



FLITWICK TOWN COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Flitwick Town Council meeting held on
Tuesday 18th February 2025 at the Rufus Centre at 7:45pm

Present:

Cllr M Platt (Chairman)

Cllr C Thompson

Cllr A Snape

Cllr R Wilsmore

Cllr F Patterson

Cllr P Earles

Cllr I Blazeby

Cllr H Hodges

Cllr T Harald

Cllr D Toinko

Also present:

Stacie Lockey – Town Clerk & Chief Executive

Stephanie Stanley – Deputy Town Clerk & RFO

Susan Eldred – Community Services & Amenities Manager

5760. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was **resolved** to accept the apologies for Cllrs Parsons (holiday), Roberts (work), and Connell (work) 's absences.

5761. 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 – Cllrs Earles and Toinko declared an interest in agenda item 15a – Allotments. The Town Clerk advised that both members would need to leave the meeting while this item was discussed.

5762. TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

No items.

5763. Leader Update

The Leader provided the following update:

1. Central Beds Council Budget Briefing – Cllr Snape would attend a briefing the following day at CBC to hear from the Leader and Executive Member for Finance about the Council's budget plans. Cllr Snape was interested in hearing about how the budget would impact local Councils, particularly Flitwick. Cllr Snape suspected that the Town Council may need to review what gaps the budget impact might bring for service

provision. Notes would be taken at the briefing, and these would be circulated to all Members.

2. Community Fridge Van Project—Cllr Townsend was thanked for her generous £500 Ward Councillor Grant to the Town Mayor's Charity CIO, which would go towards the Flitwick Community Fridge van project. The Town Mayor's Charity CIO had also received a £1,000 donation from SSP Group, which would also go towards the van project.
3. Section 106 - CBC released a new set of Section 106 reports. Working out what was and was not spendable for Flitwick was still challenging. Cllr Snape had been persistent and received a report on this. Most of the funding was for public realm improvements or projects at Millennium Park. Members noted that because of this, it was presumed that Section 106 projects would be discussed at upcoming Community Services Committee meetings.
4. CBC Food Fairness Grant—The Council had applied to this fund regarding Flitwick Community Fridge, but feedback had not yet been received, and it was now six weeks overdue. Cllr Snape was chasing the Ward Members about this but was not receiving any answers.
5. Parish Streetlights in Chapel Road – Two of the lights that had been broken since 2021 were now working again. Cllr Snape thanked MP Blake Stephenson's Office for their help with this and for holding UKPN to account. Cllr Snape continued working with the office to fix other earth faults. There were two different lights on Dunstable Road that needed repair, but they had not worked since 2021 either. Cllr Mackey had been asked to follow up on this with CBC Officers.
6. Item 15a—Cllr Snape reminded Members about the sensitivities relating to this agenda item and the importance of confidentiality.

5764. REPORTS FROM WARD MEMBERS

The Town Clerk passed on Cllr Adams' apologies and updated Members that the double yellow lines on the Avenue, Badgers Close, and Hildene Close had been issued to the contractor for delivery. Subject to weather conditions, it was hoped that this work would be completed in March.

5765. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No items.

5766. INVITED SPEAKER

No speaker.

5767. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Cllr Snape requested an update on the Steppingley Road land sale and 3 Station Road refurbishment projects.

Steppingley Road Project

The Town Clerk advised that she and the Community Services and Amenities Manager had met with the building contractor to discuss the site and access arrangements. Meetings had also taken place with the solicitors about progressing with a conditional contract. She advised Members that important work was happening for this project and

that the Council would be asked to consider the documentation once things had progressed to a suitable point. The project was progressing positively.

3 Station Road Refurbishment

The Deputy Town Clerk provided the following update:

Construction

- Work started on 3rd February, and the anticipated completion time was 13 weeks.
- Joint names insurance cover was in place.
- Initially, the works included demolition and removal of asbestos.
- Works for the retail unit would commence before the restaurant shell and core.
- Officers would be attending site progress update meetings once a month.
- The UKPN project for a new electricity cable would run alongside the main build works.

Tenants

- The Officers had met with the agents about marketing the site, and it had been decided to progress with a Kirkby Diamond brochure initially to review it after one month to determine if a more bespoke marketing approach was required, but this had financial implications.
- The timescale from marketing commencement to Heads of Terms being signed was anticipated to be six months, which allowed time for marketing, viewings, and negotiations.
- Solicitors had been asked to provide quotations for creating tenant leases.
- Without marketing, Officers had been approached by business owners who were interested in the space.
- Officers were awaiting advice from the agent about the correct order of doing things concerning the inclusion of the post office counter since the retail tenant would be required to register via Post Office Ltd. for this to progress.

