



FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Flitwick Town Council meeting held on Tuesday 19th March 2024 at the Rufus Centre at 7:45pm

Present:

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

Also present:

Cllr G Mackey – Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) Ward Member
Stacie Lockey – Town Clerk & Chief Executive
Stephanie Stanley – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO

5597 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and accepted for Cllr Platt (family bereavement).

5598 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.

5599. Town Mayor's Announcements

The Town Clerk was congratulated for passing her CiLCA (Certificate in Local Council Administration) qualification ahead of schedule.

The Council had been formally awarded the UK Shared Prosperity Fund grant via CBC, and a meeting with Officers the following week was planned regarding the communications plan for this and the next steps. This funding would be used as a contribution towards the 3 Station Road refurbishment project. There was an exempt item relating to 3 Station Road, and it was hoped that the Council could inform residents of its plans for the site soon.

Members were asked to RSVP to invitations for the annual Civic Reception event on 27th April.

The Town Mayor had attended the following civic engagements since the previous meeting:

- Dunstable Town Council Fundraising Dinner
- Leighton Linlade Town Council Civic Service
- Kempston Town Council Charity Bingo Night
- Stotfold Town Council Civic Service

5600 Reports from Ward Members

Cllr Mackey reported that residents had mixed reviews regarding the decision to charge £55 per household for garden waste, which was taken as part of the 2024/25 budget. Council tax bills were starting to be delivered to households. Cllr Mackey stated that it would be a challenging year financially for CBC, and the administration was already working on next year's budget.

Work was underway to finalise the Highways Annual Plan, and discussions were being held to finalise which roads would be prioritised for work. Ward Members planned to focus more on improving roads and pavements in the East Ward of Flitwick.

Cllr Parsons asked if there was any update from CBC about when the transition of local schools to the two-tier system would be implemented. Cllr Mackey reported that Flitwick and Ampthill schools were quite a long way off from the two-tier system being implemented. He did not have a date but stated it would be years instead of months ahead.

The Chairman moved that the Council discuss agenda item 11i – Grass Cutting – at this point in the meeting so that Cllr Mackey could contribute and answer any questions. Members agreed to this.

5601 Grass Cutting

The supporting paper for this item was correspondence between the Chairman, Cllr Townsend (CBC Ward Member), and CBC Officers regarding grass cutting and the possibility of extra cuts for Flitwick, which would cost FTC £1622+VAT each.

The Chairman explained that Cllr Townsend had approached him about the additional cuts to see if FTC would be interested in paying some 'top ups' for the service. The Chairman clarified that despite the approach detailed in Cllr Townsend's email, he had asked for costs to enable the Council to discuss this and had indicated that he felt the Council would be against this. The current entitlement was six cuts per year for Flitwick as part of CBC's schedule.

Cllr Thompson stated that the Council previously paid for the extra cuts, but a decision was made to stop this since the areas were not FTC land and were the responsibility of CBC. She added that the reduced mowing schedule met with the FTC policies, and residents favoured this, with funding being prioritised elsewhere. Cllr Thompson did not feel that this expenditure for the extra cuts had a substantial benefit.

The Chairman asked Cllr Mackey for data on how many residents contacted Ward Councillors about their dissatisfaction with grass cutting. Cllr Mackey stated he had not received official complaints, but regular individuals commented about it online. He added that he would like more cuts implemented and would be pushing for this next year within a more sensible cutting schedule.

The Chairman mentioned that Cllr Wilsmore had found evidence of a tender document prepared by CBC for a new grass-cutting contract dated 2021, but it appeared not to have progressed. Members were interested in knowing if there was a CBC decision and if CBC had decided to extend the current contract for a select number of years instead. Cllr Mackey commented that he would need to follow up on this from an Executive level.

Cllr Wilsmore agreed with Cllr Thompson's view and asked if CBC had plans to level up the number of cuts between the south and north of the district. Members agreed that the current situation where the former South Bedfordshire District area benefitted from up to 14 cuts per year when the former Mid Bedfordshire District area incorporating Flitwick paid the same rate of Council Tax and only received six. Cllr Mackey stated there was a plan for this but did not know any timescales. Cllr Townsend had previously commented to the Chairman that she had hoped this would be within the next two years.

Cllr Toinko recalled one complaint regarding grass cutting that had been reported to Community Services at last year's July meeting. He remembered that the resident's complaint came just before a grass cut happened. Cllr Toinko believed that CBC needed to communicate more about grass-cutting to inform residents of the schedule. He added that the circulated correspondence suggested that CBC had failed to cut the right areas and that the questionnaire about No Mow May mentioned was perhaps something the Council should discuss. The Town Clerk stated that Officers had not received the questionnaire but that she would contact the named CBC Officer from the correspondence to track this down.

