



FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of Flitwick Town Council Meeting held on 15th November 2022 at 7:45pm at the Rufus Centre

Present:

Cllr A Snape (Chairman)
Cllr I Blazeby
Cllr B Meredith-Shaw
Cllr R Shaw
Cllr P Earles
Cllr A Lutley
Cllr J Daly
Cllr J Roberts
Cllr D Toinko
Cllr J Dann
Cllr H Hodges
Cllr J Gleave

Also present:

Stacie Lockey – Environmental Services Manager
Susan Eldred – Community Services Manager
Helen Glover – Senior Finance Officer

Members of the public – 44 residents, 2 virtual

5304. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received and approved from Cllr Badham – unwell, Cllr Platt – work commitments, Cllr Mackey – work commitments, Cllr Thompson – holiday.

No apologies were received from Cllr Chacko.

5305. 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 – Cllr Gleave declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 10a – Planning application Land South of Steppingley Road Flitwick CB/22/04102/FULL.

The Chairman proposed to move the order of the agenda to facilitate the residents that had attended the meeting. Item 5 - public open session and item 10a – planning application Land South of Steppingley Road Flitwick CB/22/04108/FULL was brought forward.

5306. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

Mr Round spoke in relation to the closure of the Post Office in Flitwick and the impact it would have on residents in the Town. Mr Round advised that he had been investigating options to keep the Post Office open and had been in discussion with the Town Council,

CBC and the local MP. Mr Round asked what would happen to residents who could no longer access a Post Office service and if there had been any offers of support from CBC.

The Chairman commented that the Town Council had been looking into the viability of taking on the Post Office, and this item would be discussed within the exempt section of the meeting. An update would be publicised in due course.

Martin Snell – representative of the Flitwick Local Action Group, spoke on behalf of the group and addressed the following:

'This evening, we're requesting the Town Council should object to the Steppingley Road application,

- reflecting the depth and extent of local concerns,*
- to highlight some very major planning concerns,*
- and responding to Central Beds that the proposal be refused or deferred.*

By now it's clear that hundreds of people have lodged objections, angered by the proposal. Why? Because there are some real and worrying concerns about the scheme and this application is the first they were aware of the Local Plan allocation. This represents a major democratic deficit, objections in this number and on the concerns raised should not be ignored.

It's important that objections and decisions are based on planning issues, and FLAG is requesting that FTC object to this application on the basis of 7 planning matters:

1. Firstly, the development of this long-standing agricultural feature is contrary to several Local Plan policies – loss of important open countryside (EE5), development of an important countryside gap (SP5), loss of good agricultural land (DC5).

It is beyond the Settlement Envelope for Flitwick, it would push the town limits further into countryside, eroding the environmental quality, openness and tranquillity of the area. The field is one of the best grade of agricultural land in the area, fertile and productive, recent global instability has shown how important it is to feed ourselves.

2. Secondly, the CBC own green belt analysis identified how important this field is in preserving the openness of the area, and preventing sprawl between Flitwick and Steppingley, and encroachment into the open countryside. It's function as green belt complies with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Once lost to development this green belt countryside will be lost forever. If permitted there will be pressure for further development between this site and Centre Parcs.

3. Thirdly, the basis of allocating this site in the Local Plan is based on out-dated information.

The Local Plan need for housing was based on calculations in 2010 and updated 2015.

These estimates were based on the economy, migration and household patterns – all these have changed considerably, significantly since then – and there's new information.

The results of the 2021 Census from the ONS – these show that Luton and Central Beds population has already reached the estimate in the 2015 estimates.

So why press ahead with contentious development of valuable green belt? The developer will say this site is already allocated, an adopted policy in the Local Plan – well there is also an adopted policy in the Local Plan (SP1a) committing Central Beds to a review of housing need – it should have started in January 2022 – it has only just begun.

So why press ahead with contentious development of valuable green belt in Central Bedfordshire, to meet Luton's needs?

This proposal should not be considered until the results of the Local Plan Review are finalised, to understand if new housing is needed, and if this is the best site for it.

Housing on this site surfaced at the end of the Local Plan process – it was included to help meet housing needs for Luton. The inspector's final report (para 208) included this

field despite its importance in the green belt, because people could walk and cycle to services and facilities in Flitwick and there's a railway station.

4. This brings us to the 4th concern, the facilities and services in Flitwick are already over-stretched.

The Education team has already highlighted that there is insufficient capacity in local schools – if approved the developer would need to contribute £2.8m towards new education facilities. And it's not just schools, there's concerns over the capacity of youth services, training and further education and other facilities for young people.

There's no vacancies at GPs and dentists, the Tesco Superstore will be around 750 m from these houses, the town centre and railway station beyond that, and the nearest pub / restaurant beyond that. Some may walk and cycle – if the weather's good, and they feel safe beside a busy road, we suspect the majority will drive.

