



FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL

**Minutes of Flitwick Town Council meeting
held on Tuesday, 16th January 2024, at the Rufus Centre at 7:45 pm.**

Present:

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

Also present:

Cllr G Mackey – Central Bedfordshire Council Ward Member
Cllr I Adams – Central Bedfordshire Council Ward Member
Stacie Lockey – Town Clerk & Chief Executive
Stephanie Stanley – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO
2 members of the public

5569. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received and accepted for Cllr Roberts (holiday).

5570. 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 Hodges declared an interest on agenda item 11a – Land off Trafalgar Drive – as he had submitted an objection and his property was close to the site.

5571. TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor reported that Cllr Badham had resigned from the Council that day for personal reasons. He thanked Cllr Badham for his ten years of service to the Council and commented that he would be missed. The Town Clerk would be advertising to co-opt. Members were reminded that the Council aimed to keep 15 Councillors as agreed with the Deputy Returning Officer at Central Beds Council (CBC) pending a governance review.

The town mayor advised that he wished to adjust the agenda order for the meeting so that capital projects could be discussed prior to agreeing to the budget for 2024-25.

Members were updated on two Proud AF events due to take place:

27th January – Show Tunes Sing-Along

15th February – LGBT History Month Reception (speakers confirmed as Terrance Higgins Trust and a Counsellor involved with young people who would focus on the importance of mental health.)

The Flitwick Town Mayor's Charity Trustees were meeting on 18th January and all the bank account paperwork was received. Members would be given an update at the next Council meeting.

5572. REPORTS FROM WARD MEMBERS

The Chairman thanked Cllr Adams for his report. Cllr Adams confirmed that the planning application for Land off Trafalgar Drive had been withdrawn that day, which was positive.

Cllr Livens raised concern about the disabled parking allocation at the Village Hall relating to the EV charge points. Cllr Blazeby, the Council representative on the Village Hall Management Committee (VHMC), gave an update about there being no formal agreement between CBC and the VHMC to install the EV charge points. This was part of CBC's planned works, due to start on 29th January 2024, but it appeared there was no authorisation for it, and there was no clarity on the financials of the arrangement or the management of the spaces in the car park. Furthermore, there was no break clause. Cllr Blazeby agreed to raise Cllr Livens' concern at the VHMC meeting on 31st January. Cllr Adams explained that the planned works needed to be suspended for now and that Cllr Blazeby would share outcomes from the VHMC meeting.

Cllr Livens asked Ward Members about the CBC budget gap and requested that existing bus services remain. Cllr Mackey stated there was no intention to cut all the bus services and described the complex mix between subsidised and commercial bus services. He advised that CBC needed to agree on how to sustain public transport most cost-effectively whilst maintaining service levels. Cllr Gleave advised that once bus services are reduced or changed, there would be a cycle of decline because fewer residents would use the service, people would use the buses less frequently, and the service becomes less viable. Cllr Gleave added that it was frustrating to hear that CBC might cut bus services after installing a transport interchange at Flitwick Station.

Cllr Mackey gave a detailed overview of the CBC budget and provided historical background information relating to CBC's financial situation. The Ward Members advised that the funding gap currently stood at £2m for the next financial year and that CBC was working hard to establish where other savings could be made. Cllr Mackey advised that the current consultation was genuinely an attempt for CBC to find out what residents wanted and that budget proposals would be discussed at their next Executive Meeting. Following this, a draft budget would be presented to the CBC Full Council for adoption on 22nd February.

Cllr Mackey explained about the high demand for statutory services that were costly, which was putting significant pressure on CBC's discretionary funding.

5573. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

Mr Culman said he had attended the meeting to raise matters relating to item 11D – English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) – Ampthill Parkway Station. The Chairman commented that this narrative had been sent to all Members, and he believed it

was important to discuss it. Mr Culman questioned the accuracy of the information since he felt that the first half of the paper contradicted the second half and mentioned that the details were inaccurate. Mr Culman pointed out that the service area was intended for Woburn to Wrest Park; however, he did not think this would happen. Mr Culman stated that he was happy to discuss this with Members.

Mr Culman addressed the Council about the disabled parking area at Flitwick Manor Park. He had communicated with Officers about the gate not working and asked how residents would get out of the car park if there were an issue with the sensors. Mr Culman commented that he believed the solar power at the site was the problem, stating that there was not enough sunlight to charge the batteries. The Town Clerk advised that Officers were in contact with the contractor to try and establish why the gates were repeatedly not working. She shared Mr Culman's frustration with this and advised that Officers would check there was adequate signage at the site and get back to him on this matter in full as soon as possible.

Mr Misson had attended the meeting in relation to agenda item 11A – planning application CB/23/03861/OUT – Land off Trafalgar Drive – and asked the Council if it was aware that this site was infested with Japanese knotweed. The Chairman commented that he had seen social media comments about this but advised that this land did not belong to the Council. Mr Misson asked for advice on where residents needed to report this, and he was advised that it would be most appropriate to let the Environment Agency (EA) know via their portal. Cllr Mackey agreed to write to the EA about this.

5574. INVITED SPEAKER

There was no invited speaker.

5575. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Cllr Livens explained that at the Over 60's Lunch Club that day, Officers announced that a new booking fee system would be launched and that attendees would be required to pay this booking fee whether they paid in cash or via card payment. Officers who made the announcement had advised that the fee was unknown at this time, and Cllr Livens commented that the Council would struggle to attract newcomers to Lunch Club if it made the entry price £8.50. Cllr Livens stated that the Officers who organised Lunch Club asked her to raise this matter at this meeting.

