick is also a hub for surrounding small villages and communities, enabling people to access health services, education, banks, post-office, shops and the Railway.

Local services and businesses have appeared even during the current emergency and have helped the local economy to remain resilient to the limited available local employment. A challenge will be to ensure that the Town continues to be a place where businesses, physical and virtual, have opportunities to grow in locations where they wish to operate.

Flitwick enters this strategic period with a thriving community sector and relatively low crime and social deprivation levels. However, there are real challenges around making sure people feel a part of Flitwick, especially as it undergoes continued growth and change. Collaborative working and community participation needs to be more central to how we work. We will strive to find new ways to work with the people of Flitwick to address challenges and seize opportunities around inclusion, housing, employment, and wellbeing.

5.1 The heart of our strategy

There are five key pillars of our strategy for the next four years. We have broken each area down into a series of actions that will be incorporated into detailed work plans.

A PROSPEROUS TOWN

Increase economic prosperity and encourage a vibrant and diverse town. Develop improved services to meet the demand as it grows.

A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

Improve the quality of the public realm, responding to climate change issues and protecting the local environment.

AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY

Develop a greater sense of pride in the Town across all age groups, improving the level of public engagement and providing a place where people have a strong sense of wellbeing.

A CENTRE FOR EVERYONE

Develop the Rufus Centre as a profitable commercial business and quality hospitality centre, which also caters for a wide range of community activities and supports local businesses.

A COUNCIL THAT DELIVERS

Develop the capacity and skills within the Council to equip it to best deliver its aims and services efficiently, effectively, imaginatively, and collaboratively.

5.2 A detailed plan

A PROSPEROUS TOWN

The Town is constrained and divided by the railway line, which adversely affects the town centre's potential for cohesive development. Past plans have proposed differing scales of re-development, but large-scale change is unlikely in the foreseeable future due to the financial costs involved.

We propose to:

- Continue to work with stakeholders to ensure that opportunities are taken to improve the town centre's layout, accessibility, and infrastructure, including more use of the area in front of Barclays Bank, developed by Central Bedfordshire Council as part of the Market Towns initiative.
- Continue to support and participate in Central Bedfordshire Councils' development of an integrated and accessible transport interchange at the Flitwick Station site.
- Continue to support the development of step-free access to the station within the next few years.
- Actively support the enhancement and development of the Village Hall and the adjacent market to maximise its contribution to the Town's revitalisation.
- Work with local businesses – physical and virtual - to encourage networking, investment, and job creation for a speedy recovery following the impact of the pandemic.
- Lobby Central Bedfordshire Council on the expansion of the current Flitwick Industrial Estate.
- Help facilitate start-up activity or the expansion of existing businesses and support business from home and online.
- Promote the visitor and night-time economies by working with stakeholders to raise the standard and range of the offering in Flitwick, with supporting promotion to local audiences.
- Continue to work with Central Bedfordshire Council, the community and other partners to ensure the development of Flitwick is planned and delivered in a strategic and holistic manner.
- Consider the development of a Neighbourhood Plan to influence the nature, type, scale, and style of future developments, and ensuring that our community's wishes are considered.
- Lobby for increased Health, Education and other infrastructure provision for the Towns residents based on the recent housing development already delivered and future demand anticipated in the Central Bedfordshire Council Local Plan.
- Help to influence the continuation of adequate physical retail outlets and an extension to the current space, where opportunities allow.
- Actively influence the consultation processes and development of the CBC Local Plan strategy.
- Where we are able, use local suppliers and businesses. We will create a roster of companies that match our ethical standards and environmental aims.

A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

Sustainability means "meeting the needs of today but preserving the environment for the next generation". This cannot be achieved by only considering environmental issues, social and economic sustainability is equally important.

The Town Council will act both as an organisation whose business activities impact on the environment, where we will lead by example to minimise any adverse impact. Secondly, we will work with our community and other partners to help make the town environment more sustainable.

