



FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Flitwick Town Council meeting held on Tuesday 18th June 2024 at the Rufus Centre at 7:45pm

Present:

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

Also present:

Cllr I Adams – Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) Ward Member
Cllr G Mackey – CBC Ward Member
Stacie Lockey – Town Clerk & Chief Executive
Stephanie Stanley – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO
26 members of the public (1 via virtual access)

5650. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was **resolved** to accept apologies from Cllrs Copleston (family commitment), Thompson (unwell), Wilsmore (holiday) and Harald (personal commitment).

5651. 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 Cllrs Toinko and Blazeby declared an interest in agenda item 12G - Investment in Stocksfield Room – as both were Trustees for SHARE: Flitwick & Ampthill.

5652. COUNCILLOR CO-OPTION

It was **resolved** to elect Patricia Earles to Office of Councillor.

The Declaration of Acceptance of Office will be read at a later date.

5653. TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor had attended the following events:

Flitwick Football Centre Charity Event - "Spideys Big Game 2024"

Pride events – Drag Night – Ultimate Party Games and Pride Picnic

D-Day Service organised by the Royal British Legion

The Council's Family Fun Day – was the best one to date, with the most attendees. The Chairman thanked everybody who helped make this event a success.

The Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire's Service of Thanksgiving

The Deputy Mayor had attended the RBL's D-Day Event and the beacon lighting in Ampthill.

There were no updates from the Leader at this meeting.

5654. REPORTS FROM WARD MEMBERS

Members noted the circulated report. Cllr Adams mentioned that all Ward Members were coming together in their objections to the planning application for Steppingley Road field.

There were no questions.

5655. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

The meeting was adjourned for 15 minutes to allow the public to address the Council on matters presented on the agenda.

Planning Application – CB/22/04108/FULL – Land at Steppingley Road

A resident asked how many objections had been received to the planning application for Steppingley Road. Cllr Adams answered that approximately 3,000 objections had been received.

Mr Culman (resident) asked the Council to object to the application strongly and to get the land removed from the CBC Local Plan.

Mr Culman referred to item 12a regarding the e-petition to amend the speed limit to 20mph on Hatfield Road. He mentioned that lowering the speed limit was a positive idea but incorporating speed bumps was not a good idea. He stated that speed bumps caused many problems due to poor design and installation and referred to other areas of town where they had caused issues. He mentioned the issues the bumps caused for the emergency services.

Mr Hill (resident) proposed the changes in Hatfield Road and commented that instead of bumps, other traffic-slowing measures could be used, as he had not considered the impact bumps would have on the emergency service vehicles.

A resident commented on the impracticality of roads in the town and the Steppingley Parish since the crematorium had been built. She said the situation was becoming dangerous.

A resident mentioned that the Steppingley Field planning application would add to the already prevalent traffic issues on Steppingley Road and other Flitwick roads because the town already could not cope with the number of vehicles. The proposed development would add to this. The residents present made other general comments relating to public safety with the traffic issues the development would cause.

Residents commented on the over-development of Flitwick, particularly on Steppingley Road with the new Leisure Centre, Steppingley Gardens estate, the retirement village, etc. Discussion took place on the size of the retirement village, which had seven lifts of scaffold, and it was believed to be higher in structure than what was in the plans. Some residents at the meeting felt they could not trust CBC to build any houses to plan.

Cllr Mackey entered the meeting at this time (20:02).

A resident asked how CBC would consider this application and if they would take objections seriously. Residents felt that CBC built whatever they wanted to and that the fields beyond Steppingley Field (this application) could be at risk of development in the future. There was general concern about the lack of infrastructure in Flitwick to support more housing developments, and the roads were discussed at length as unsuitable for the population's expanding size.

Maahwish Mirza (MP Labour Candidate) commented that she appreciated that her point was not a planning ground for objection. However, it was important for CBC to note that fields and walking had become a place of respite for emotional and mental health, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. She commented that monetary value could not be placed on this and access to greenbelt land was vital.