The Chairman explained that the Council were due to introduce a new system called Ticketsolve as Eventbrite was becoming too expensive. He explained that Lunch Club was one of the most labour-intensive activities for Officers based on the administration involved in organising it. Members were also advised that the Finance Scrutiny Working Group (FSWG) had been looking at credit card charges, currently at 2.5% for telephone bookings, which heavily impacted the cost of this particular event. There was an aspiration for people to book events and activities online.

The RFO explained that the Senior Management Team (SMT) had met that day, and it was discussed to investigate using the café's online Good Eats booking system on a trial basis for the next Lunch Club. This would mean the current issue of attendees not pre-booking would be sorted, and all income would be received via one medium. The RFO explained that, on reflection, the announcement had been made prematurely. Attendees of Lunch Club had subsequently booked for February in the usual way, and SMT would work out the best way forward and communicate this with attendees before the next session.

5576. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

- a. For Members to approve the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held, on **Tuesday 19th December 2023**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.

This item was discussed in Exempt.

5577. MATTERS ARISING

- a. Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on **Tuesday 19th December 2023**.

No items.

- b. Members to receive any updates from Officers

No items.

5578. OUTSIDE BODIES

No items.

5579. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

- a. **CB/23/03861/OUT - Land off Trafalgar Drive - Salisbury Road Flitwick Beds**

The Chairman thanked Cllr Gleave for his superb report and reiterated that the link made within the application to the Council's Nature Park had been underhand. It was agreed that the applicant's summary did not represent the Planning Improvement Working Group's (PIWG) discussions.

It was **resolved** to submit the Town Council's objections to planning application CB/23/03861/OUT for the reasons outlined in the circulated PIWG report.

Cllrs Adams and Mackey left the meeting at 20:34.

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.

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.

EXEMPT ITEMS

- a. **Minutes & Recommendations**

It was **resolved** to adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on Tuesday 19th December 2023 as a true record.

- b. **Land at Steppingley Road**

It was **resolved** to progress with the circulated press release to include wording focused on spending the funds on reinvestment in Flitwick, and FAQs would be re-named as Detailed Questions & Answers.

- c. **3 Station Road**

It was **resolved** to:

1. Pursue Option 1 for 3 Station Road, including the financial plan identified.

2. Apply to the Community Ownership Fund.
3. Explore a Plan B.

The Council agreed to adjourn the meeting for five minutes.

- d. **Officer Update** - Members noted the update.

It was **resolved** to re-enter the public section of the meeting.

5579 cont.

- b. **Annual Residents Survey**

It was **resolved** to agree to publish the Annual Residents Survey questions as circulated.

- c. **Town Mayor's Allowance Policy**

It was **resolved** to adopt the circulated Town Mayor's Allowance Policy.

- d. **English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) – Ampthill Parkway Station**

Members discussed the correspondence from the ERTA and agreed that it was important for the Wixams station and the step-free access at Flitwick Station to be completed before progressing with Ampthill Parkway Station. Members decided not to respond to the correspondence.

- e. **Proposed Budget 2024-25**

- i) **Chairman's Report**

Members noted the Chairman's Report on the proposed Budget for 2024-25. Cllr Thompson mentioned two accuracy points for the report and agreed to send these via email following the meeting. It was noted that this report would be published alongside the budget the following day.

- ii) **Proposed Budget 2024-25**

Cllr Blazeby mentioned that he believed the precept rise should be between 5 and 6% to avoid cutting budgets and stated that the rise should be at least 4% in line with inflation. Cllr Parsons noted Cllr Blazeby's point around inflation, however, referred to the predicted surplus of £150k for this financial year. He added that the proposed budget was balanced and stated that the Council would likely outperform this. Cllr Parsons felt that increasing the precept by more than 3% was over-cautious, and locally, Flitwick had the third highest precept in Central Bedfordshire Band D households. Cllr Parsons commented on the Council's focus on the cost-of-living crisis, and this balanced with the projected surplus for the current financial year and the Officer team's work on the budget preparations; he believed 3% was the right level.

Members did an informal show of hands for 3% and 4% precept rises.

It was **resolved** to progress with a precept rise of 3% for Flitwick Town Council for 2024-25.

- f. **Bank Mandate**

The Chairman relayed conversations that happened at the FSWG regarding the bank mandate. Cllr Blazeby asked what sort of actions he would need to administer once he was on the mandate, and it was explained that a typical action would be to authorise payments online.

It was **resolved** to have all Members of the FSWG on the bank mandate (Cllrs Snape, Blazeby, Parsons and Roberts) and remove all other names listed.

g. General Reserves Policy

Members discussed the circulated draft General Reserves Policy and it was confirmed that the ringfenced funds would amount to half of the precept. The figure for this would be adjusted each year when the policy was reviewed.

It was **resolved** to adopt the General Reserves Policy as circulated.

h. Overspends

The overspends circulated were noted and Members were informed that the overspends relating to legal costs had been authorised. The Chairman commented that the Council's Financial Regulations were due to be reviewed in the next two months and within that review process, the document would include a point about the business overspends to be offset by income.

5580. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

a. Finance Reports

iii) Flitwick Town Council Summary, Investments & Loans - noted.

iv) Balance Sheet

This was noted. The Chairman asked why the loan liabilities were not on the balance sheet and the RFO stated this change came as part of the switch to using new accountancy support and related to a necessary AGAR requirement for Year End. The detail on this would be communicated to the Chairman via email.

v) Cashbooks – noted.

vi) Projects Fund Summary - noted.

c. Planning

(i) Members to note the Planning Delegated decisions – noted.

(ii) Members to note the CBC decisions – noted.

5581. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No items.

5582. EXEMPT ITEMS

The Exempt Items were discussed earlier in the meeting.

Meeting closed at 22:04.