Finance

- Officers had been sent a cash flow forecast from the building contractor to show expected payments over a three-month period. There would be monthly payments of varying expenses spanning over March, April, and May.
- Currently, the refurbishment had been paid for using grant funding, but this was due to change in March when funding would come from the Council's reserves.
- The Finance & General Purposes Committee had been sent a monthly reserves position document for review.

Members Visit

- Officers would organise a visit to the site for Members at an appropriate time.

5768. MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MEETINGS

- a. For Members to approve the minutes of the Town Council Meeting held, on **Tuesday 21st January 2025**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.

It was **resolved** to approve the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on Tuesday 21st January 2025 at the Rufus Centre as an accurate record.

- b. For Members to receive and consider the resolutions and recommendations of the Business Improvement & Development Board meeting, held on **Tuesday 11th February 2025**, this meeting was held at the Rufus Centre.

Members noted the resolutions of the BIDB meeting held on Tuesday 11th February 2025 at the Rufus Centre.

5769. MATTERS ARISING

- a. Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on **Tuesday 21st January 2025**.

No items.

- b. Members to receive any updates from Officers – no items.

5770. OUTSIDE BODIES

No items.

5771. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

- a. **Standing Orders**

It was **resolved** to accept the proposed changes to the Standing Orders and present them to the March Town Council meeting for adoption.

- b. **Resident Survey**

- (i) **Members to review and comment on the updated Annual Residents Survey for 2025**

Cllr Snape left the meeting at 20:03.

Cllr Harald asked about the relevance of asking questions about gender and ethnicity. Cllr Blazeby advised that this was included to see if the respondents matched the population of Flitwick. Cllr Thompson stated that the Council was committed to being inclusive and diverse; therefore, understanding the demographics of the respondents was important. Cllr Harald clarified that there was a question each year about residents feeling safe in the town during the daytime and at night, and knowing the gender of respondents would help the Council understand possible actions to take in response to the completed surveys.

Cllr Snape re-entered the meeting at 20:07.

Cllr Blazeby reminded Members that over half of the questions were equivalent local versions to those included in the national survey, which was used as a comparative for benchmarking.

Cllr Earles asked about the level of feedback generally received. Cllr Blazeby responded that the surveys were completed online or through hard copy submissions. He advised that there were 291 responses last year, 442 the year before, and 196 the first time. Some Members were initially unsure if the survey was worth doing, but after discussion, it was agreed that it was worthwhile as it showed whether the Council was improving and that it was positive to have the survey.

The survey would be included in the next Flitwick Papers.

Cllr Toinko asked if a question could be included to capture the ratio of homeowners to tenants. He was also interested in the wards that respondents lived in as this would help with feedback about the parks and other questions. Members agreed that the description

of this matter would need to be clarified or a change of wording to explain where the wards in Flitwick were.

Cllr Blazeby advised that the survey responses would support the development of the Council's Strategy, which was also used within the Annual Report.

Unsuitable questions that were no longer relevant had been removed, and additional questions were proposed regarding the Community Fridge and the post office counter cost element of the 3 Station Road project. Cllr Snape clarified that the subsidy required from the Council for this service was approximately 1% of the precept. He reminded Members that the post office counter was part of the Community Ownership Funding bid but stated that it was unknown if the Council needed to subsidise the service at this stage. Cllr Thompson commented that the question wording about the cost of the post office counter needed to be clear that this would be a 1% increase on top of potential other increases. Cllr Hodges asked for the question to include '3 Station Road (formerly Barclays Bank)' so that it was clear for residents. Cllr Blazeby noted this and clarified that the council tax year would be for 2026/27 and future years.

Cllr Blazeby suggested including a question on the Share charity as they occupied a room at the Rufus Centre.

It was **resolved** to include a question about Share: Flitwick & Ampthill within questions 12 and 13 of the survey.

It was **resolved** to progress with the survey and amendments discussed relating to the Flitwick Wards, whether respondents owned or rented their properties, and to seek views on the Council tax discussion.

(ii) Members to note the timeline for publication

The timeline for publication of the survey was noted.

c. Street Trading Application

Members were asked to consider the street trading application for Station Road.

Cllr Thompson asked if this was an application to renew the agreement for the existing van or a different business. The Town Clerk advised that this application related to a different business and that the former van no longer traded from this location.