We propose to:

Protect and enhance our local environment and address sustainability

- Initiate an environmental audit of FTC activities and operations to create a Council Environmental and Sustainability Policy to reduce our adverse impact on climate change and environmental issues.
- Gather baseline data on the environment and sustainability within the Town, on which to prioritise future actions. Consider ways to reduce consumption, improve re-use and increase re-cycling.
- Do all we can to preserve the natural environment, parkland, biodiversity and important landscapes. Initiate wildflower and tree-planting, while also seeking to develop additional wildlife areas and community gardens.
- Raise the standard of the public realm by tackling litter, fouling, graffiti and neglected or aesthetically displeasing areas. Work in partnership with existing responsible bodies and voluntary organisations to improve the look of the Town.
- Review the benefits of working with like-minded organisations to make the Town sustainable via a Local Authorities "joint pledge" approach.
- Encourage and facilitate walking and cycling in and around the Town and to the Rufus Centre and to reduce the adverse impact of traffic.
- Use our influencing role in planning as a positive influence on the Town's built environment and sustainability.

Recognise and build on our existing heritage

- Maintain, co-ordinate and financially support the Remembrance parade and other events which commemorate important occasions.
- Ensure Flitwick's heritage is recorded and made accessible to all. Look to develop more online content on our website that captures the Town's look, memories, and history.
- Use our involvement in the planning process to preserve green open spaces, protecting green belt land where it is possible.
- Work with other stakeholders to develop art and culture provision in the Town. Review previous proposal to create a showcase for the existing artistic endeavours produced by residents of the Town.
- Stage directly or with partners, events that raise the profile of the Town and encourage visitors.

Work to improve the range of leisure and sporting assets

- Oppose new developments where recreation or sports facilities are lost unless equivalent provision is provided.
- Support and promote the development of new sports and leisure facilities to meet the local and surrounding population's needs.
- Work with grant awarding and third-party bodies to maintain and upgrade the various play parks in the Town.
- Support inclusive local sports and leisure organisations to expand and play a greater role in meeting the population's needs, encouraging residents to lead a healthier lifestyle.

AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY

It is a fundamental requirement of the success of any community project that it is undertaken in partnership with the community. But more than this, working in partnership with the community, empowering it and helping it to become cohesive is at the core of our proposals.

We propose to:

Build an engaged and empowered Flitwick community

- Celebrate the diversity of our communities of place, origin, interest, or age, and proactively engage with them. Work to develop a wider range of arts and cultural activities that showcase the talents of residents and help develop the interests of people in the town.
- Work with the community on planning how to develop and support it.
- Engage with, and support, the wide variety of voluntary and charitable organisations in the Town, which help us deliver our aims.
- Ensure that young people have things to aspire to, be it employment opportunities, safe activities, and places to engage in and an interest in their community and Council. Continue to support and, where appropriate, develop our existing youth services and outreach activities.
- Take the lead to empower a volunteering culture within Flitwick by raising awareness of the benefits and promoting opportunities.
- Ensure our equality policy always reflects best practice in respect of employment, services and democracy.

Provide a voice for Flitwick

- Maintain either directly or in partnership a programme of events to promote the Town and promote the Council's other objectives.

- Develop a shared agenda to influence the improvement and effective management of local services through coordinating with stakeholders and relevant third parties, holding to account service providers responsible for delivery.
- Work more closely with Central Bedfordshire Council to influence the delivery of coordinated services and development.
- Promote and support events that build community cohesiveness or promote the Town.
- Maintain an active and responsive programme of Mayoral engagements to support the community and promote the Town.
- Continue with the annual Community Awards to highlight outstanding local contributions by individuals and organisations.

Work to make our Town safer

- Look at opportunities to work with Central Bedfordshire Council to extend CCTV services and, where financially viable, introduce a monitoring service that will deter crime.
- Work with the Police and other partners on community safety initiatives and to disseminate information and ensure residents know where to report matters of concern.
- Ensure that FTC has a robust Town Emergency Plan, working with appropriate third-party organisations.
- Provide access to home safety & health advice/information through our website, social media and other FTC channels.
- Undertake a Crime Reduction Audit on the Council's activities & facilities to enable us to lead by example.
- Look to utilise the Council's assets and resources to benefit the most vulnerable in our society.
- Lobby for road improvements and maintenance, which improves safety.