Action: Town Clerk

It was **resolved** for the Council to formally contact CBC and state that FTC would not be paying for additional grass cutting.

Cllr Mackey left the meeting at this time (20:03).

5602 PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No items.

5603 INVITED SPEAKER

No invited speaker.

5604 MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Cllr Thompson reported for the fourth time that she had not received her copy of Flitwick Papers. The Chairman asked Members to give a show of hands if they had received their copies and it was clear that only two had received them. The Town Clerk would ask the Comms & Marketing Manager to investigate this with the delivery company.

Action: Town Clerk/CMM

5605 MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

- a. For Members to approve the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held, on **Tuesday 20th February 2024**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.

It was **resolved** to adopt the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on Tuesday 20th February 2024 at the Rufus Centre as a true record.

- b. For Members to receive and consider **resolutions and recommendations** of the

Community Services Committee, held on **Tuesday 5th March 2024**, this meeting is held at The Rufus Centre.

The Chairman referred to item 1161b – The Hub Car Park – stating that this was a recommendation and asked Members to make a decision on this as there was an application to the Projects Fund.

It was **resolved** to approve the recommendation from Community Services to accept Quote A for £800 and Option 2, to paint a white line as a delineation between the Hub and Village Hall via the Projects Fund.

Action: RFO

Cllr Patterson pointed out a typo on item 1161c, Event Review—Christmas Market. Officers would correct this.

The resolutions of the Community Services Committee held on Tuesday 5th March 2024 were noted.

- c. For Members to receive and consider **resolutions and recommendations** of the Business Improvement and Development Board Meeting, held on **Tuesday 12th March 2024**, this meeting is held at The Rufus Centre.

The resolutions of the Business Improvement & Development Board Meeting held on Tuesday 12th March 2024 were noted.

5606 MATTERS ARISING

- a. Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on Tuesday 20th February 2024 – no items.
- b. Members to receive any updates from Officers – no items.

5607 OUTSIDE BODIES

No items.

5608 ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

a. Senior Member Roles

Members were asked to consider the circulated supporting paper detailing responsibilities for Senior Member Roles drafted by Cllr Snape.

Members noted the document circulated. The Chairman explained that it summarised last month's Council discussion and listed subsequent proposed changes to the Standing Orders to be considered during the meeting.

Cllr Thompson had not been at the previous meeting but wanted to say that she did not think a four-year term for the Leader was appropriate. Cllr Toinko agreed and felt that two years would give the necessary continuity because a lot could change with the make-up of the Council in that time due to Councillor resignations, etc.

b. Councillor Officer Protocol

Members were asked to adopt the revised Councillor Officer protocol.

Following the previous item discussion, the Chairman commented that item 26 needed to be amended to allow the leader a two-year term.

Following a suggestion from Cllr Roberts, it was agreed to add more information within the Chairman's role to emphasise that they are involved with the Leader's discussions with staff on strategy and decision implementation so that they are fully informed when Charing meetings and representing the Council publicly.

Action: Town Clerk

A Member asked when the Leader role would start. The Chairman explained that this was intended to be implemented at the May Annual Statutory Meeting, initially for a year, with another election in May 2025 for the following two-year term aligning with the election cycle.

Cllr Parsons asked why the Leader role would last over a year. The Chairman explained that this was primarily for continuity.

Cllr Patterson commented that there was an assumption that the Town Mayor/Chairman was in charge of the Council and seen to be responsible. He asked if the term Leader confused this as it implied they would be in charge. The Chairman stated that the term Leader was what other Councils called this position and that Cllr Patterson's comments on who was in charge were a common misconception with the public. The Council was responsible and made decisions as a corporate body, not individual Councillors, including the Mayor.

Cllr Livens asked for clarification on the formatting of the circulated document. It was explained that the document tracked changes to show the former wording alongside the proposed changes discussed. Cllr Livens pointed out a few typos in the document, which Officers agreed to amend.

Action: Town Clerk

It was **resolved** to:

1. Amend point 26 to state the Leader role was for a two-year term within the Councillor/Officer Protocol.
2. Appoint the Leader initially for one year at the May Council Meeting to match the election cycle.

It was **resolved** to accept the Councillor/Officer Protocol document as circulated, with point 26 amended to include a two-year term for the Leader role.

Action: Town Clerk

c. Civic Protocol

- (i) Members were asked to adopt the circulated Civic Protocol document, which incorporated feedback from Members at the February meeting.

Cllr Thompson stated that most responsibilities were listed, except the Civic Service did not feature. The Chairman agreed that this should be added and that hosting the event and the decision to hold it in a Church setting were optional.