Residents asked for the Council's support in objecting to the planning application since ¼ of the population had already objected.

Other planned local developments, such as in Marston, would put more pressure on the town's roads.

Residents were keen to ask questions of Town Councillors once they had discussed the planning application.

It was proposed and agreed to bring forward item 12b.

Cllr Gleave, Chairman of FTC's Planning Improvement Working Group (PIWG), referred to the circulated report and provided a summary of recommendations for the Council to consider about the planning application:

- To object primarily on traffic grounds – the applicant's Transport Assessment and Travel Plan were not credible. There were issues with the Traffic Survey from 2021 (due to COVID-19 implications - 35% of people were working from home).
- The Council's response to the previous application to develop this land was covered in the report. It was considered worthwhile to focus on highways rather than objecting to all matters.
- The land was classified as grade 2 agricultural, productive, and farmed. A policy in the Local Plan stated that CBC was not in favour of developing this type of land.
- There were biodiversity concerns based on an Ecological Assessment, including the nesting of skylarks, a protected species. The development's impact on the nearby Flitwick Woods needed to be considered – many nature organisations were objecting to this.
- The Local Plan was not sound, and whether this site should be included was questionable. CBC was reviewing its Local Plan. The PIWG had taken advice from specialists in Planning Law.
- The developers emailed FTC Officers towards the end of the previous week, but no Section 106 contributions were discussed. The circulated report included some figures that Cllr Gleave commented should not be considered final since they related to a Head of Terms agreement and could change. He pointed out that even if all these funds were secured, the infrastructure improvements were unlikely to be done before the development works.

- The way the application was done was not with good community engagement, and residents were not given a meaningful voice, leaving people to find out about the proposed development too late.

Cllr Snape thanked the PIWG for their work on this matter. He reminded residents why the group had been set up and the positive steps that had been made to engage positively with developers in a transparent way. Cllr Snape was frustrated that nobody at CBC had thought consulting with Ward Members or Town Councillors was appropriate. He asked for a complaint to be made to the Chief Executive of CBC since elected Members were there to represent residents. The traffic issues that the proposed development would create were not mitigated in the suggested contributions of Section 106, and Cllr Snape felt it was important to have a Town Plan.

Cllr Snape was concerned that the ecological assessment had not been looked at properly and that residents had not been consulted.

Cllr Toinko commented that residents had been clear that their primary concerns were the traffic implications and the value the field had as open space. He also shared the views already presented regarding the impact on Flitwick Woods. He felt the Section 106 contributions should reflect the needs of the town and that elected representatives should have been consulted on these. The Section 106 contributions list did not make any sense. Cllr Toinko wanted to know who had been liaising with the developers/CBC to suggest the current list of projects. He added that CBC should not receive any S106 money to assist with the switch to a two tier school system for the area.

Cllr Gleave advised that the PIWG were consulted on future projects but there was nothing proposed that addressed concerns from residents. Cllr Blazeby commented that CBC were responsible for paying for the proposed S106 contributions. Members felt that the Local Plan needed to be reviewed first before this proposed development was considered.

It was **resolved** to object to planning application CB/22/04108/FULL – Land at Steppingley Road – in addition to the highways grounds and include matters on biodiversity and it being premature in advance of CBC’s review of its Local Plan.

It was **resolved** to make a formal complaint to CBC regarding their approach to the Section 106 contributions presented as part of the planning application and ask formally for all Ward Members and the Town Council to be consulted on future agreements and discussions.

The Chairman stated to residents present that the Council supported their views.

Cllr Mackey, Chairman of CBC, advised that he was the Chairman of CBC’s Development Management Committee (DMC) where this planning application would be considered. He stated that the Town Council’s objection would be lodged and that residents would be updated with the DMC’s meeting date where the planning application would be considered. He advised that residents would have the opportunity to address the DMC with their concerns. Cllr Mackey stated that he was having to withdraw temporarily as Chairman of the DMC due to his current position in standing in the election for Mid Bedfordshire’s MP. He had not been able to be as vocal about his objections to the application because of the current position.