5. Highways

The proposals represent the bare minimum highway provisions – access, sight lines etc for the maximum number of homes. Steppingley Rd is already a busy road, a diversion if the M1 is blocked, a feeder road for over 700 villas at Centre Parcs, with new developments already permitted along its route, this scheme would have two new accesses onto Steppingley Rd – bringing the total of junctions along this short stretch to 7. The new roads and the 2m footway (for the cycling and walking the inspector envisaged) towards Flitwick would add further vehicle turning where cars and vans already speed, and this scheme would bring another 400 – 600 people walking and cycling alongside. And yet there's no mention of a s.106 agreement for the developer to mitigate highways issues, to contribute to works on Steppingley Road such as road narrows (to limit speeds), roundabouts at the new junctions (to allow easier access both ways onto the main road), controlled crossings (to make it safer for people to cross over to the facilities on the other side of Steppingley Road), or footway / cycle access improvements nearer the station (one of the Inspector's main reasons for allowing the site).

6. Damage to trees and hedgerows.

The submitted arboricultural assessment shows that a third of the trees on the site would be affected, with removal of branches, excavation and development over roots, in one case felling completely. In addition the highways works would involve complete removal of a long section of hedgerow on the road frontage - loss of hedgerow is contrary to policy EE4.

There's no analysis of how development would impact the relationship, wildlife corridors, flora and fauna from the adjoining Flitwick Woods ancient woodland.

These proposals run counter to policies EE2 Enhancing Bio-diversity and EE3 nature conservation.

The development may also be viewed as an over-development of this sensitive edge of settlement site – over-development and under-provision of natural features and landscaping through the site, not just around the edges.

7. Lastly, the not inconsequential matter of drainage: the proposed surface water drainage is shown discharging into ditches and culverts that already flood during heavy rain, which would be exacerbated if the field was developed as a housing estate.

Chair, FLAG and nearly 1,000 local people are deeply concerned about this scheme, the Group feels it is flawed in its details, contrary to long-held green belt and countryside protection, and is being considered because of out-of-date information when Central Beds' adopted policy to review the Local Plan is already nearly a year overdue.'

Mick Fagan also raised that English Nature had identified small pockets of biodiverse areas that are required to be accessed by the green access ways. Currently, Flitwick wood is surrounded by a housing estate on one side therefore if the development did go ahead, it would be going against the green access ways to Flitwick Wood. The

Government had agreed with English Nature that this is something that needed to be preserved going forward.

5307. Planning application Land South of Steppingley Road Flitwick CB/22/04108/FULL

Cllr Gleave advised Members that the Planning Improvement Working group had been through a thorough process looking at arguments for and against the application. It was advised that whilst the location was an allocated site within the local plan, several issues were associated with it, and the application was contrary to many policies within the local plan.

Cllr Blazeby commented that the report was very comprehensive and positive to see mitigating options of getting the best out of the application should planning permission be granted.

Cllr Shaw commented that the Planning Improvement Working group had met with planning consultants, CBC planning officers and representatives from the Flitwick Local Action Group whilst reviewing the application as well as looking at the national planning policy framework.

Members felt that the application was not sustainable development.

CBCllr Bunyan advised that he was the Vice Chairman of the Development Management Committee at CBC, where the application would be decided. He stated that he would be unable to vote but would speak against the application. CBCllr Bunyan commented that the most important time to object to the development of a site would be at the local plan consultation stage.

CBCllr Gomm advised that he would also oppose the application due to it being prime greenbelt land and overdevelopment of the local area.

It was **RESOLVED** to object to this application CB/22/04108/FULL for reasons set out in the report that was previously circulated.

It was **RESOLVED** to elect Cllr Gleave to speak at the CBC Development Management Committee on behalf of the Town Council.

Members of the public left the meeting.

5308. TOWN MAYORS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor had attended the following Civic Events:

- Diwali Celebration Event – Steppingley
- Civic Reception
- Respite at Home AGM
- Two Remembrance Services

The cost-of-living meeting had been rescheduled for the 28th November.

The Chairman advised Members that help would be required for the Christmas Light Switch on event and the Over 60's Christmas Lunch due to staff shortages.

5309. REPORTS FROM WARD MEMBERS

CBCllr Bunyan advised that the Step Free access was due to start in summer 2023 with completion anticipated for 2024, this would include a bridge and two lifts.

The Station Interchange was almost complete with only landscaping, lining and crossings to be completed. Some concern was raised with the right hand turn into Tesco and Cllr Bunyan would be taking this up with the appropriate CBC Officers.

CBCllr Gomm advised Members that the railway at Wixams would be constructed and complete by 2024. It was hoped that this would relieve pressure on Flitwick Station.

The Chairman asked for an update concerning the Froghall Road chicanes and Windmill Road traffic calming measures. CBCllr Bunyan advised that Froghall Road had now been adopted by CBC, and this matter would be taken up with Highways Officers. Double yellow lines had been added along various points on Windmill Road.

Issues around parking outside the Vape shop at the top of the avenue were raised, and this would be taken up directly by ward Councillors.

5310. INVITED SPEAKER

There was no invited speaker.

5311. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Members asked for an update on the Town Clerk. The Chairman advised that this would be discussed within the exempt section.