Action: Cllr Snape

- (ii) Members received an update from the Town Mayor in relation to Civic Events. Attached was a policy document from the Royal British Legion (RBL) about Civic Events.

Members noted the circulated document. The Chairman explained that the RBL had invited members to an event to commemorate the DD Landings, but it was protocol for the group to seek permission from the Council since this was a civic event. Acts of remembrance were Civic events and the responsibility of the Council. Members agreed that the Council would not be organising an event for this purpose so that the RBL could

do so. To this effect, the Town Clerk would contact the organisation and remind the RBL Flitwick Branch of the roles and responsibilities.

Action: Town Clerk

Members briefly discussed that Councillors could attend this event if they were invited; however, consideration should be given to this if the Town Mayor is unavailable since this could lead to awkwardness.

d. Standing Orders Review

Members were asked to consider approving the suggested amendments to the Council's Standing Orders (highlighted in blue font) and to comment on additional changes before adoption at the April meeting.

Some Members did not want to reinstate the automatic election of the outgoing Deputy Mayor to Town Mayor, and it was agreed that this suggestion should be removed.

Cllr Thompson asked if a point about the Leader and Deputy Leader roles and any restrictions in relation to involvement with the HR or Appeals Committee needed to be included. The Chairman agreed that this was a good point; members agreed the Leader and Deputy Leader would not be permitted to be on the Appeals Committee.

Cllr Livens referred to the section about virements and asked for clarification on what this was. The Chairman explained that a virement was a local government term for moving funds from one Council budget to another. He pointed out that the Council were being asked to approve a virement later in the meeting.

It was **resolved** to adopt the revised Standing Orders with three amendments:

1. Reinstate item 5f(iii) relating to the Deputy Mayor not automatically becoming Town Mayor at the next Annual Statutory Meeting.
2. Add item 19k to enforce that the Leader and Deputy Leader cannot serve on the Appeals Committee of the Council.
3. Amend item 26c to state that the Leader role was for a two year term.

Action: Town Clerk

e. Earmarked Reserve (EMR) Transfer Request

Members were asked to consider moving £29,000 from the Youth Provision EMR (code 311) to General Reserves.

The Chairman advised that the EMR was no longer necessary.

It was **resolved** to move £29,000 from the Youth Provision EMR (code 311) to General Reserves.

Action: RFO

f. Investment Management Policy

Members were asked to adopt the circulated Investment Management Policy.

It was **resolved** to adopt the circulated Investment Management Policy as presented.

Action: RFO

g. Burial Ground

Members were asked to discuss the Burial Ground provision in Flitwick.

The Chairman commented that an early draft statement had been circulated detailing information that the Council may wish to release to the public about burial ground provision. Cllr Blazeby had sent in his comments, which had yet to be discussed with the Town Clerk but would be incorporated. Members were advised that new grave spaces would likely run out in this calendar year. The Chairman planned to circulate an updated statement to all Members before communicating with residents.

The Council was the burial authority (CBC is not) because the town is parished. CBC is open to assist with setting up any joint burial ground with another parish.

Cllr Blazeby explained what Bishops Stortford was doing concerning their campaign for multilayering and reusing graves and that a new law awaited Royal Assent.

Members accepted that there was limited land available within Flitwick parish, with most of the surrounding land being Metropolitan Greenbelt. Furthermore, the water table was high, and there are many watercourses surrounding the town, adding further limitations. Members were aware of the reasons for abandoning the previous project for a new burial ground site at Maulden Road.

The Chairman explained that residents had no legal right to be buried within their parish, which was a common misconception. Only 20% of people who died in 2022 were buried, continuing the long-term trend towards cremation.

Cllr Parsons commented that he understood the emotional reasons why people might want to be buried with loved ones and within their parish. He asked if the churchyard site was separate from the Council's burial ground; he was advised that this was the case and that the Churchyard was legally closed and could not be reopened. Cllr Parsons mentioned that he would favour working with Ampthill Town Council (ATC) on a joint site. Through recent correspondence, the Town Clerk confirmed that ATC had responded that they had spare graves but that the land had water issues similar to those of the Flitwick parish, so not all space was useable. ATC had 360 new graves remaining, and they averaged 25 internments a year. Members discussed the fees ATC charges for residents outside their parish to be buried at their site, and the Town Clerk confirmed she had these figures on file but not to hand for this meeting. Cllr Blazeby suggested the Council could pay any excess fees if this route were progressed, and Members agreed this should be investigated. The Town Clerk explained that she would need to check if anything in the law would prevent the Council from doing this.

Action: Town Clerk

Cllr Gleave wanted to understand all the options available to the Council and their financial implications.

Members were reminded that there was no legal requirement to provide a burial ground; this was a discretionary power. The Council was required to maintain the current burial ground once it was closed.