Cllr Snape provided his reasons for objecting to the application as follows:

- No access to hygiene facilities and toilets.
- No waste management arrangements were detailed, and issues with previous traders weren't addressed. It was unfair to expect the taxpayer to dispose of waste generated by businesses.
- Using a generator could significantly impact air quality due to the emissions of particulate matter (PM), nitrogen oxides (NOx), and carbon monoxide.
- Negative impact on the public realm (grease, etc., on pavement).
- Many businesses already provide the same types of food, so there isn't a need.

Cllr Snape stated that the applicant needed to address the above matters as a minimum.

Cllr Wilshire commented that it was not a good location in Station Road considering the Council's refurbishment project. He asked if the applicant could be asked to trade elsewhere, like outside the Village Hall, and use their facilities.

Cllr Hodges advised that there was a renewed planning application for a chicken shop at 119 Station Road.

It was **resolved** to reject the street trading application based on the above points.

d. Finance

i) Financial Regulations

It was **resolved** to adopt the revised Financial Regulations for Flitwick Town Council.

ii) Overspend

Members were asked to approve an overspend of £7,680 on nominal code 4110/303 (Tree Maintenance) for essential tree works in Manor Park. The Community Services & Amenities Manager stated that the team had experienced additional difficulties that day when removing some trees and requested that Members increase the overspend by up to £800 to fund fence repairs.

It was **resolved** to approve an overspend of up to £8,480 on nominal code 4110/303 for essential tree works in Manor Park.

iii) Internal Audit (2nd Interim)

Cllr Thompson thanked the Officers for their work on this.

It was **resolved** to accept the Second Interim Internal Audit Report for 2024-25.

e. X (Formally Twitter)

Members received a report from the Leader of the Council and were asked to consider its recommendation.

Cllr Snape said he did not want the Council to publish any statements about this matter. He mentioned that there was not a lot of engagement on the social media platform. Cllr Toinko supported this view and stated that the account did not generate traction or have a local focus. Cllr Harald mentioned that he had looked at the platform after reading the supporting paper for this item and confirmed that the content was negative across the board. Overall, Members were in favour of supporting the recommendation in the report.

Cllr Thompson commented that many organisations and individuals are currently removing their accounts for this platform and that nobody will notice that the Council has done the same.

Cllr Patterson asked if the Council had received any negative feedback from residents about using the platform. The Town Clerk stated that no negative feedback had been received.

Cllr Patterson commented that people were leaving the platform as a gesture, and he asked if it was worse to remove the Council's association with the platform because as more people left it, the people left using it were the type of people the Council was moving away from. He asked if leaving the platform would make the situation worse. Cllr Thompson responded that the type of content the Council posted was not challenging and

would not make a difference to the conversations that were occurring on the platform. She provided an example of the type of content posted by the Council, which showed this.

Cllr Blazeby reiterated that the Council had discussed removing the platform from its social media profiles multiple times due to the lack of engagement.

It was **resolved** for Flitwick Town Council to immediately cease all official activity on Twitter/X, including posting content, engaging with users, and maintaining official accounts associated with this authority. All references to Twitter/X would be removed from flitwick.gov.uk and therufuscentre.co.uk, as well as all future publicity material.

f. Office Space Refurbishment

Members were asked to consider authorising expenditure from the Rufus Centre EMR (current balance: £19,442.05) for refurbishing tenant office space in line with other refurbished offices.

Cllr Thompson asked if there were any reasons that Members should be aware of not to progress with the lowest quotes. The Town Clerk advised that there were no reasons not to do this.

A Member asked why sinks were being proposed for two rooms. Cllr Blazeby advised that the Business & Facilities Manager had been receiving increasing demand for this type of facility from prospective tenants and that the two rooms mentioned had the capability to incorporate sinks. Members were informed that including these features would benefit marketability.

It was **resolved** to:

1. Accept Quote 1 for rooms 8 & 9 to refurbish the office space in line with other refurbished offices for £13,547.20.
 2. Accept Quote 1 for rooms 13 & 28 to incorporate a sink and wall unit for £3,000.
- This work would be funded by the Rufus Centre Capital Works EMR (334).

5772. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

a. Finance Reports

- i) Balance Sheet – noted.
- ii) Projects Fund – noted.

5773. PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

No items.

5774. 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. Allotments

It was **resolved** to accept the Officer's recommendation and for the amounts to be the upper limit for compensation.

b. Youth Provision

Members discussed the report and Officers were given actions to undertake before a decision was made.

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 ended at 21:40.

Signed

Chairman