



## FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL

**Minutes of Flitwick Town Council meeting  
held on Tuesday, 19th December 2023, at the Rufus Centre at 7:45 pm.**

Present:

Cllr A Snape (Chairman)  
Cllr C Thompson  
Cllr F Patterson  
Cllr S Livens  
Cllr R Wilsmore  
Cllr H Hodges  
Cllr T Parsons  
Cllr M Platt  
Cllr D Toinko  
Cllr J Roberts  
Cllr T Harald

Also present:

Alistair Stratham – Mid Bedfordshire MP  
Cllr I Adams – Central Beds Council (CBC) Ward Member

3 Members of the Royal British Legion - Flitwick & District Branch

Stacie Lockey – Town Clerk & Chief Executive  
Stephanie Stanley – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO

### **5555. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received and accepted for Councillors Blazeby (family commitment), Badham and Gleave (unwell), and Connell (work).

### **5556. 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 – none.

### **5557. TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Town Mayor thanked everybody who helped support the Flitwick Christmas Lights Switch On event, which was very well attended and successful.

The Town Mayor thanked those who assisted with the Over 60's Christmas Lunch the previous week. Meals were served to 140 people, and excellent feedback was received.

Since the previous meeting, the Town Mayor had attended the following engagements:

Dunstable Charity Dinner – ABBA Night  
National Association of Local Councils Parliamentary Reception  
Christmas Wine Tasting Event held at The Rufus Centre  
Dunstable's Caritas Harmony Gala Christmas Concert raising funds for Macmillan  
A meeting with Central Beds Council about Joint Committees

The Town Mayor had one more item to raise under his announcements in exempt.

**5558. REPORTS FROM WARD MEMBERS**

The report was noted.

The Chairman was interested in hearing any feedback Ward Members (Councillors Adams and Townsend) had received on the contentious planning application for land off Trafalgar Drive as part of their campaign. Cllr Adams reported that there had been 80 responses against the development, and a couple favoured it progressing. The area of most concern for people was access to the site. There had been a lot of engagement and interest, and the Ward Members had spoken with Planners at CBC. The deadline for FTC's response had been extended so that the Council's view could be considered at the January meeting. The public deadline remained as 9<sup>th</sup> January 2024. Cllr Adams assured Members that FTC's response would be considered.

Cllr Adams left the meeting at 19:50.

**5559. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

The three representatives from the Royal British Legion (RBL) agreed to take questions under the relevant item on the agenda.

**5560. INVITED SPEAKER**

Alistair Strathern, Mid Bedfordshire MP, thanked the Council for the work they had been doing and congratulated Members on their proactivity in leading the way locally with initiatives like Flitwick Community Fridge. Alistair discussed the challenges facing local residents, including the cost-of-living crisis, infrastructure, primary care services, and the need for a vision for school and youth provision. Alistair mentioned he was pleased progress had been made regarding accessibility at the station and commented on the constituency's requirement to transition from a three-tier to a two-tier school system. Alistair touched on the challenges with local development and mentioned that new homes needed to be suitable for Flitwick, including affordable housing provision.

The Chairman thanked Alistair for attending the meeting and commented that it was excellent to see him getting to work immediately on important issues and continuing to meet residents as soon as he was elected. The Chairman asked if there were specific issues residents were raising with Alistair and if there was anything FTC could do to support. Members were informed that the cost-of-living challenges, particularly for winter, were a regular challenge. Alistair asked FTC to continue supporting this issue with their initiatives and signposting residents to help organisations. He wanted FTC to amplify visibility on this issue and commented that although Mid Bedfordshire was considered an affluent area, many residents needed help with the current situation.

Alistair mentioned the pressures on Flitwick about and that he supported enhancing the high street and retail offerings to create a better sense of pride in the place with residents. He commented on FTC's ambitious visions for the former Barclays building, indicating support.

Alistair would continue working with CBC on the central pressures across the county regarding healthcare, schooling, and SEND challenges and ensure local parents have stakeholders working on their behalf.

Alistair advised that he had hired five staff members and that they would be starting employment in January. His staff had various skills and backgrounds; four would be based at the Rufus Centre office, and one in Westminster with him. Alistair asked FTC to contact him/his team about matters that Members thought needed reinforcement from the MP's office. The Chairman updated Members that Alistair had previously assisted with securing slots from supermarkets for the Community Fridge. Other Councils, including Houghton Regis Town Council, wanted to set up a similar initiative in their town.

Cllr Roberts commented that it was nice to have the MP attend an FTC meeting and stated that it would be good to hear about the differences made if the country were to be led by Labour in the future. Alistair commented on Labour's commitment to being more sustainable and that he had been elected at a time when he could influence Labour's Manifesto.

Alistair Strathern, MP, left the meeting at 20:05.

The Council agreed to adjourn the meeting for five minutes.

The meeting re-started, and all Members and Officers returned to the meeting room, except Cllr Roberts, at 20:10.