11 residents and Cllr Mackey left the meeting at this time.

5656. INVITED SPEAKER

There was no invited speaker.

5657. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Cllr Snape asked about the timescales associated with the planned works to the Stocksfield Room at the Rufus Centre. The Town Clerk advised that Officers were waiting for final confirmation from the insurance company but that contractors would be instructed following this. It was anticipated that work would commence within a couple of weeks.

5658. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

It was **resolved** to adopt the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on Tuesday 21st May 2024 at the Rufus Centre as a true record with one amendment – add Cllr Blazeby to those present.

The resolutions and recommendations of the Business Improvement & Development Board (BI&DB) meeting held on Tuesday 28th May 2024 were noted.

5659. MATTERS ARISING

- a) Cllr Toinko referred to item 5647a of the Council Minutes from 21st May 2024 and asked why the Councillor Attendance Record was not on this meeting's agenda. The Town Clerk advised that this item was supposed to be considered at the meeting but due to current workloads, it had been deferred to the July meeting.
- b) There were no updates from Officers.

5660. OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no items.

5661. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

a. Support for e-petition - 20mph speed limit around play park on Hatfield Road, Flitwick

Mr Hill (resident) had attended the meeting and was responsible for coordinating the e-petition. He mentioned that the previous discussion about not progressing with the speed bumps had been noted but commented that traffic calming for Hatfield Road was required. He requested the Council's support for the e-petition in reducing the speed limit to 20mph.

Cllr Patterson commented that lowering the speed limit was a good idea and suggested incorporating the reduction in Hatfield Crescent.

Cllr Gleave was in favour of 20mph zones; however, he raised the point that the Police would expect this change to be self-enforcing by narrowing the road, using chicanes, or similar.

Cllr Adams supported the suggestion and offered to meet with Mr Hill separately since he could raise this at a CBC Traffic Management meeting. He mentioned that there would be analysis work to do but he agreed to liaise with CBC Officers on the matter.

It was **resolved** to write a letter to CBC supporting the e-petition to lower the speed limit to 20mph in Hatfield Road.

b. Planning Application – CB/22/04108/FULL – Land at Steppingley Road

This item was discussed earlier in the meeting.

c. Planning Improvement Working Group – Terms of Reference

It was agreed at the previous Council meeting for the PIWG Terms of Reference to be amended.

It was **resolved** that the revised Terms of Reference for the PIWG be adopted as circulated.

d. Parking

- i) **Members were asked to consider writing to CBC for formal action to be taken**
(Members previously deferred this item so that the parking responses from the Annual Residents Survey could be considered alongside the discussion)
- ii) **Members were asked to note the correspondence from CBC relating to parking charges and consider a formal response.**

The survey responses regarding parking in Flitwick were noted.

Cllr Snape commented that CBC needed to improve parking provision in the town. He had contacted Cllr Baker, Executive Member of CBC's Finance Committee and had asked if the Town Council wanted to provide a formal response regarding the consultation on raising car parking charges at the station. Cllr Parsons commented that if there were increased parking charges at the station car park then CBC needed to improve their enforcement of irresponsible parking in the town. Cllr Gleave would be interested in understanding the rationale for increased charges and wondered about any plans to encourage alternative travel methods to the station. Without these plans, there would be a negative effect on on-street parking.

Cllr Toinko had read the correspondence with CBC and commented that CBC had not provided enough detail. He mentioned that any increases in parking charges would have a minimal impact on the current parking issues.

It was **resolved** that the Town Clerk should write to CBC asking for formal parking enforcement to start in Flitwick.