It was agreed that the Town Clerk should circulate information to all members about why CBC could not provide a replacement burial ground.

Action: Town Clerk

Cllr Wilsmore asked what effect, if any, Bishop Stortford's new law would have on the Council. Cllr Blazeby advised that it could set a precedent for multilayering and reusing graves for plots occupied for over 75 years. The Chairman questioned if this would be palatable for Flitwick residents.

h. Police Priority Setting Representative

Members were asked to elect a sub for the Police Priority Setting Representative.

Cllr Thompson questioned why a representative would be selected now when the Annual Statutory meeting was only two months away.

It was **resolved** that Cllr Patterson be elected as the sub for the Police Priority Setting Representative position.

i. Grass Cutting

Members discussed this item above – see minute number 5601.

j. Office Space Refurbishment

Members considered the application to the Projects Fund.

Cllr Thompson asked for an update on how the Council planned to differentiate between the surplus generated by the Rufus Centre and the other cost centres. The Chairman explained that this would be discussed and implemented at the financial year-end; background work was underway. The Council would need to decide where any surplus would be allocated as part of the year-end process, likely at the May council meeting.

Cllr Blazeby asked if Officers could provide a mapped document of office space refurbished as part of the programme so that Members could see which spaces still required work. He added that he would be interested in exploring other opportunities with long-standing tenants who may want to refurbish their rooms. It was agreed that this would be discussed at the BI&DB.

Action: Town Clerk/B&FM

It was **resolved** to approve the BI&DB application to the Projects Fund for £3,370 to refurbish tenant office room 28. This would include new carpet, LED lights, paintwork, and blinds, in line with the other refurbished offices.

k. Budget Virement

Members were asked to consider making a virement from the following budget codes into the Rendezvous Equipment budget (4138/420); this is for the purchase of new crockery;

4047/421 (Staff Courses/Training) - £1200.00

4078/421 (Planting/Weeding) - £500.00

4150/421 (Promotions/Advertising) - £800.00

It was **resolved** that the requested virement from the above nominal codes be approved in the Rendezvous Equipment budget to fund the purchase of new crockery.

l. Projects Fund Applications

(i) Members noted the Projects Fund Summary document circulated.

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

- Business Development Improvement Board – Rufus Centre Flat Windows - £3,560.00

Members were advised that the windows were leaking.

It was **resolved** to approve the BI&DB application for £ 3,560 from the Projects Fund to purchase replacement windows for the Rufus Centre flat.

m. Parking

Members were asked to discuss parking issues within Flitwick and consider writing to Central Bedfordshire Council to demand greater enforcement action.

Email correspondence was circulated to all Members between the Chairman, Cllr Parsons, Cllr Roberts, CBC Ward Member Cllr Adams, and the Town Clerk.

The Chairman commented that CBC was not enforcing traffic rules (e.g., in Coniston Road outside Tesco) and, therefore, thought it was pointless to introduce new rules.

Cllr Blazeby advised that the submitted responses so far to the residents' survey indicated that the two biggest problems in Flitwick were poor parking and speeding traffic. He asked Members if they thought it was a good idea to defer a decision on this item until the residents' survey consultation period ended so that there was more evidence. Members were advised that the survey closed on 8th April, and this matter could be discussed then, which was subsequently agreed upon.

Action: Town Clerk

Cllr Gleave commented on the current way parking issues were enforced by CBC through vehicles and stated CBC would incur additional investment to implement more frequent controls. For this reason, CBC would need assurance that it was worth it.

5609 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.
- iii) Cashbooks – noted.

b. Skills for All Strategy Consultation – Central Beds Council (CBC)

The new 'Skills for All' strategy aims to ensure that everyone can access quality education. It outlines how we will support residents from childhood, helping them continuously acquire new knowledge and skills and contribute to the growth of Central Bedfordshire. CBC has launched a consultation, seeking views from the public about the draft strategy to help refine it before it's implemented. The deadline for responses is 12th April.

Members agreed that Councillors should respond to this consultation individually rather than give a Council response.

c. Delegated Authority Decision

Members were asked to note the delegated authority decision to install an intruder alarm at 3 Station Road for £3,370 from the Projects Fund. This decision was made before this meeting as it was classified as an emergency expenditure under the Financial Regulations to secure the building.

Members noted the decision made and were advised that the insurance would have been null and void without an alarm.

The Chairman asked Members how they felt about possibly hosting the next Council meeting from 3 Station Road. Officers agreed to facilitate this as it would hopefully align with when the Council could release a statement on the project.

5610 PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No items.

5611 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. Confidential Reports – to note
- b. 3 Station Road – for consideration

It was **resolved** to accept the offer presented.

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 21:07.