**5561. MEMBERS QUESTIONS**

There were no questions.

**5562. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS**

- a. For Members to approve the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held, on **Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre. (Moved to EXEMPT)
- b. For Members to receive and consider **resolutions and recommendations** of the Community Services Committee Meeting, held on **Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023**, this meeting is held at The Rufus Centre.

The resolutions and recommendations of the Community Services Committee held on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023 were noted.

- c. For Members to receive and consider **resolutions and recommendations** of the Business I & DB Committee Meeting, held on **Tuesday 12th December 2023**, this meeting is held at The Rufus Centre. (Moved to EXEMPT)

**5563. MATTERS ARISING**

- a. Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023 – no items.
- b. Members to receive any updates from Officers

Members were advised that the Council had secured funding and support for a Tiny Forest at Hinksley Road. Soil testing was due in early January, with planting happening soon after. The trees would not shield the Industrial Estate but would be planted near the Sea Cadet Unit. The area would be completed with benches and a good site for schools to visit. Members were pleased to hear this news.

**5564. OUTSIDE BODIES**

No items.

**5565. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION**

**a. Royal British Legion**

Members considered the report previously circulated from the RBL.

The RBL was asked how many years they wanted the lease term. Brian Woodward, RBL Chairman, confirmed that the organisation wanted a 20-year term.

Cllr Toinko referred to previous conversations and mentioned that the Council had been told that there were structural problems with the building and that it had reached the end of its design life. Therefore, it would not last 20 years. The Chairman asked if a structural engineer had surveyed the concrete, and Brian confirmed that this still needed to be done.

Members discussed the roof issues, including the asbestos, and asked the RBL if they had any plans for sorting these issues. Brian confirmed they had plans for internal works to increase insulation, rewire the electrics, and had replaced the heating. The RBL members advised that the building was structurally sound and had funds due to an inheritance donation (£20k) and profit income (£5-6k annually) from hirers to pay for the works. The Chairman explained that the other local organisations presented FTC with advanced plans and financial models relating to building improvements, which meant that longer-term leases had been agreed upon. The RBL did not want to spend money on the works unless a longer lease term could be agreed.

Cllr Wilsmore asked about membership numbers for the RBL, the regularity of their meetings and hall usage for private hires. The RBL explained that the other groups and private hires assisted with the building's running costs.

Councillor Roberts re-entered the meeting at 20:18.

The Chairman mentioned to the RBL that there had been an indication previously that the organisation would be accepting the three-year lease term offered. He went on to ask the RBL if there were reasons why the group needed to meet at the Legion Hall and if they could meet elsewhere. The RBL representatives advised that there would be a storage issue for the Poppy Appeal if they were to meet elsewhere and that they currently had memorabilia displayed on the walls, which would not be the case if they moved sites. The RBL also raised concerns about paying rent if using another hall.

The Chairman asked about the RBL's financial model and if it was sustainable, asking if they had enough funds to sustain the building and make the required improvements.

After an extended discussion, it was agreed that the Town Clerk would write to the RBL clarifying what the Council expected to reconsider the longer lease term. This is related to the RBL providing a surveyor's report on the building plans for the refurbishment and a financial model for funding the improvements.

Action: Town Clerk

Three representatives from the RBL left the meeting at 20:28.

**b. Draft Budget 2024-2025**

Members considered the draft budget for 2024-2025. The Chairman advised that the Finance Scrutiny Working Group (FSWG) had been unable to meet the previous week but mentioned that any changes needed to be discussed at this meeting.

Cllr Patterson asked if Officers had included a separate line for IT hardware, as discussed at a recent meeting regarding the new IT contract. The RFO advised that the work had been done to establish costs in the last year relating to hardware purchases. This figure was still within the IT contract code but would be separated as agreed in time for the January meeting. The Chairman commented on the lifespan of the current Officer laptops, many of which were almost four years old, mentioning that the Council needed to be budgeting for replacements.

*Action: RFO*

The Chairman mentioned that over £100k had been saved following the Council's decision to close the LGPS Pension Scheme to new employees. He added that it was likely that the Council would need a bridging loan to assist with the 3 Station Road refurbishment project to offset cash flow concerns.

Members of the FSWG, Committees and Officers had sufficiently scrutinised this budget. The RFO mentioned that the inflationary pressures (including the NALC annual salary settlement, which was outside the control of the Council, general inflation currently at 5% having run at 12% earlier in the year, new initiatives, and supplier cost increases) had amounted to £131,054, 13.7% of the proposed budget.

The RFO spoke about the variable nature of the projected income for the business at year-end and that any surplus could be transferred into an Earmarked Reserve for capital investment at the Rufus Centre. The other capital funds presented in the precept demonstrations would be utilised for other works in the town, for example, play area repairs. These decisions would need to be resolved by the Council at the appropriate time.