It was **resolved** to write to CBC to express concern about increasing car park charges at the station without adequate provision for alternatives or improvements.

e. Year End 2023-2024 Accounts

- i) **To approve the unaudited Financial Statement for 2023-24**

Cllr Parsons commented that the Finance Team had had a challenging year due to accounting issues primarily caused by the Council's previous advisors. He mentioned that the team was now in a much better position, and the preparation of accounts for the year-end process had gone well.

Cllr Snape stated that a huge amount of work had gone into completing the Financial Statement, which gave residents a transparent insight into the Council's activities. He mentioned that the Council had achieved a revenue figure of over £2m for the first time, and over half of this was down to the Rufus Centre traded service. This was impressive, given the pressures that have been faced. He mentioned that FTC was not like other Councils who did basic accounting and stated that Officers were used to providing management reports. Cllr Snape thanked the RFO and her team for their work.

It was **resolved** to accept the unaudited Financial Statement for 2023-24.

(5 residents left the meeting at this time)

ii) **To approve the Governance Statement 2023-24**

It was **resolved** to approve the Governance Statement 2023-24.

iii) **To approve the Annual Return 2023-24**

It was **resolved** to approve the Annual Return 2023-24.

iv) **To consider the final interim Internal Audit Report for 2023-24**

It was **resolved** to accept the final interim Internal Audit Report for 2023-24.

f. **Council Surplus 2023-24**

The report circulated was noted.

The RFO provided the Council with some background information relating to the year-end process and commented that any surplus funds would automatically go into the Council's General Reserves in previous years. She mentioned that this year, Members needed to decide what proportion of the surplus funds could be earmarked for Rufus Centre projects and to factor in allocating some funds to assist with the 3 Station Road refurbishment.

Cllr Blazeby commented that in July 2024, the Council would make their final loan repayment for the purchase of the Rufus Centre. He wanted to thank the people who had been involved in purchasing the building. Cllr Blazeby also wished to thank the Business & Facilities Manager who led the Council's hospitality team to secure the biggest traded service surplus to date. He mentioned that it was a solid decision to open the Rendezvous Café and to refurbish areas of the building.

Cllr Snape continued that this was the second year that the Council had delivered a commercial surplus and noted that the Rufus Centre's traded service had generated £173k. This figure had been reduced to compensate for the unavoidable legal bill.

The Chairman passed on his thanks to everyone involved.

It was **resolved** to progress with the RFO's recommendations to:

- Create an EMR for 3 Station Road refurbishment project and code £110,572 from the year-end surplus 2023-24.
- Create an EMR for Rufus Centre projects and code £40k from the year-end surplus 2023-24.
- Delegate responsibility for approving expenditure from the Rufus Centre projects EMR to the BI&DB.
- After receiving an updated Cost Plan, formalise an updated Financial Plan that considers cash flow for the 3 Station Road refurbishment project.
- Amend the General Reserves Policy to reflect that the Council will consider the year-end surplus at June Council meetings to decide where to code it within the Council's reserves.

g. **Projects Fund**

i) The Projects Fund Summary was noted.

ii) To consider the Project Fund applications below:

1. Dishwasher

It was **resolved** to accept the proposal to replace the dishwasher and its associated installation costs, totalling £4,471.25 from the Central Projects Fund.

2. Rendezvous Café Expansion

Cllr Snape asked a question about lighting.

It was **resolved** to accept the proposal to expand the café to incorporate an IT Station, which would cost £2,620.95 from the Central Projects Fund.

3. Stocksfield Room Annex – Storeroom and ‘Shop Front’ for Community Fridge

Members noted that this project had secured some funding from Hubbub and Ward Councillor grants.

It was **resolved** to accept the proposal to contribute £2,500 from the Central Projects Fund to the Stocksfield Room Annex project, including flooring.

h. Leader Expenses

Members were asked to consider creating an allowance of £200 to cover expenses for the Leader role with the same rules applied as the Town Mayor’s Allowance.