Work to improve health and wellbeing

- Support and partner initiatives that encourage residents to live a healthier lifestyle.
- Reduce social isolation and loneliness by supporting befriending schemes and community transport.
- Lobby to ensure the community has enough health and social care facilities and services and to contribute at a very local level, where appropriate. To work in partnership to address food poverty, where evident.
- Lobby to ensure the housing proposed in the Central Bedfordshire Council Local Plan is delivered in a sustainable way, has a mix of types for a balanced and diverse population (including affordable homes) and is of a design that preserves Flitwick's character.

- Lobby to ensure homelessness in the Town is addressed.

A CENTRE FOR EVERYONE

The Rufus Centre, opened originally as a school and taken over by the Town Council in 1999 as their administrative hub and has become one of the most flexible hospitality, conference and events venues in the local area. It provides the opportunity for the Council to deliver many of its economic, environmental and community goals, as well as enabling a range of commercial activities that can keep down the cost of the council precept.

We propose to:

To develop the Rufus Centre as a strongly performing commercial enterprise.

- Operate on a commercial basis, with a full cost understanding of all events and activities and the markets in which they compete.
- Ensure non-business functions are internally re-charged to service cost centres.
- Undertake a range of commercial events which help maximise the use of the Centre.
- Offer an excellent standard of hospitality, with a varied and value menu that offers healthy and sustainable options.
- Offer good value business space at a commercial rent.
- Provide subsidised use of the Centre by Community organisations and charities to support the Council's community aims.
- Provide a quality and engaging public interface for the Council's services and a gateway to services by other providers.
- Provide a range of services and events to support and promote the Council's democratic processes, the community, citizens' wellbeing, supporting businesses and job creation and protecting the Town's environment.

A COUNCIL TO DELIVER

Over the last year we have reviewed our organisational structure, governance, policies, processes, and culture to ensure they are all pulling in the same direction and are fit for purpose. We have made much progress, but there is still more work to do.

We propose to:

Taking an integrated approach to Management.

- Develop capacity and a diverse skill base through an active and ongoing Councillor and Officer training programme.
- Finalise the new agreed Council staffing structure, which clearly differentiates areas of responsibility, led by a strong and empowered Senior Management Team, with sufficient additional resources to cope with our initial plans. Recruit remaining identified roles.

- Be innovative in finding external funding for Council and other local community initiatives.
- Gain accreditation under the Local Council Award Scheme, where it furthers efficient practises.
- Deliver the Council objectives through outcome-focused delivery plans and related performance management.
- Improve operational efficiency by developing a range of quality based operating procedures.
- Regularly review our governance and policies to ensure they work to the best advantage.
- Move to a 5-year financial plan to ensure best value and undertake a service-value review.
- Ensure the Council's information technology is fit for purpose and delivers value for the organisation. We will conclude our move to the 'cloud', introduce more opportunities for remote and flexible working, and introduce new software or services where they fit the Council's aims.

Deliver excellent services.

- Determine priorities on objective need and public choice in the light of both business and safety risk assessments.
- Continue to deliver our existing services and develop outcome-based standards.
- Support or supplement essential services provided by others, but only take on new or devolved services where it is necessary to preserve or improve them.
- Introduce new services and initiatives where we can satisfy need and choice cost-effectively.
- Use our role in the planning system to the benefit of the local community.

Provide excellent communications and transparency

- Seek to engage the public and communities through a variety of channels as set out in our Communications and Marketing Policy, ensuring communication is two way and that we listen.
- Regularly report progress on actions in our delivery plans, including any unimplemented decisions. Develop a range of key performance indicators and a balanced scorecard approach if they enable better communication of our progress.
- Ensure regular publication of key Council financial reporting and that published accounts are easy to understand.

6. Keeping track of our progress

We want to understand the impact and value of the work that the Town Council and the community do and how far we are progressing towards achieving the vision set out.

We will engage the community with reviewing this strategy to find out how and where we are making progress, who we are helping and who we may need to support further with new projects or activities.

For each key pillar in our strategy, we will create a series of actions and targets that will appear in our delivery plans. The responsibility for the delivery of every action will be allocated to an area of the Council, under the Management of the Town Clerk and the Senior Leadership Team.

Progress will be overseen by one of the current Council Committees or, where necessary, the whole Council. We will identify a target date for each action, and we will review and regularly report on our progress throughout the year. We will also create a complimentary five-year budgetary plan to ensure that we can fund our aims.