The RFO explained that it was good practice for the precept to increase by small amounts each year rather than the Council not raising it for a few years and then having to increase it by a lot one year. Once asked, the RFO advised that she felt the precept should be increased by approximately 3%. It was agreed that the RFO would circulate what this would mean for a Band D household per annum the following day. The RFO also agreed to liaise with other Town Councils to understand how much they would raise their precepts.

*Action: RFO.*

**c. Rufus Centre 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

Members were asked to note that the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Rufus Centre is in October 2024. Members were asked to consider tasking Officers with investigating options for an event to celebrate this occasion. It was agreed that a celebration was unnecessary.

**d. Household Waste Recycling Centres**

Members were asked to note the correspondence received from Marston Moreteyne Parish Council and consider the request to support their position using ID proof at Household Recycling Centres.

An extended discussion occurred about the history behind this item and why ID might be required. In summary, it was agreed that Ampthill's Household Recycling Centre was not suffering from the same issues as other sites, e.g. Thorn Turn and Members discussed that there were road pollution concerns if barriers were put in the way of recycling. Cllr Parsons suggested contacting the MP about this since it was a national issue.

It was **resolved** to write and state that the Council supported the correspondence from Marston Moreteyne Parish Council and to engage with Ward Members and Mid Bedfordshire MP about this issue.

**e. Annual Residents Survey**

Members were asked to review the open-ended questions circulated for the 2024 Residents Survey.

It was agreed to amend the first question so as not to raise residents' expectations since the future decision on 3 Station Road would be informed by the Feasibility Study being completed by an external consultant. Members were keen to incorporate the question about the Town Square.

It was **resolved** to amend question 1 to reflect the discussion and for questions 2 and 3 to read as circulated.

**f. Access to Cash Consultation**

Members were asked to consider a response to the Access to Cash Consultation by the Financial Conduct Authority.

<https://www.fca.org.uk/publications/consultation-papers/cp23-29-access-cash>

The Chairman explained that he had been having ongoing conversations with Duncan Round and Derek French about access to cash in the community. He talked about the closure of the bank and the post office, the number of cash points in town and some of the challenges with this. Members generally agreed with the sentiment of the consultation and agreed for the Chairman to compile a list that he would send to the Town Clerk for circulation to all Members.

It was **resolved** to give delegated authority to the Town Clerk to respond to the consultation.

*Action: Town Clerk*

**g. Projects Fund Applications**

(i) Members are asked to note the Projects Fund Summary document circulated – noted.

(ii) Members are asked to approve the following Committee applications to the Projects Fund:

- Business Development Improvement Board – Office Space Refurbishment - £11,460.88
- Business Development Improvement Board – Lockyer Suite Capital Works - £48,654.56

Cllr Hodges advised Members that the offering at the Rufus Centre needed these works because the building needed modernisation, and AV equipment was essential to keep current customers and bring in new customers. He urged Members to see this as an investment opportunity. Cllr Patterson shared this view and advised that there was a concern about the reliance on NHS and CBC bookings. Cllr Toinko commented that the applications to the Project Fund were expensive and asked if payback periods had been considered. The Chairman advised that this had been discussed; however, the current AV equipment was now not sufficient for the needs of the business (£35k), and the microphones needed to be updated, which were no longer compliant. There were also cabling issues and equipment that did not work, which was unprofessional and meant that agreeing to this expenditure was necessary for service delivery.

It was **resolved** to approve the following applications to the Projects Fund:

- Business Development Improvement Board – Office Space Refurbishment - £11,460.88
- Business Development Improvement Board – Lockyer Suite Capital Works - £48,654.56
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**5566. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

**a. Finance Reports**

Members are asked to note the following finance reports:

- i) Flitwick Town Council Summary, Investments & Loans – noted.
- ii) Balance Sheet – noted.

**b. Calendar of Meeting Dates 2024**

Members were asked to note the circulated Calendar of Meeting Dates for 2024.

The Chairman asked for Members' views on the Council meetings on Tuesday evenings, and overall, Members were happy with this arrangement. It was suggested to include the Planning Improvement Working Group dates; however, the Town Clerk pointed out that these meetings took place as and when required with a current system that worked well. It was agreed that once PIWG meetings were arranged, these would be included in the meetings calendar, and papers would be circulated.

Cllr Toinko asked about the Community Services meetings proposed for August and December as, historically, the Committee did not typically meet during these months. The Chairman advised that although that was the case, additional meetings were called to transact business. It was agreed that the Community Services Committee should consider moving their bi-monthly meetings so that they do not meet in August or December at their next meeting.

*Action: Town Clerk*

**c. Planning**

- (i) Members to note the Planning Delegated decisions - noted.
- (ii) Members to note the CBC decisions - noted.

**5567. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION**

No items.

**5568. EXEMPT ITEMS**

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

**a) Minutes & Recommendations**

It was **resolved** to adopt the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023 as a true record.

**b) Feasibility Study** – update noted.

**c) Substation Consent**

It was **resolved** to grant consent for an additional substation lease on the proviso that CBC paid the legal costs.

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.

The meeting closed at 21:36.