Cllr Patterson asked for confirmation of what expenses this would cover. Cllr Snape advised that this includes travel costs, a subscription to software to assist with the role, and expenses for meeting with people at the Rendezvous Café. Sometimes, the Leader may need to meet with the MP or other external people, and there were costs to this.

It was **resolved** to create an allowance of £200 to cover leader expenses.

i. Anti-Fraud Policy

Members noted that the Council required an Anti-Fraud Policy to comply with the Community Ownership Fund (COF) criteria.

It was **resolved** to adopt the Anti-Fraud Policy circulated.

5662. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

a. Finance Reports

- i) FTC Summary, Investment & Loans – noted.
- ii) Balance Sheet – noted.
- iii) Bank Reconciliation – noted.

b. 3 Station Road

i) Officers Update

The Deputy Town Clerk & RFO advised the following:

- There had been a lot of background work being undertaken to complete the necessary surveys prior to submitting a planning application for the refurbishment of 3 Station Road.

- There would likely be an extraordinary Council meeting called in the second week of July to progress the project in four key areas:
 - i) To approve planning drawings
 - ii) To approve an updated cost plan
 - iii) To approve a procurement strategy with a set of recommendations
 - iv) To approve a set of documents relating to roofing works to enable the first tender
- The COF requirements meant that capital expenditure must be spent by March 2024. Therefore, the 3 Station Road Project Manager adjusted the work programme to bring forward some capital works. This included the roof works that would be done with a separate tender to the main build contractor tender. Some enabling works for utilities and demolition would also be done earlier than originally planned.

ii) Members noted the updated Delivery Programme.

iii) Members noted the circulated report from Luton Borough Council Design Team.

a. Annual Residents Survey

Members noted that the commentary received from the Annual Residents Survey would be sent to relevant Committees for consideration, including discussions at relevant Working Groups. This information would also be considered as part of the new strategy review.

5663. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

A resident mentioned the PIWG supporting paper circulated for this meeting regarding the planning application for Steppingley Road and asked where the suggested cycle lanes would go. She also asked if CBC would accept this suggestion. The Chairman mentioned that the Town Council formed an advisory role in planning. The resident responded that CBC should take note of what residents wanted. The resident also wanted to ask if the Skylarks would move to another field. The Chairman stated that CBC would consult with experts.

A resident referred to the 3 Station Road refurbishment project and asked for more information on a 'casual dining' restaurant. She had concerns about additional cafes or takeaway establishments. Cllr Snape responded with the following information:

- Public engagement had taken place over the past 18 months in different formats, including the Residents Survey, Councillor Surgeries, etc., but the consultation had been limited because of the ongoing commercial negotiations the Council had been having with Barclays regarding the dilapidation costs. The Council would have liked to have done more consultation, but it was a requirement to progress with a programme of works.
- The Council was progressing with a two-storey casual dining restaurant which would be a 'proper' restaurant – not a café or a takeaway – and plans would become evident to residents in the next three to four weeks. The Council hoped for a mainstream restaurant to enable Flitwick to become a destination. Cllr Snape explained that the Council needed to balance best value for the taxpayer with what was progressed.
- There were plans for a single storey retail unit on the other side of the building and part of the COF bid was for money to subsidize the opening of a Post Office. The Council were doing all they could to make a Post Office return to Flitwick. Meetings

had taken place with Post Office Ltd. to understand their requirements for a building as part of the design process.

Mr Culman (resident) said he had emailed the Town Clerk and two Members regarding parking at Manor Park. He had met with the Amenities Officer and Cllr Wilsmore to demonstrate the problems with the gate, but he had received no further correspondence. The Town Clerk advised that she was meeting with the contractor the following day due to Mr Culman's meeting and that his points had been taken on board. She would ensure that Officers responded to Mr Culman once the meeting had taken place with the contractor.

5 residents left the meeting at 21:25.

5664. EXEMPT ITEMS

a. Confidential Reports

The Confidential Report from the Town Council meeting held on Tuesday 21st May was noted.

The meeting closed at 21:27.