5312. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

- a. For Members to approve the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held, on **Tuesday 18th October 2022**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.

There were several errors within the minutes, and Members **DEFERRED** these to the next meeting requesting that officers review the document.

- b. For Members to approve the minutes of the Extra Ordinary Council Meeting on **Tuesday 1st November 2022**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.

Members adopted the minutes of the Extra Ordinary Council meeting held on Tuesday 1st November 2022.

- c. For Members to receive and consider **resolutions and recommendations** of the Corporate Services Meeting, held on **Tuesday 25th October 2022**, this meeting was held at The Rufus Centre.

Members noted the resolutions and recommendations of the Corporate Services meeting held on Tuesday 25th October 2022.

- d. For Members to receive and consider **resolutions and recommendations** of the Community Services Committee Meeting, held on **Tuesday 1st November 2022**, this meeting was held at The Rufus Centre.

Members noted the resolutions and recommendations of the Community Services meeting held on Tuesday 1st November 2022.

5312. MATTERS ARISING

- a. Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on Tuesday 18th October 2022 and minutes of the Extra Ordinary Council on Tuesday 1st November 2022.

There were no matters arising.

- b. Members to receive any updates from Officers.

There were no updates.

5313. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

b. **Rolling Capital Fund (RCF) Applications**

Members were asked to approve three Committee applications to the RCF as set out on the agenda.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the following RCF applications;

- Installation of Water Dispenser - £1426.91
- Flitwick Town Square – 7 benches, 2 planters and 4 bins - £12,101.96
- Flitwick Town Square Notice Board - £655.00

c. **RFO Temporary Responsibility**

Members considered temporarily outsourcing the RFO responsibility to Derek Kemp of DCK solutions to cover for staff sickness. The Chairman informed Members that DCK was the Council's Accountant and had been for many years. The cost for this service would be £100.00 per month.

It was **RESOLVED** to temporarily outsource the RFO responsibility to Derek Kemp of DCK solutions.

d. **LGBTQ+ Support Service Drop-in**

Members considered a request from LGBT Bedfordshire to use a room at The Rufus Centre one day a week for 20 weeks to provide a 'one-stop shop' LGBTQ+ support service.

Members asked if a community benefit would be delivered, justifying waiving the charge for a room. The Chairman advised that this would be the case and that it would bring another service to Flitwick for the benefit of residents.

It was **RESOLVED** to support LGBT Bedfordshire and allocate a room one day a week for 20 weeks.

e. **Access to the Till System Back-Office for Business Improvement & Development Board Members**

It was **RESOLVED** for all Members of the Business Improvement & Development Board to have read-only access to the Till System Back-Office.

f. **Calendar of Meetings 2023**

Members considered the dates that had been previously circulated. It had been suggested to the Town Clerk previously that the Business Improvement & Development Board Meetings and the Corporate Services Meetings be swapped to enable more up to date finance reports.

It was **RESOLVED** to accept the Calendar of Meeting dates for 2023 with Corporate Services Meetings being on the 2nd Tuesday of the month and Business Improvement & Development Board Meetings being on the 4th Tuesday of the month.

5314. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

a. Planning – Responses to CBC including Officer Delegated Decisions

Members noted the Planning Responses, including Delegated Decisions.

b. Planning – CBC Decisions

Members noted the CBC Decisions on Planning Applications.

c. Delegated Authority Decision

Members noted the following decisions made under Delegated Authority:

1. Amendments to the operation of the Café which includes:

- Reduction of Café menu
- Closing the kitchen at 2.30pm (instead of 3pm) Monday – Friday
- Closing the kitchen on a Saturday and serving light refreshments, Café to remain open as normal from 8am-2pm.

The above will be reviewed in January 2023.

2. To readvertise the vacant Chef position with a revised job description and increase of salary to between £25,000 and £28,000 per annum following benchmarking.

3. Christmas Opening Hours

- Café to be closed Saturday 24th December.
- Café and Town Council Offices to be closed 28th, 29th & 30th December.
- Café to be closed Saturday 31st December (the building will remain open as there is a party in the evening – bar only, so limited staff are required).

d. Finance Reports Part 1

Members noted the following finance reports:

- i) Whole Business Summary, Investments & Loans
- ii) Corporate Services Summary
- iii) Community Services Summary
- iv) Civic Expenses Summary

OMEGA Reports:

- v) Income & Expenditure (Corporate & Community)
- vi) Cashbook (CB1 & CB2) Transactions
- vii) Bank Reconciliations (CB1 & CB2)

5315. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public present at this time.

5316. EXEMPT ITEMS

The following resolution was **moved** that is advisable in the public interest that the public and press are excluded whilst the following exempt item issue is discussed.

13a – Post Office

It was **RESOLVED** not to proceed further with the Post Office initiative.

Members **RESOLVED** to release a press statement including a summary of the decision made.

13b – Town Clerk

The Chairman gave an update on the Town Clerk.

13c – Finance Reports Part 2

Members noted the reports.

Pursuant to section 1(2) of the public bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 Council **resolved** to exclude the public and press by reason of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted.