



FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL

**Minutes of Flitwick Town Council meeting
held on Tuesday, 20th February 2024, at the Rufus Centre at 7:45 pm.**

Present:

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

Also present:

Cllr I Adams – Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) Ward Member
Stacie Lockey – Town Clerk & Chief Executive
Stephanie Stanley – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO
One member of the public (via virtual access)

5583. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received and accepted for Cllrs Connell, Parsons & Thompson (holiday).

5584. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive Statutory Declarations of Interests from Members in relation to:

- (a) Disclosable Pecuniary interests in any agenda item – no items.
- (b) Non-Pecuniary interests in any agenda item – no items.

5585. TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Deputy Mayor advised that he and the Town Mayor had attended an Afternoon Tea event with the Council's 'Forget Me Not' Group the previous week and a DJ Workshop at the Hub that day.

5586. REPORTS FROM WARD MEMBERS

The circulated report from Cllr Adams was noted.

Cllr Gleave referred to the cancellation of the Stagecoach 2 bus service and asked for an update on whether the Grant Palmer 44 service had been extended. Cllr Adams reported that this registration had happened today, so there should be an imminent start.

Cllr Patterson asked if there were any timescales for the new passenger footbridge at the station. Cllr Adams said he hoped the works would start during the summer, but no firm date had been given. Cllr Wilsmore commented that it was reassuring that Network Rail were looking to retain the existing footbridge in the plans. Members would be kept informed.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Adams for his work in trying to sort the parking issues outside the Vape Shop on The Avenue. Cllr Adams apologised that progress had been slower than it should have been.

Cllr Adams left the meeting at 19:52.

5587. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No items.

5588. INVITED SPEAKER

No invited speaker.

5589. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

None.

5590. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

- a. For Members to approve the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held, on Tuesday 16th January 2024, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.**

It was **resolved** to adopt the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on Tuesday 16th January 2024 as a true record with one amendment: delete Cllr Roberts to those present.

- b. For Members to receive and consider resolutions and recommendations of the Community Services Meeting, held on Tuesday 6th February 2024, this meeting was held at The Rufus Centre.**

The resolutions of the Community Services Meeting held on Tuesday 6th February 2024 were noted.

- c. For Members to receive and consider the resolutions and recommendations of the Business Improvement & Development Board Meeting, held on Tuesday 13th February 2024, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.**

This item was moved to exempt.

5591. MATTERS ARISING

- a. Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on Tuesday 16th January 2024**

The Town Clerk advised Members that Officers wished to submit a reply to the discussion held at the January Council meeting regarding Lunch Club (minute reference 5575). The Officers' reply was read aloud and was noted by Members.

- b. Members to receive any updates from Officers.**

Members were informed that Concertus, the Project Management Team for the care development on Steppingley Road, had delayed its opening to September and had asked what impact this would have on the Council. The Town Clerk explained that this would

impact the Council because the temporary Tractor Store on the Rufus Centre field would need to be there for an extended period and how this was affecting the field use for visitors to the Rufus Centre using the other side of the field for car parking without any reinforced ground matting. The Town Clerk stated that CBC would either give some funding towards purchasing matting or their team would come and install it.

5592. OUTSIDE BODIES

No items.

5593. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

a. Planning Improvement Working Group (PIWG)

Members were asked to consider the report circulated by the Chairman of the PIWG.

Cllr Gleave, Chairman of the PIWG, stated a couple of recommendations were included in the report relating to co-opting some members of the public onto the group and approving the undertaking of a planning survey to establish resident's priorities.

The Chairman was conscious not to raise residents' expectations during the survey process and asked how this would be clarified. Cllr Gleave stated that the survey aimed to establish priorities from residents and explain what the Council was trying to get out of the planning system rather than opposing all development.

Cllr Snape entered the meeting at 20:03.

It was **resolved** to co-opt Bryn Timlin, Janice Beal, Jo Connew, and Liz Jackson as members of the PIWH.

It was **resolved** to undertake a Planning Survey as circulated.

Action: Cllr Gleave & Amenities Officer

b. Internal Audit Report 2023-24: 2nd Interim

Members were asked to consider the Internal Audit Report 2023-24: 2nd Interim. The Chairman thanked Officers for their work on this.

It was **resolved** to accept the Internal Audit 2nd Interim Report 2023-24 circulated.

c. Draft Civic Protocol

Members were asked to comment on the draft Civic Protocol circulated.

Cllr Snape briefed Members that he had drafted this document based on research and lived experience as Town Mayor. Other larger Councils had civic protocols that detailed necessary expectations, such as having written precedence for events like Remembrance Sunday.

Cllr Toinko suggested amending minor inconsistencies in the wording of 'Chair' or 'Chairman' and for the 'CBC' abbreviation to be put in full for its first mention. Cllr Toinko also commented on outdated gender terms relating to 'ladies' and 'wearing hats in church.' He suggested using the term 'women' and including wording that stated there was no requirement to dress formally unless at a place of worship or when the Lord Lieutenant was present. Cllr Snape agreed but mentioned that specifying 'tailored shorts' was necessary since he had received complaints about his attire at civic events. Cllr Snape also explained that traditionally, women were expected to wear hats in church and

that many of the towns in the district followed this tradition when the Lord-Lieutenant was present. Cllr Snape felt it important to ensure future female consorts had this information to avoid potential embarrassment.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Snape for drafting the document. Amendments based on the discussion would be included and presented to the Council for adoption in March.

Action: Cllr Snape

d. Financial Regulations

Members were asked to review the current financial regulations circulated and note suggested amendments by officers and members of the Finance Scrutiny Working Group, which were highlighted in blue font.

Cllr Blazeby commented that he was happy with the amendments suggested.

It was **resolved** to adopt the updated Financial Regulations circulated with one amendment: remove reference to the Senior Finance Officer from the document.

Action: RFO

e. Community Engagement Policy

Members were asked to review the circulated Community Engagement Policy. Given the content, this policy was an agenda item at the last Community Services Committee meeting, and it was decided to defer this to Council discussion.

Cllr Toinko explained the discussion about 'hard to reach' not being a preferred term and suggested removing the comment 'it is important to note...personal choice' under 2.2. The Deputy Town Clerk (DTC) would liaise with Cllr Toinko on these changes.

Cllr Snape suggested including a section on expectations for the Town Mayor.

It was **resolved** to adopt the circulated Community Engagement Policy with amendments suggested on 'hard to reach' groups and to include a piece on expectations for the Town Mayor.

Action: DTC

f. Senior Member Roles

Members received an update from the Town Mayor about Senior Member Roles. Cllr Snape explained that this discussion was necessary before reviewing the Council's Standing Orders at the March meeting, allowing ample opportunity to make changes before the Annual Statutory Meeting. He gave details on the commitment required from a Town Mayor if the Council continued to operate as it is now, with the senior roles as they were. Cllr Blazeby asked Cllr Snape about how many hours each week he spent working on Council business.

Cllr Snape suggested creating a non-party political Leader of the Council role, effectively splitting the role of Town Mayor. He felt this would be a more sustainable model to allow the Council to continue to progress business at the current pace. The Leader would work to move the Council's work forward by collaborating with senior Officers behind the scenes, leading on strategic direction and working with members to build consensus. This role would include collaborating with the Town Clerk on significant projects like 3 Station Road and the Nature Park. The Town Mayor would remain the Chairman of the Council, presiding at meetings (a statutory requirement) and continue to represent the Council at

civic events. Cllr Snape advised that he believed that splitting the role would have positive outcomes for service delivery and assured the Council that the responsibilities would be adequately divided, with appropriate job descriptions.

Cllr Snape was clear that whoever was elected Town Mayor in May would retain the flexibility to progress this role in their desired style. He proposed that the Leader's role be a four-year term but that a clause was established in revised Standing Orders to allow the Council to remove any future Leader if there was a subsequent loss of confidence and for the Council to re-elect. He asked for Members' views on this idea.

Cllr Hodges asked for clarification on whether the Council could legally separate the role of the Chairman and the Town Mayor. Cllr Snape stated that this was not legally possible but suggested having two Job Descriptions for the different roles, should this idea progress. He also reminded members that all Councillors were equal and leadership had to be achieved through influence and building relationships.

Cllr Toinko thought a two-year term for the Leader post was more appropriate.

Cllr Patterson requested clarification on the responsibilities for each role. Cllr Snape explained that the Council now operated with senior roles, including Chairs of Committees and Working Groups. He stated that the Town Mayor would chair the full council meeting, transact business, and publicly represent the Council. The Leader would work with the Officer team and councillors to progress decisions and drive the council's business.

Cllr Blazeby touched on the Council's current work, including the commercial business and project work, and explained that it would not be easy for somebody else to take on the Town Mayor role with the current setup and the number of hours they would need to commit. He believed the suggestion of splitting the role was a natural progression. The Chairman endorsed this view and stated that the current setup and expectations for those wanting to be Town Mayor in the future could exclude people.

Cllr Wilsmore asked if this needed to be written down into a document. Cllr Snape agreed and explained there was no template to write this down. He informed the Council that changes to the Standing Orders, the Scheme of Delegations, and two new Job Descriptions were needed. Cllr Snape was only willing to invest time in producing a document with the Town Clerk if members supported the approach in principle.

Cllr Wilsmore asked if this suggested setup was common for towns of a similar size to Flitwick. Cllr Snape stated that it was not about the size of the town but more about the style of the Council and whether it was run along political lines. Leighton-Linslade, Dunstable, Biggleswade, and Sandy were all political, but only Leighton-Linslade operated with a Town Mayor and a formal Leader selected by the majority political group. He proposed that Flitwick remain non-political from a party-political perspective, but the Council would elect a Leader as part of the Annual Statutory meeting process.

Cllr Hodges asked if it could become party political in the future. Members were informed that it could be done in the future. Cllr Hodges asked if the senior roles involvement could decrease given that there was now a new Town Clerk and a Business Manager. However, Cllr Snape did not see the member workload decreasing unless the Council wanted to delegate more work directly to officers and accept that less would be achieved. He reiterated that there needed to be a good working relationship between all members and the Officer team.

It was agreed that Cllr Snape should draft a paper on senior member roles to include the responsibilities of the town mayor and the leader, which would be considered at the March Council meeting.

Action: Cllr Snape

g. Annual Assembly

Members were asked to consider holding the Annual Assembly on Tuesday, 30th April 2024.

Cllr Blazeby commented that only four members of the public attended last year's Annual Assembly. He explained that this was a mandatory meeting and provided some background information about when more people turned up in previous years. He suggested that high-level presentation slides were required and was happy with the date.

Cllr Blazeby explained to Members that there were upcoming 'Chat to a Councillor' sessions being held on Fridays from 10 am – 12 noon at the Village Hall (1st, 8th, 22nd & 29th March, and 5th April) and asked Members to support him by attending. These were sessions that provided residents with a chance to ask questions. The dates of the sessions overlapped with the publication of the Annual Residents Survey, which would be launched soon.

It was **resolved** to hold the Annual Assembly on Tuesday, 30th April 2024.

5594. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

a. Finance Reports

Members were asked to note the following finance reports:

- (i) Flitwick Town Council Summary, Investments & Loans – noted.
- (ii) Balance Sheet – noted.
- (iii) Cashbooks – noted.
- (iv) Projects Fund Summary – noted.

b. Planning

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

5595. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

Jonathan Marshall (attended via virtual access) commented that he agreed with the senior roles proposal discussed earlier and looked forward to the 'Chat to a Councillor' sessions.

The resident left the meeting at this time.

5596. 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 items are discussed.

- a. BIDB Recommendation & Resolution Sheet - noted.
- b. Confidential Reports – noted.
- c. Land at Steppingley Road

It was **resolved** to:

- 1. Progress with an independent valuation.
- 2. Progress with the project based on a conditional contract.

- d. Village Hall Representative

It was **resolved** to seek legal advice.

e. 3 Station Road

It was **resolved** to start the tender process.

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.

Meeting closed at 21:21.